[RE]conceptualising assessment within a Higher Education Curriculum

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Promoter: Prof. P. du Preez

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DECLARATION

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use has been made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.

19 April 2017
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to render a nuanced perspective of the nature of assessment practices and perspectives of lecturers in higher education and the extent to which such practices are in agreement with the policy changes that underpin a shift from a behaviourist to a more socio-constructivist teaching and learning approach. Thus the main objective for the formulation of a research question for the study, which looks beyond the immediate practices of assessment, is to consider what the nature of assessment would be if providing students with a firm foundation for learning.

The main question of the enquiry is: To what extent, if any, could assessment be (re)conceptualised to overcome the standards-based versus student-centred dualism in a higher education context?

Influencing institutional assessment policy necessitates conceptualising assessment in terms of the individual lecturer’s perspective as well as in terms of the intentions of the institution (NWU - Potchefstroom campus). This approach acknowledges the lecturer’s perspective, but also directs attention to the concerns of the institution as well as to possible resulting action. Hopefully, it will address the problem of the fragmented and isolated perspective of standards-based approaches to assessment.

The study focuses on the formative and summative assessment practices in the eight faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus), in order to analyse and understand the actions of and interaction between various role players that occur in differing contexts. Student-centred learning is an adaptation of a socio-cultural approach to learning that elaborates on and revises an earlier conceptualisation (behaviourist and constructivist) of assessment. The research is localised in an interpretive paradigm for analysis, in which human action is studied from an “insider’s perspective” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:53), according to a case study research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assessment practices of the different faculties at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, as well as to ascertain the meaning of assessment to participants in the process.

The key problem in assessment, revealed by the literature review, is the dualism between the alternative student-centred assessment approach to enhance learning and the standards-based assessment approach that demands institutional improvement and accountability. This research also confirms how standards-based assessment will always drive out student-centred assessment, should they be in opposition to one another. The latter is clearly illustrated in the assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) that are still dominated by standards-based approaches, in which norm-referenced and
summative assessment have secured a foothold. This study suggests a (re)conceptualisation of assessment by merging standards-based (rigorous, but less relevant) with student-centred (relevant, but less rigorous) assessment practices. Such a merging entails a reconfiguration of lecturers’ and students’ roles and identities from adversarial to synergistic, guided by a model that respects the differences between the two approaches and simultaneously reinforces their joint commitment to a shared mission. The endeavour to (re)conceptualise assessment in its totality - within the complex interrelated teaching- and learning-related activities necessitates (re)curriculating, (re)culturing, (re)structuring as well as (re)training of lecturers.
Die doel van hierdie studie is om ’n genuanseerde perspektief te ontwikkel van die aard van dosente se assesseringspraktyke en -perspektiewe in hoëronderwys asook die mate waartoe sulke praktyke, in ooreenstemming met beleidsveranderinge, ten grondslag van ’n beweging vanaf ’n behavioristiese na ’n meer sosiaal-konstruktivistiese onderrig- en leerbenadering, ooreenstem. Daarom dan die formulering van ’n navorsingsvraag wat verby die onmiddellijke assesseringspraktyke kyk, ter oorweging van hoe assessoring daarna sou uitsien as die hoofdoel die bevordering van gehalte leer is.

Die navorsingsvraag van die ondersoek is: Tot watter mate, indien enige, kan assessoring ge(her)konseptualiseer word om die standaardgebaseerde teenoor die studentgesentreerde dualisme in die hoëronderwys te oorkom?

Beïnvloeding van institusionele assesseringsbeleid noodsaak die konseptualisering van assessoring in terme van die dosent se perspektief sowel as in terme van die voornemens van die universiteit. Hierdie benadering erken die dosent se perspektief, maar skenk ook aan die belange van die universiteit sowel as die neem van moontlike aksie aandag.

Die studie fokus op die formatiewe en summatiewe assesseringspraktyke van die agt fakulteite van die NWU (Potchefstroomkampus) om die aksie en interaksie tussen die rolspelers in die hoëronderwyskonteks wat in verskillende kontekste plaasvind, te analiseer en verstaan. In terme van die uitbreiding of wysiging van ’n vroeëre konseptualisering (behavioristies en konstruktivisties) van assessoring, is studentgesentreerde leer ’n aanpassing na ’n sosiaal-kulturele benadering tot leer wat die belangrikheid van konteks erken. Die navorsing is in ’n interpretatiewe analiseparadigma gesitueerd, waar menslike optrede vanuit ’n “binne-perspektief” ondersoek word (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:53) en ’n gevallestudienavorsingsontwerp volg om ’n diepgaande begrip van die assesseringspraktyke van die verskillende fakulteite by die Potchefstroomkampus van die NWU te verkry. Hopelik, sal dit die probleem van ’n gefragmenteerde en geïsoleerde perspektief van standaardgebaseerde benaderinge tot assessoring aanspreek.

Die kernprobleem van assessoring, onthul deur die literatuuroorsig, is die dualisme tussen die studentgesentreerde assessoringsbenadering wat leer bevorder, en die standaardgebaseerde assessoringsbenadering wat institutionele verbetering en verantwoordbaarheid vereis. Hierdie navorsing bevestig hoe standaardgebaseerde assessoring altyd studentgesentreerde assessoring sal domineer, sou hulle teenoor mekaar gestel word. Die laasgenoemde is duidelik uit die assesseringspraktyke en -perspektiewe by die (Potchefstroomkampus) wat steeds deur standaardgebaseerde benaderinge, waarin
normgerigte en summatiewe assessering vastrapplek gevind het, gedomineer word. Hierdie studie stel ’n (her)konseptualisering van assessering voor wat standaardgebaseerde (nougeset, maar minder relevant) met studentgesentreerde (relevant, maar minder nougeset) assesseringspraktyke integreer. Hierdie integrering behels ’n herstrukturering van dosente en studente se rolle en identiteite van teenstellend na medewerkend, gerig deur ’n model wat die verskille tussen die twee benaderinge respekteer en tegelykertyd hulle gemeenskaplike verbondenheid aan ’n ooreenstemmende doelwit versterk. Die poging om assessering algeheel te (her)konseptualiseer – binne die ingewikkelde verbandhoudende onderrig- en leer verwante aktiwiteite – noodsaak (her)kurrikulering, (her)kulturering, (her)strukturering en (her)opleiding van dosente.
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STRUCTURE OF STUDY

This study is concerned with assessment in higher education, specifically the tension between traditional, standards-based assessment and the range of approaches associated with outcomes-based education and so-called student-centred practices.

**Chapter 1** reflects the educational realities I was exposed to as researcher. It details the socio-historical background against which my engagement with the tension and dualism of standards-based in contrast to student-centred assessment took shape. It provides the rationale for the selection of and predilections towards specific perspectives on assessment.

**Chapter 2** provides a justification for the methodological approach adopted in this research study, i.e. a case study approach, into the practices within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). The philosophical position that influenced this choice is explained and justified. This chapter describes and explains the methodological choices made as part of investigating how lecturers understand and conduct assessment in a higher education curriculum context. Such methodological choices are also used to engage with theories that inform these assessment perspectives and practices.

**Chapter 3** starts with an international macro context and then narrows down to the South African context. This chapter analyses the evolution of assessment over the past three decades in higher education, with specific reference to the transformation of assessment, in the form of a document analysis. Furthermore, this study has drawn on a wide body of scholarship in relation to assessment in higher education over the past 30 years and is thus a literature review as well. Theoretical perspectives were explored and refined in order to design the fieldwork.

**Chapter 4** moves from the international contexts to the South African context. It describes the current assessment discourse within the South African higher education context. Drawing on international perspectives provides a justified contrast to how curriculum assessment practices evolved in South Africa. The most specific point of this research is how the academic staff of the eight faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) perceives and conducts various assessment practices.

**Chapter 5** explores the philosophical perspectives on the series of assessment trends that led from traditional outcomes-based assessment, as initially embedded in behaviourism, to the more transitional outcomes-based assessment of a constructivist teaching and learning paradigm. Given the problematic nature of this stance, the third perspective of the transformational outcomes-based assessment, within a critical paradigm, is broached. The
different categories that facilitated the analysis of assessment trends in the previous chapters enabled the emergence of a clearer and more reliable perspective on the research question. The different theoretical frameworks allowed the researcher to make assumptions and judgements about what is observed to be present or absent.

**Chapter 6** details the assessment practices of each of the cases, in relation to the categories contained in Chapter 1. Analysis of the data offer certain insights, often relevant to all the cases and yet unique in other cases.

**Chapter 7** explains the current assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). This chapter opens with reflection on the dominant assessment practices, classified according to a paradigm chart to illustrate similarities and differences within the eight faculties. Current assessment practices and perspectives are explained in terms of the different decades and assessment trends conveyed in Chapter 2, to determine how assessment developed at the NWU in correspondence to international trends over the past three decades. Categorising the nature of lecturers’ dominant assessment approaches, whether it be norm- or criterion-referenced or content- or performance-based assessment, provides both a holistic portrayal of lecturers’ assessment perspectives and also a clear conception and justification of the theoretical constructs that inform these assessment practices.

**Chapter 8** suggests that not only are specific assessment reforms required, but also a major (re)conceptualisation of the nature of assessment itself. The need to (re)conceptualise assessment to overcome the dualism between student-centred and standards-based assessment emanates from the discrepancies in the assessment practices and perspectives outlined in the previous chapter. This chapter develops a perspective to which respondents in higher education can subscribe, i.e. a view of the direction the enterprise of assessment should take.
CHAPTER 1: 
SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 THE STORY OF ASSIDERE

Particularly since the political transition of 1994, personal disclosure has become part of a revisionary impulse, part of the pluralising project of democracy itself. The individual, in this context, emerges as a key, newly legitimised concept...talking about their own lives, confessing, and constructing personal narratives...South Africans translate their selves, their communities, into stories. (Nuttall & Michael, 2000:298)

"My assessment story can be seen as an affair." The comparison of assessment with a love affair might seem farfetched, yet an affair is usually characterised by a love-hate relationship and the complex nature of assessment surely qualifies as such a relationship (Louw, 2003:3). The Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002:22) defines affairs as things relating to your personal life; something that happens, especially something shocking; used to talking about an event, situation; used for saying that something is relevant to one person only and other people do not have the right to comment on or get involved in it. The main thing about a love affair is that it changes your life, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Louw (2003:3) also likens her perspective to an affair, writing in an article “my love affair with alternative assessment, integrating quality assessment into OBE course for distance education”. This article is about the implications of alternative assessment and its impact on distance learning.

The point is that my affair with assessment has not left me unaffected, but changed the way I see a student and I have developed a distinct affinity for the connection between assessment and its relationship with learning theories.

My relationship with and involvement in assessment – both the good and the less than great of this aspect of education - started practically in my first year of school.

I already had my first doubts about the reliability and validity of assessment as 5-year-old first grader at Laerskool Langlaagte, Johannesburg. Upon conclusion of that first school year my family moved to Piet Retief, where my parents were to enrol me for Grade 2. Although I had “passed” Grade 1 and had met the minimum requirements, according to Laerskool Langlaagte, Laerskool Piet Retief considered me “too young” and too “small” for Grade 2 and made me “repeat” Grade 1. I found the front-page picture of the 1966 yearbook where I, as the shortest child in the school, was made to pose next to Standard 5-learner (Grade 7) Marinus Meiring, the tallest child in the school, in no way affirmative. As a child I found it difficult to reconcile
losing my sense of achievement at having “passed”, with being “deemed too young or even too short”. I still remember how affected, and more specifically affronted, I felt and how my trust in teachers’ decision making had been irreparably damaged. This is probably where my interest in qualitative assessment as well as an awareness of the need for valid and reliable decision making originated. A decision must be justifiable and trustworthy. The negative impact this experience had on my learning resonated right through my primary school years up to entering high school.

The turning point came in Standard 7 (Grade 9) through a high school history teacher who understood the value of assessment, long before the implementation of outcomes-based education in South African schools. She was the epitome of assidere, Latin for assessment, meaning it is something you do with and for somebody and not to somebody. She addressed my lack of motivation after yet another mediocre performance. She literally sat down next to me and clearly explained what was expected of me. She went on to show me affirmatively that I was indeed capable of more and offered her support. Today I realise that she understood the purpose of assidere as being motivational, corrective and progressive. I still remember to this day how she “sat beside me”, “close by”, “watching me closely”. This assidere had a huge impact on my scholastic performance. My abhorrence of – or less than positive association I had with – assessment gradually transformed into a great love affair with assessment. Like the above teacher, I applied greater devotion and enthusiasm to my work and started excelling academically at school and later university. Assessment became a celebration!

Not even the unjust decision of an army officer, upon conclusion of my infantry officers’ course during my conscription years, could change my perspective on the value of assessment. It was army tradition every year to select the “best candidate officer” of the infantry officers’ school in Oudtshoorn. According to the feedback I received, I qualified to be “shortlisted” for the best cadet. The final “criterion” of the selection process was to determine whether the candidate was “religious”, which entailed an interview with the army chaplain. Although the interview went well, the candidate also had to recite the Confession of Faith. The problem was that I didn’t belong to any of the three “sister churches” and, therefore, didn’t know the confession that members recited every Sunday. Once again I was “weighed” and found “wanting”.

Killen (2005:142) argues that norm-referenced assessment aids in discriminating between better and poorer performers, but it provides very little information on actual performance and abilities in relation to predetermined learning outcomes. Stiggins (2005:324) supports this argument and also points out the injustice of this discriminatory assessment approach in which the categorising of students, i.e. the better and poorer performers, is also a categorisation into various segments of the social and economic system. This approach to assessment, Boud and
Falchikov (2007:119) add, fails to develop students and restricts their ability to assess their learning needs in future. It may also impact negatively on the classroom climate. This adverse effect of norm-referenced is a consequence of its embedded competitiveness (Meyer, Lombard, Warnich, & Wolhuter, 2010:52) and as Hodnett (2001:179) puts it: “this grading technique does not encourage growth”. It is devastating to many students, since weaker students quickly realise that they achieve bad results, regardless of the quality of their work.

This experience and earlier ones would teach me the importance of the assessment principles of fairness and appropriateness as well as the role that context and background play in meaningful assessment. It also instilled in me a much broader understanding of prejudice and favouritism, which went beyond their exclusive relation to racism at the time. Discrimination in terms of assessment revealed itself in terms of the prevailing double standards, i.e. judgement according to different levels of measuring performance, in conjunction with people’s preconceptions.

The discrimination in terms of religion, I experienced in the armed forces during conscription, was also general practice in the field of basic education between 1970-1985, in that only members of the three “sister churches” were considered for selection to the teaching profession. A matric learner whose parents belonged to a "sect", which was how the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) was labelled at the time, just wasn’t considered a suitable candidate for the teaching profession. Yet there were rare exceptions and the headmaster delivered the “good news” that I had been accepted at the Pretoria College of Education, based on my matric marks. The rector’s welcoming speech to first years, in which he informed us how we were chosen by “two fingers”, was another blow on top of my headmaster’s “friendly advice” that, although I had been accepted based on my scholastic achievement, the chances of my ever being promoted in the field of education were slim, since most schools' governing bodies were usually chaired by church ministers. He also strongly doubted that I would be offered any teaching position.

Bureaucratic discrimination and prejudice were common and such practice correlates with the assertion Smith, Schmidt, Edelen-Smith and Cook (2013:149) make that in a higher education setting, lecturers and students are part of a discourse community (Smith et al., 2013:149) that is demonstrated in their behaviour, language and values as well as the constant checking of whether they belong to the right group or not. Discourses often serve a gate-keeping function and are used to determine who is accepted and credible in a group and who is not (Smith et al., 2013:149).

Since 1994, both the lecturer and the student profile in South Africa have changed systematically. In most cases, universities increasingly reflect a culturally diverse identity. As
a result, the teaching of students in modern-day South African universities is not only an academically and professionally, but also a culturally and politically, sensitive matter that has to be approached and managed with great care – especially with regard to transcultural and gender issues.

Despite numerous sincere efforts on all fronts to encourage knowledge and tolerance of the colourful variety of cultural identities in the so-called “new South Africa”, culturally embedded perceptions, biases and obstinate misunderstandings still remain some of the biggest obstacles on the road to healing and building the nation. One of the areas in life that sharply highlights these perceptions, biases and misunderstandings is higher education.

These experiences made me realise that I would only be rid of the adverse assessment conditions of childhood through academic success at school and university. There wouldn’t be another chance or alternative and I had to work all the harder to get ahead. Assessment turned into more than just a mechanism to progress from one grade to the next, it became part of my personal philosophy. This life philosophy is grounded in the belief that in order to “climb the ladder”, the ladder has to be against the right “wall”. Some learners achieve “success” at school and university because their ladder was against the “right” wall, i.e. having parents who contributed financially and otherwise to the school. These children, whose parents also attended the “right” church and belonged to the “right” organisations, had a greater chance at getting ahead than others. I later came to realise, at the teaching college that it was actually to these learners’ detriment, since the lack of the “right” educational support made them dependent and unprepared for the demands of learning and tertiary study. They struggled to gain ground, often throwing in the towel. Although discouraged students may not go as far as developing “learned helplessness”, they may develop “learned dependence”, in respect of which Boud (1995:39) writes:

Too often lecturer-driven assessment encourages students to be dependent on the lecturer or examiners to make decisions about what they know and they do not effectively learn to do this for themselves.

Learned dependence means that the student relies on the lecturer to issue instructions and does not seek to go beyond the boundaries that he/she believes to circumscribe the task.

The “right” support became relative in student-centred philosophy, where the student must ultimately be responsible for their learning since no one can do it for them. The key issue is learning is a survival kit for life and the key responsibility lies with the student. Spoon-feeding, in the long run, teaches nothing but the shape of the spoon. Assessment aims to engage the student in their own learning. I also found “success” measured in terms of averages, pecking orders, grades, marks, etc. to be somewhat meaningless to learning. Constructive feedback
from teachers and lecturers soon made me realise that in order to promote a learner’s “climb to the top”, you need to create an environment that affirmatively and formatively feeds him/her forward, instead of “feeding” back. The student must know the next event in the learning process. The student must know what to do when they do not know what to do!

Assessment becomes a powerful way of raising standards, a way of planning the activities in the lesson so that both the lecturer and the student know what they are learning and how well they are learning. Assessment is considered to have a more motivational, corrective and progressive purpose with regard to students’ performance.

I so passionately believed in my philosophy that it even had an effect on the headmaster and the other teachers. After two years of teaching, the Department of Education presented me with a merit award for outstanding teaching. This award, together with the ample opportunity the headmaster allowed me to open hall assembly with Scripture reading and prayer freed me of the damning assertion that my church affiliation would keep me from professional promotion. Three years after joining the teaching profession I was promoted to head of department, at the age of 27, and headmaster, at the age of 31. I no longer believed, as I had in Grade 1, I was “too young” to progress and came to realise that good enough is also old enough.

A favourable learning environment supports the value of one of the key assumptions of outcomes-based education, whereby all learners can learn and that success promotes success. Institutions also have the responsibility to create favourable conditions for the effective implementation of the curriculum. I diligently continued my studies at the University of Pretoria and not only received academic colours for graduating cum laude, but also the Sanlam Award for Best B.Ed. honours student.

Assessment opened up a whole new world to me and relates to the sentiment implicit in the words of Rudi Giuliani, mayor of New York at the time of the World Trade Centre tragedy on 11 September 2001:

At that point I wasn’t sure how bad the conditions were. I followed my usual practice of going to the scene to see it myself so I could discuss it intelligently. I also wanted the fire commander to talk to me face-to-face – to look me in the eye and give me an undiluted assessment. I realised that we were in a new world.

During this time my passion grew, as headmaster and later as trade union chair and chief negotiator, as chairman of various professional bodies and interest groups to converse intelligently with teachers and headmasters about assessment, with the aim of opening up new teaching and learning worlds for students, lecturers, educators and parents. My call was for a “divergent” approach or a “workable relationship” between process- and product-oriented
assessment, making the praxis model most appropriate for the diverse constructions and multidimensional reality of assessment as integral to teaching and learning (Bellis, 2001:188).

Under the auspices of the South African Teachers’ Union (SATU), I presented a host of workshops nationally on assessment as well as at annual headmaster symposia to inform headmasters on the management of assessment in schools, i.e. how to use assessment to shape teaching and promote learning.

During the launch year (1998) of outcomes-based education in South Africa I attended every training opportunity offered on assessment, with the aim of finding solutions to the assessment questions teachers and learners face. I found the assessment courses presented by Netherlands Academics 1999 especially insightful and worthwhile. Information and guidance on assessment were virtually non-existent during 1998-2005. SATU even sent me on a study tour to Australia in 2001 to obtain further information on the most effective assessment practices, from which I returned very optimistic that outcomes-based assessment could indeed be implemented successfully. Even the R800.00 penalty for exceeding the weight limit at OR Tambo International was worth the knowledge obtained on practical examples of assessment as well as how important such practical illustrations are to training in assessment. Teachers don’t want to be taught; you have to show them with examples. Given the need to improve the quality of education in schools, this approach to training was very favourably received and I increasingly became involved in the training of educators in assessment.

In 2001 I was invited to join the Ministerial Project Committee (MPC) of the then minister of education, Kader Asmal, to revise Curriculum 2005 (C2005). I participated in the implementation workgroup, responsible for the development of an implementation plan for the national curriculum statements (NCS). This experience gave me valuable exposure to curriculum development, which would later be of great use in the development and implementation of short courses on assessment and moderation. The implementation workgroup also provided insight into the unique specifications of assessment within each learning area and subject. The important role of assessment to the successful delivery of a curriculum became evident, strengthening the notion that assessment actually drives the curriculum. Dr Linda Chisholm, head of the ministerial project committee (MPC), later admitted to me that the area of assessment was hugely neglected in the revision of the curriculum.

The new knowledge gained on assessment gave me a fresh perspective on outcomes-based education. I realised, more so than the other contributors and academics to the ministerial project committee (MPC), how the principles of assessment were basically those of outcomes-based education – i.e. the principles of assessment like validity, reliability, equity, meaningfulness to learning and practicability are synonymous with the clear focus, design back,
expanded opportunities and high expectations of outcomes-based education. This new-found knowledge in turn gave rise to the conviction that the effective application of the principles is the key to employing assessment for the promotion of teaching and learning. Simply put by Prof. John Pryor, of the University of Sussex, at a course I attended with the Mpumalanga Department of Education: “OBE is assessment and assessment is OBE. It is open ended and it can be what you want it to be.”

It is indeed the freedom of this “open-endedness” and being “what you want it to be” that overwhelms many teachers accustomed to bureaucracy and a prescribed syllabus. They find it quite an adjustment to suddenly have the professional freedom to create a learning environment and assessment activities related to the context of the learners’ life and worldview. The relinquishing of power to learners as well as the increased involvement of teachers, lecturers and learners in assessment to establish a more learner-centred, as opposed to teacher-driven, approach and also the deviation from a particular teaching routine was for many educators a contentious point that led to fierce opposition to the implementation of outcomes-based education and more specifically assessment. One of the reasons lecturers find assessment problematic is because of the way they conceptualise assessment. Yorke (2003:477) points out how the “philosophical” and “theoretical” contexts of assessment are often disregarded. Further theoretical development is needed that takes account of disciplinary epistemology; intellectual and moral development; and the psychology of giving and receiving feedback.

Convincing educators and academics of the valuable impact of outcomes-based assessment on teaching and learning was probably one of the greatest hurdles that I as teacher, headmaster and lecturer had to overcome. The challenge and my conscience clearly spoke to me, urging me not to allow learners to be subjected to the same pedagogy to which I had been and to employ assessment in support of learners’ and students’ endeavours to achieve their full potential. The above difficulties therefore make it important to consider alternative interpretations of student-centred learning. Barnett (1994:191), for example, explores how higher education fulfils individuals’ intellectual demands, thereby “enabling students to free themselves from constrains under which they are already thinking and acting”. This perspective denotes higher learning as a process of engaging with established bodies of thought, being able to participate in associated conversations, identifying new possibilities for understanding and being able to go beyond conventional insights and wisdom. In promoting these particular notions, Barnett (1994:191) acknowledges how, by implication, these features are being eschewed in the current debate and are slipping away.
I decided to make assessment my life’s calling and went on sabbatical in 2004 to develop an assessment course for the North-West University (NWU). During this time the NWU invited me to participate in an assessment project, undertaken to address issues on assessment in South African schools and I was tasked with launching an investigation into the implementation of outcomes-based assessment in South African schools, which would also form part of my master’s degree. I welcomed the opportunity of applying for a position at the University on assessment and presentation of short courses in 2005. This came as a great relief, because it would enable me to position myself centrally in South Africa to make a greater contribution to the education sector.

Working together with ETQAs and EDTP-SETA – training students to become SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) accredited assessors and moderators – provided valuable insight into criterion-referenced and competence-based assessment. The knowledge on assessment of self-directed learning was especially useful and I would later learn, from my literature study, how it is the latest trend in assessment. It focuses on the possibility of a range of assessment strategies, given the many different approaches to self-directed learning.

Other universities noticed the value of the assessor course, which is now also presented at the University of Stellenbosch (US) and Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). I had the privilege of training the final-year students as accredited assessors of three universities and seven campuses. Upon request from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), I started training department officials and subject advisers in 2006 to become accredited assessors and moderators. The feedback from course participants was and remains extremely positive, described as life changing. Each presentation of the assessor course was inevitably followed by an expression of the need for an accredited moderator course.

This need was duly addressed and in 2008 a moderator course was developed. The main purpose of the accredited moderator course is developmental and intended to enhance the quality of the assessment system. The demand for the assessor and moderator courses grew to such an extent that it necessitated the establishing of a close corporation for business and entrepreneurial purposes. After a lengthy negotiation process with the NWU, as my employer, Assidere Training Institute (ATI) was launched – in a cooperative agreement with the NWU. The philosophy and approach followed by ATI – derived from its name meaning “doing it with and for you” – triumphed and approximately 1 000 students are trained in work-based assessment as accredited assessors and moderators. WCED also classifies ATI as a “preferred service provider”.

I simply had to train teachers and lecturers to undertake “assidere”: to sit beside their learners/students, watching them closely; to do it for them and not to them; to use assessment
motivationally, correctively and progressively instead of merely racing through the syllabus in preparation for the exams. Lecturers who espouse the central ideas of assessment respect the feeling of entitlement of the students to be treated as individual learners – fully and actively participating in all aspects of their learning.

Who among us would not wish to be treated this way?

Reflecting on our practice and its impact on students will quickly tell us if we are offering our students the service we would wish for ourselves. Putting ourselves in the shoes of our students will not only help us to identify with their problems and difficulties; desires and aspirations; it will also help us to identify any aspects of our professional activities in need of improvement – and prompt us to do better.

Experiences, like the ones described above, reflect how assessment is not merely limited to the classroom, but also to life in general and “learning in the community” corresponds to “learning in the classroom”. A cognisance of the diverse historical and cultural milieus shapes and influences students’, teachers’ and lecturers’ perspectives. Contextual issues considered in the study relate both to geographical context and also to the political, socio-economic and ideological contexts that influence personal and professional identities.

This knowledge gave me as teacher and lecturer the freedom in which to create an environment where I could work at and explore concrete strategies to move away from a devastating assessment system, dominated by standards-based assessment approaches (marks and percentages), and in which students’ performances are compared to each other. Instead I hoped to move towards a socio-cultural approach, where the context in which the student lives and his or her achievements are defined by the knowledge and skills required to progress to the next level.

I have endeavoured to understand assessment practices holistically in relation to students’ individuality and diverse contexts, in an attempt to understand the associated human behaviour and experiences. Such sensitivity, from a socio-cultural perspective – i.e. the background ideas that inform the problems – offers ways of seeing, organising and understanding experience (Charmaz, 2000:515-520). The socio-cultural perspective revolves around the student’s needs. Meaningful learning is accomplished by creating a favourable learning environment that promotes effective learning. Learning outcomes are also identified in the light of the student’s existing knowledge and is contextualised within the life of the student.
I increasingly became aware that my perspectives on assessment were not limited to the local universities where I worked, but that they were also in line with those of international institutions.

1.2 ASSESSMENT ARGUMENTS – LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

Major changes in higher education assessment over the last 30 years, according to Dreyer et al. (2010:3), have been most obvious and significant in countries with an outcomes-based education such as the United States, England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Arab states, Western Europe, Canada, Pacific Rim countries and parts of Africa. Meyer et al. (2010:10) indicate, in reference to the above assertion by Dreyer et al. (2010:3), how the same can be said of South Africa with the introduction of outcomes-based education.

The role and function of higher education have also undergone dramatic change in response to economic imperatives. The notion of a broad liberal education is struggling for its very survival in a context of instrumentalism and technocratic rationality. In such circumstances, education “comes under the gun” by being both blamed for the economic crisis, while at the same time held out as the means to economic salvation – if only a narrow, mechanistic view of education is embraced (Smyth & Dow, 2006:293).

The more extensive the outcomes are, the more other ways of thinking are subtly and almost subconsciously excluded and marginalised Ecclestone (1999:43) remarks. This may not be intentional, but outcomes of workplace-based assessment offer forms of learning and assessment almost entirely devoid of critical engagement with the social and political issues that determine any occupational activity. Particular political standpoints are represented in workplace-based outcomes and criteria, e.g. the growing body of assignment exemplar materials provided by the quality authorities. Although this is true of all qualifications to some extent, centralised specifications are expensive to produce and often politically sensitive. Once in place, the prescriptive systems are almost impossible to reform or update, nor can students and lecturers decide to ignore, question or change contentious or irrelevant aspects and this in turn means that the specifications are neither lecturer- nor student-centred in this important sense (Ecclestone, 1999:42).

Outcomes-based assessment undoubtedly challenges academics to reconsider the outcomes of learning and the wider role of higher education. It appeals to important democratic notions of inclusion; access and transparency; and perhaps also a need for certainty and relevance in an uncertain age. As Ecclestone (1999:44) asserts, lecturers (and students) who support a more accessible and open education system cannot and should not avoid these challenges.
It is, therefore, easy to overlook the power of outcomes-based assessment to shape the wider cultural and social purposes of learning and the nature of “higher” learning in universities. Barnett (1997:37) argues that in the face of these trends it cannot be disputed that academics should be the sole definers of outcomes, but there are dangers in allowing significant concepts of “human being, knowing, action and interaction...to slip away”. He raises the worrisome spectre of higher education programmes that are able to yield demonstrable, rigorously assessed outcomes, but where students gain no notion of what deep understanding entails.

These changes in the nature of assessment practices, Boud and Falchikov (2007:1) say, necessitate a central educational idea to which participants in higher education can subscribe, i.e. a view of the direction the enterprise of assessment should take. Boud and Falchikov (2007:1) further contend that only through establishing a counter-discourse to the prevailing one, can some of the fundamental problems created by current assessment assumptions and practice be addressed. They suggest that not only are specific assessment reforms required, but also major (re)conceptualising of the aim of assessment, how it is discussed and the language used to describe it (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:1).

Despite initiatives to improve the quality of the NWU’s assessment practices, recent reports show that the required progress has not been made. For example, in 2011 Dr Scott-Van Wyk from academic support services conducted an extensive investigation into the state of teaching and learning on the Potchefstroom campus. The report made it clear that several of the problems regarding assessment identified in 2007 had still not been addressed, and that a number of the recommendations made at that time needed reconsideration.

Based on an assumption from literature (Black & William, 2006:9) that the improvement of lecturers’ assessment practices could result in the improvement of students’ performance, it is important that lecturer’s assessment perspectives as well as assessment practices be revisited.

However, it is important that I clarify any possible confusion between or equation of “standards-based assessment practices” and “student-centred assessment practices”, as there are nuance differences between the two practices. Subsequently, the assessment practices related to standards-based assessment on the one hand, and the assessment practices related to student-centred assessment on the other, will be explained.

1.3 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.3.1. Perspectives

My selection of the term “perspective” is in line with O’Donoghue’s (2007:27) description of perspectives as “frameworks through which people make sense of the world”. He asserts that
the perspective offers a conceptual framework, comprising interrelated sets of responses, which the researcher can employ to make sense of the physical reality. As Charon (2001:3) explains:

A perspective is an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at it and tries to understand the reality…a perspective is an absolutely basic part of everyone’s existence, and it acts as a filter through which everything around us is perceived and interpreted. There is no possible way that the individual can encounter reality ‘in the raw’, directly, as reality is, for whatever is seen can only be part of the real situation.

1.3.2 Content-based versus outcomes-based education

The key principle of outcomes-based education and the motivation for the higher education system’s choice of outcomes-based education is the student's focus on the learning outcomes and the observable demonstration of achieving the learning outcomes. Different from content-based assessment, outcomes-based education is geared towards the learning process aligned to the intended learning outcomes as well as the mastery of knowledge and skills to achieve the outcomes. Differentiating between content-based and outcomes-based approaches Spady (2005:1), in his article “OBE Reform in Search of a Definition”, defines and describes the components of an outcomes-based system as “a comprehensive approach to focusing, defining, and organising all aspects of the instructional and credentialing systems of institutions”. The abovementioned two systems can be seen, within the outcomes-based system, as the teaching and assessment systems of universities. A teaching system includes elements such as goal setting, planning, curriculum, education, teaching and learning material as well as assessment of learning (Spady, 2005:4). The credentialing system includes elements such as evaluation, marking, crediting, reporting and promotion. Within an outcomes-based approach, these components are determined and organised according to the needs and abilities of the students. The point of departure of teaching, learning and assessment is thus the student and not the curriculum.

Anderson (2004:257) offers, with reference to Botha (2002:364), the following definition:

Outcomes-based Education is an approach in which decisions about the curriculum are driven by the exit learning outcomes that the students should display at the end of the course.

Harden, Crosby and Daris (1999:7-14) explain in this regard that outcomes-based education, as “result-oriented thinking”, is the opposite of “input-based education”, in which the emphasis falls on the teaching process and results are unquestioningly accepted. In outcomes-based
education the learning outcomes direct the teaching, learning and assessment process (Harden et al., 1999:7-14).

The above definitions and descriptions depict outcomes-based education as an approach to education that is set on the achievement of predetermined learning results. It is a paradigm that elevates what the student learns and whether the student learns over the when and how of learning. Such learning must occur according to the abilities and pace of the student. It could be concluded then that the intention of outcomes-based education is to enable all students to learn successfully, in the belief that success cultivates further success. It acknowledges the individuality and needs of the student, which is the core premise of the teaching process.

1.3.3 Evaluation versus assessment

The interchangeable use of the terms evaluate and assess reveals the lecturers' superficial and inadequate understanding of the assessment process.

Hodnett (2001:1-2) advocates the distinction between these terms, arguing that evaluation and assessment are two components to be considered for implementation in the classroom, by citing the dictionary definitions of these terms. Evaluation determines importance or value; judging the effectiveness or worth of educational programmes. Assessment is a rating and measures the student’s learning and other human characteristics. Hodnett (2001:2) also differentiates between assessment and evaluation, explaining that “assessment” has two meanings. The first refers to a specific instrument or measurement, i.e. any test is a form of assessment, and the second refers to the process of designing and applying measuring instruments to gather critical judgement data on the student’s progress.

Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:80), however, explain that although these terms represent two different processes, they are interconnected. Any decision (evaluation) made about the learning of the student is based on the information obtained from formal and informal assessment. Evaluation judges the student’s knowledge, work performance and values or attitudes. Measuring and evaluation fall under the overarching concept of assessment. Assessment, in other words, culminates in evaluation and is one process. Hodnett (2001:1-2) agrees that assessment is an overarching concept of which one component is evaluation and not two separate components, as previously indicated, adding that assessment takes place when the lecturer gathers processes and interprets information on the student’s performance to reach a particular conclusion and that moment then refers to evaluation. Evaluation is an intrinsic part of assessment. Assessment does not go from evaluation to assessment, but merely provides the evaluator with a certain process. This process then provides information on knowledge as well as skills, attitudes and values.
1.3.4 Outcomes-based assessment versus input-based assessment

Current information on assessment reflects an understanding of the changing nature of the student's knowledge, which enables comparing the student's performance over a period of time. Nair and Pillay (2006:304) define assessment as "any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a learner possesses". In conjunction to this, Spady (2005:1) indicates that these learning outcomes are seen in clearly observable demonstrations of learning during or at the end of a considerable number of learning events. He explains that these demonstrations or performances often reflect the key elements of: (1) the student’s knowledge; (2) how the student is actually able to apply the knowledge; and (3) the student’s confidence and motivation during such a demonstration. Outcomes-based assessment, therefore, does not entail acceptance of “any” results, but is a focused approach toward achieving clearly defined and predetermined outcomes.

1.3.5 Summative assessment versus formative assessment

Reddy (2004:33) and McGaw (2006:4) explain that summative assessment is conducted at a specified time, which offers results mainly recorded for learner progress to verify the successful completion of a module, about which Airasian (2005:151) notes that the feedback on learners' progress is formal and the best-known methods for this type of assessment are tests and examinations, conducted within a specific timeframe.

According to Brown and Glasner (1999:6), formative assessment is the daily monitoring of student performance and is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. It takes place in the course of events, but is not specifically stipulated in the curriculum design and includes instantaneous feedback during a learning activity as well as comments on drafts of portfolio items. Contrary to Brown and Glasner’s (1999:6) suggestion that formative assessment is primarily characterised by being continuous, Yorke (2003:479) argues that there is no necessity that it be continuous: Formative assessment can be very occasional, yet still embody the essential supportiveness towards student learning.

1.3.6 Norm-referenced assessment versus criterion-referenced assessment

Norm-referenced assessment is probably the most traditional and most prevalent form of achievement assessment, in which students are compared to each other. Student performance is spread against the normal distribution curve, to award a certain value to that performance (Meyer et al., 2010:53). Hodnett (2001:5) adds that the aim of this kind of assessment is for learners’ scores to be “normal” against an average or median, within a predetermined range.
Marks are awarded to a student relative to his/her place in a group, measuring relative rank and not growth. Promoting learning is not the primary objective.

Criterion-referenced assessments are interpreted by comparing the assessment results with one or more external variables (called criteria), considered to provide a direct measure of the behaviour or characteristics in question and such comparisons are usually made by calculating correlations or regressions. Criterion-referenced assessment is a useful concept, Killen (2003:8) explains, in situations where a standardised assessment task is repeated with different groups of subjects, after its correlation with a direct measure has been established and has proved to play a powerful role in the promotion of teaching and learning.

1.3.7 Standards-based assessment versus student-centred assessment

Killen (2005:142) considers standards-based assessment as an integral part of the curriculum, whereby learning outcomes and assessment standards serve as starting points for the development of learning programmes. The frame of reference or guidelines aid the lecturer in developing suitable teaching, learning and assessment strategies that correspond to the learning outcomes and assessment standards.

Botha (2002:364) states that outcomes-based system is a student-centred approach to teaching and learning. It clearly moves away from the syllabus-driven system, in which teaching and learning goals are uppermost. Botha (2002:364) puts it as follows: “...the emphasis is not on what the lecturer wants to achieve, but rather on what the student should know, understand, demonstrate (do) and become.” What the student learns and whether the student learns are thus more important than when and how the student learns.

The key problem with using assessment to drive reform is the rift between the educational arguments for changes in assessment to enhance learning, and the policy demands for accountability (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442). Employing assessment for accountability purposes manifests in practice as summative, content-based, norm-referenced assessment. This standards-based approach characterises the behaviourist perspective. It is an approach which assumes that quality of teaching and learning in the classroom will improve if results improve; thus teaching and learning practice in the classroom will look after itself. In contrast, the use of assessment to enhance teaching and learning manifests in practice as formative assessment, performance-based assessment and criterion-referenced assessment. This student-centred assessment characterises the constructivist perspective.

When viewed as critical elements of the contrasting community discourses, the disjuncture and antipathies between the two said approaches take on considerable significance. The accountability argument manifests as regular testing of students to determine if expected levels
of performance are attained. In this approach there is an assumption that teaching and learning in the classroom will be strengthened once results improve. It therefore leaves teaching and learning practice in the classroom to take care of itself. Kanjee and Sayed (2013:445) argue that in the context of the assessment policies that also focus on accountability, standards-based assessment will always drive out student-centred practices if they are set in opposition to one another.

1.4 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

Based on the preceding discussion as well as the different meanings of assessment for different people, and to solve the problem, this study explores a possible broadening of the current fragmented and isolated take-up of standards-based perspectives on assessment versus student-centred perspectives. The (re)conceptualisation of assessment can therefore not be separated from the theoretical and philosophical contexts. In order to theoretically substantiate this study, Chapters 2 to 4 deal with theorising in literature about the use of standards-based assessment practices embedded in philosophical substructure, as well as the apparent differences in student-centred approaches to assessment. References to arguments about assessment are thus used to clarify and broaden lecturers’ assessment perspectives dealt with in this study.

Boud and Falchikov (2007:9) remind us that when we (re)conceptualise assessment, it is necessary to consider the context of assessment in higher education. Assessment is not only judged on narrow technical grounds, but also in terms of how it influences learning in the long term. It ranges from philosophical questions about the fundamentally problematic nature of assessment as a human activity, through considerations of the socio-political context, to issues of educational practice.

The fundamental principle of thought is not so much about how the lecturers’ actions influence learning outcomes, but rather how the involvement of the student influences learning outcomes. Morgan et al. (2004:9) argue that learning involves doing and is performative – meaning it is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction, but is created by the students’ learning activities – their approaches to learning.

In contrast, Banta (2002:22) says that assessment is not only a matter of the student’s life ambitions – the failing or passing of exams and consequences of this – but also one of the education system as a whole. Policymakers and researchers both analyse the role of assessment in considering the way that monitoring and the raising of educational standards
can impact on the system as a whole, but they approach this from two different perspectives. Torrance and Pryor (1998:1) define this difference as follows:

For policy makers the issue seems to be how to design an assessment system which embodies high standards and monitors performance through testing programmes – i.e. focusing on the procedures and products of assessment. For lecturers and assessment researchers the issue has more to do with how the processes of assessment might assist learning in the classroom.

In order to ensure quality learning in higher education for all students, this study is left with no other responsible response than to move this debate beyond merely advocating assessment practices that are safe and predictable; fixed and non-negotiable; and framed in a lecturer-centred and standards-based approach. It suggests that not only are specific assessment reforms required, but also a major (re)conceptualisation of assessment.

The (re)conceptualising aspires to the concept of sustainable assessment, i.e. assessment practices that both meet the needs of the student as well as the longer-term imperative of equipping students for lifelong learning. While acknowledging the lecturer’s perspective, such a (re)conceptualisation would direct attention to the concerns of the institution and possible action that needs to be taken.

The study does not advocate a revolution in the lecturer’s role, in the sense that revolution involves overthrowing or denouncing previous approaches. Neither does this study suggest that lecturers abandon their fundamental approaches to knowledge generation, but it calls on lecturers to broaden their perspectives to include those of others.

This study seeks to encourage, rather than resist, the process of change and stretch, rather than reinforce the boundaries that currently define assessment and its academic study. Some important areas of interest immediately present themselves. In various parts of the world new approaches to assessment have been developed, whose conclusions reveal the limitations of outlook we have inherited. New concepts of forms and modes of assessment have been proposed, together with new notions of the nature of assessment itself, in which new views of the role of assessment in relation to society can flourish. This study expounds and comments upon the most notable of these.

Lecturers and students need to move beyond the necessary content knowledge and assessment to craft knowledge into assessment scholarship. Assessment can be regarded as a scholarly discipline in its own right. It is indisputable that there is a substantial body of research and literature on assessment in higher education that can at the very least help lecturers escape the obvious pitfalls and at best illuminate improved student-centred learning.
Assessment scholarship urges the emergence of a professionalism that is outward-looking and emancipating. There is a significant advantage to be gained for academics to insist that student assessment be seen as assessment scholarship. It is important to realise that when lecturers’ professional confidence and professional interpretations of policy are manifest in practice, they are underpinned by lecturers’ particular assumptions, values and frames of reference. Although lecturers do require greater insight into assessment and do have different knowledge strengths, team work, communication, collaboration and cooperation are essential. Policy demands in relation to standards will only be satisfied if lecturers have the opportunity to communicate, cooperate and collaborate (Holroyd, 2000:47).

This study is also important for the following reasons:

(a) Through policy-making, statutory bodies such as the Department of Higher Education and the HEQC create an education context within which assessment practices should take place in terms of specific requirements and protocols. In addition, the assessment processes are evaluated by both organisations to monitor the capability of universities to produce competent students, as well as their accountability in respect of compliance with the assessment policy and guidelines. To date, these policies have been based on overseas assessment models. In this respect, in particular, the research can make an important contribution by attempting to reproduce the situation as it manifests itself in typical South African circumstances. The findings can provide a more realistic point of departure for policy-making in this regard. With the increasing throughput rate and weak pass rates of students, the provision of research-based information that offers the opportunity to promote learning is of utmost importance.

(b) The teaching provided by lecturers, and in particular their conceptualisation of teaching and learning activities in the context of changes in South Africa’s higher education, are of great importance as it influences the prioritisation of standards-based or student-centred assessment. The insights that emerge from this research report can serve as a starting point for renewed reflection on assessment practices that focus on learning. Moreover, it can serve as a basis on which lecturers can justify professional choices and motivations for more student-oriented assessment approaches. As this study focuses on certain approaches and principles pertaining to assessment practices, it should motivate other researchers and lecturers to replicate the research in their particular subject specialties.

(c) A study like this may possibly reprioritise the debate on student-centred assessment in the South African higher education environment as a research area that needs further attention. Through research and theorising, it may therefore be possible for academics to show an interest not only in terms of assessment within the context of higher education, but also
assessment in the different faculties and within the context of the specialist modules/subjects.

Within the context of a need for further development of assessment, Anderson (1998:7) indicates that assessment does not have one specialised knowledge base – it draws on many types of knowledge. Yorke (2003:477) confirms this theoretical positioning and goes on to say that assessment is based on an “interrelated set of philosophical beliefs and theoretical assumptions”, which need to be critically investigated. In support of the close connection between views on learning and the events of the classroom, in terms of teaching and assessment, Bell (2005:17) avers:

The ways in which we view learning can determine the ways in which we approach teaching and assessment in the classroom; the ways in which we think about being a lecturer; and how we view and conceptualise students and their needs.

The purpose of this study is to provide a nuanced perspective of the nature of assessment practices and perspectives of lecturers at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus), and the extent to which such practices are in agreement with the policy changes that underpin a shift from a behaviourist to a more socio-constructivist teaching and learning approach. Thus the main objective for the formulation of a research question for the study, which looks beyond the immediate practices of assessment, is to consider what the nature of assessment would be to provide students with a firm foundation for learning.

1.5 THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis refers to the total number of participants of the specific group of people (case) from whom the researcher seeks to obtain data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:159). Although the research is stated as being situated in higher education, the fieldwork was conducted in the eight faculties of the North-West University (NWU), Potchefstroom campus. Neuman (2000:196) explains that qualitative researchers:

Focus less on a unit of analysis’s representatives or detailed techniques for drawing a probability unit of analysis. Instead, they focus on how the unit of analysis’s small collection of cases, units or activities illuminates social life.

Correspondingly, the greatest consideration in the composition of the unit of analysis was for it to include faculties (as comprised of their particular lecturers) that would feature all possibly meaningful dimensions and nuances inherent to assessment. Non-probability sampling was therefore selected.
The selection of the unit of analysis of this study contained both an equal-chance as well as a non-equal-chance element. Given the year-long timeframe of the research, during which the researcher worked at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, the proximity of the faculties was a significant consideration. Another necessity was for the faculties to be as representative as possible. My intense awareness of the social, cultural and political situatedness of the faculties and their activities made me attentive to the possible impact of homogeneity on the pedagogy of the classroom, based on the assumption that the staff complement of faculties would be largely white and Afrikaans, even after the establishment of 1994 political dispensation.

Influencing institutional assessment policy necessitates the conceptualisation of assessment in terms of the individual lecturer’s perspective as well as in terms of the intentions of the institution (NWU - Potchefstroom campus). This approach acknowledges the lecturer’s perspective, but also directs attention to the concerns of the institution as well as to possible resulting action. Hopefully, it will address the problem of the fragmented and isolated perspective of standards-based approaches to assessment.

Within the present changed socio-political climate, this study has the opportunity and the responsibility to (re)conceptualise assessment constructively in order to assess the more diverse NWU student corps, through its academic offering and socially relevant research, to contribute to a more socio-environmentally just and sustainable world.

1.6 MY SITUATEDNESS AS RESEARCHER

My assumption that full justice is not done to quality assessment and that it does not have the positive effect on learning that research literature claims it may have, is embedded in my experience as a student, as a lecturer and as a researcher.

I entered the research terrain (faculties) with certain experiences, theories and knowledge on assessment practices within universities. The challenge was to identify the different perspectives that inform lecturers’ activities leading them to reproduce existing assessment practices or produce new assessment practices. As Connole (1993:20) explains, the research process requires an awareness of one’s particular social abilities and limitations as well as detachment, but at the same time active involvement in the process of negotiated meaning.

The first tier of the data-collection process contains information regarding the experiences of assessment I have had as a student and a lecturer, also reflecting the socio-historical background of such experiences. As Mgqwashu (2007:119) states, the use of personal educational experiences as a data source in a study is an attempt to indicate the extent to
which “each of us is shaped by all the influences exerted upon us, by the way in which we have responded to them, and by what we as individuals decided to do as a result”. My experiences not only informed the research question and served as one of the data sources in this study, but also formed the basis of my research interests. The data, including the associated critical engagement, offered significant clues for the process of understanding data collected from the different faculties. Accessing the participants at the NWU was relatively easy, because I work with them on a day-to-day basis. Several transcripts from focus group meetings with lecturers, reports, minutes of subject and phase meetings, and policies are at my disposal.

Mgqwashu (2007:111) correctly points out that these types of data excel at “telling the story” from the participant’s viewpoint, providing the rich descriptive detail that sets results into their human context. Setting results into a human context enables and facilitates opportunities for a thorough organisation of data, an informed understanding of the issues involved, and critical engagement with the assumptions and possibilities inherent in the phenomenon studied.

1.7 A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON ASSESSMENT

Assessment within the eight faculties of the NWU cannot isolate the latter from the external agents, situations and structures of the process. It furthermore entails social aspects that inform the agency of both the lecturer and the student (including other students and other members of the teaching-learning milieu) – not to mention the significant role of other curriculum and didactic elements, such as the particular pedagogy that steers classroom events, the learning environment created, the meaningfulness or value of the learning content and the impact of institutional policy.

(Re)conceptualising assessment requires taking account of the context of assessment in higher education. Socio-cultural perspectives on learning confirm the assertion that knowledge is socially constructed and context dependent (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:9). It depicts the interrelatedness between the content and how human mental processes are situated within historical, cultural and institutional contexts.

Gipps (2002:73) argues in this regard that just as the student and/or lecturer functions within a cultural, social, material and technological environment that has its problems, but also the resources to solve such problems, assessment occurs within a socio-cultural milieu in which it could be viewed as either a problem (e.g. the over-emphasis on standards-based assessment – summative assessment/the final exam) or as a way to support student-centred learning. Rather than regarding assessment as an externally initiated process, formally implemented, it is deemed a social process and product embedded in the social and cultural life of the
classroom. Consequently, knowledge is defined as proficiency in activities meaningful to the particular group of students. Cowie (2005b:202) asserts in this regard:

Seen in this way, methods of assessment are simply practices which develop patterns of participation that subsequently contribute to students' identities as students and knowers. Students therefore have an active role in assessment as people who can 'negotiate', shape and reflect on their participation and non-participation.

Gipps (2002:74) identifies four additional aspects based on the interpretation of the work of Vygotsky (1978) that may contribute to the socio-cultural perspective:

1. **The use and internalisation of instruments and (external) support are some of the key elements of Vygotsky's view on the development of mental function.** Assessment is supposed to create the opportunities for such development that students (and lecturers) may achieve “best performance rather than typical performance” (Gipps, 2002:74). These processes, however, imply the willingness of the student and the lecturer to collaborate (Figure 4.1). This leads to the stark realisation that in the semester and end-of-year examinations – which are still considered the main form of promotion and ultimately indicate “typical performance” – the student is robbed of these instruments and support of a knowledgeable guide. Continuous assessment, which is supposed to measure learning activities, in contrast, gives students (in collaboration with the lecturer) less anxiety and allows them the opportunity to render their “best performance to demonstrate their knowledge, comprehension and ability”.

2. **Assessment within the social (group) milieu,** according to Glasner and Silver (1994:412-413), offers the student the opportunity to observe the reasoning and work of others and also receive feedback on their own endeavours. Students are supported in the collaboration process, Gipps (2002:76) explains, by providing suggestions to develop and question their own abilities. In this set-up of socially situated “performance”, the student should also be assessed within the group context and not only on individual level (Figure 4.1). This furthermore has implications for reaching valid conclusions on the student’s progress within the context of his/her particular group. Where students write examinations or standardised tests, according Lave and Wenger (1991:112), the focus is more on the exchange value of learning (in terms of social status and academic progress) rather than on its application value (i.e. learning to gain knowledge). This explains Lave and Wenger’s (1991:112) view of tests and examinations as a new parasitic practice, in which it is endeavoured to raise the exchange value of learning independent of its use value.

3. **The assessment relationship between the lecturer and student, constructed in different ways, is of cardinal importance to the learning process** (Figure 4.1). In traditional
assessment (as denoted in the first decade of assessment described in Chapter 2 and 4) the lecturer stands in a position of “power” through his/her task design and assessment, while the student is the subject of assessment and obliged to complete the task. These days there is growing advocacy for assessment as learning in the form of self-assessment (Dann, 2002:73). This breaks down the hierarchical nature of the lecturer-student relationship in that the student participates in the discussion on and negotiation of assessment criteria and outcomes (Figure 4.1 portrays the more equal and collaborative relationship between the lecturer and the student).

4 The role of assessment in the development of identity, according to Gipps (2002:80), can be seen in the public nature of questioning and feedback in the classroom as well as in the dynamic of the student-lecturer relationship. The more assessment practices students are exposed to within the university context, the more they influence the forming, retention and change of the student’s identity (academic and/or social). Precisely because student-centred assessment entails inter alia feedback on the true abilities or level of performance of a student, providing such feedback in the presence of fellow students has a significant impact on the student’s view of him-/herself. This is the reason Gipps (2002:80) claims that the lecturer’s continuous class-based assessment could have a greater impact on the student’s identity development than the results of standardised semester tests or examinations. Similarly, a predominantly norm-referenced assessment regime, with its comparative and competitive nature, could lead to a negative self-image when such comparison is poor.

These views on learning and the associated education practice(s), according to Claxton (2002:24), have a powerful and direct effect on the student’s epistemic mentality (the aspect of the human psyche that relates to manner of learning and knowing) and identity. He defines the latter concepts as follows:

Epistemic mentality refers to someone’s accumulated ways of knowing, learning strategies and styles, and their habits of mind.

Epistemic identity refers to the person’s view of themselves as a student and “knower”: what they are good and bad at learning; what is worth knowing; what say they have in the generation and evaluation of knowledge and expertise, and so on” (Claxton, 2002:24).

Student-centred assessment is a social process in which epistemic mentality and identity are social products. The efficacy of student-centred assessment is established in the degree to which the attained epistemic mentality and identity enable the student to effectively employ opportunities, arising from assessment events, to promote learning sustainably and fully.
The scaffolding of structured learning support of learning-directed action(s) along the zone of proximal development, between the lecturer and student, is largely the product of the power or energy invested in the interaction before learning can occur (Figure 4.1). The hope is that the power or energy or effort, seen as mainly coming from the lecturer, will be transformed into the achievement or suitable engagement with the relevant learning outcomes (Figure 4.1). O’Brien and Guiney (2004:109), however, assert that “in these highly differentiated interactions most of the energy transformation (not most input) from teaching into fully grounded learning, is enabled on the student side of the interaction”. The generally accepted view that learning and teaching are driven by the lecturer has limited merit. The greater truth, it would seem, is that the lecturer and student are both instrumental in the successes of structured learning support (scaffolding) at the zone of proximal development (Figure 4.1).

This study takes as its departure-point four presumptions underpinning the socio-cultural view of learning.

1. The chief objective of a socio-cultural view on learning, thinking and intellect is to explain the human memory processes that recognise the essential relationships between mental processes and the social, cultural and institutional environment. Nuthall (1997:711) deems it necessary to focus (Figure 4.1) on “the culturally embedded nature of the classroom processes and the central role that cultural norms and artefacts play in structuring learning and the way we view learning”.

2. Meaning is a central feature of a socio-cultural approach and thus the emphasis falls on the mind rather than the brain. Given the premise that thinking is situated, spread or mediated action, the mind is considered socially spread rather than merely the cognition of brain processes.

3. Socio-cultural approaches take both the individual and the social aspects of learning into account in that it explains the relationship of the cultural, institutional and historical milieus in which functioning occurs. Learning would thus include both the creation of individual meaning as well as the socially given features and realities of the university. Assessment may well centre on the individual student, but it cannot be separated from the socio-cultural dimensions represented in the planning, execution and feedback phases (Figure 4.1). The socio-cultural “baggage” that both the lecturer and the student(s) bring to the classroom must also be taken into account.

4. The variety of theories on the subject reveals a methodological concern over the unit of analysis. This unit of analysis in research and theorising of learning have changed over time, as Bell (2005:52) indicates: “The unit of analysis has changed from the ‘person-solo’ to the person-plus (surroundings).” Human action as unit of analysis, to study both
the individual and social aspects of learning (and assessment), is more productive than concepts, linguistic and knowledge structures or attitudes (typically found in the field of psychology) as units analysis.

The objective of the interpretative analysis of eight faculties is to develop a socio-cultural perspective or perspectives on the assessment practices of the faculties.

1.8 INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE

Assessment practices are essentially human actions aimed at rendering information on the student’s true level of development to provide the student with the necessary support of a knowledgeable guide, along what Vygotsky (Daniels, 2001:56) calls the zone of proximal development, to achieve his/her expected or potential levels of development. Answering the research question consequently requires a research design that primarily describes and interprets human action and interaction. Information on the structure that may influence behaviour also constructs a more holistic and nuanced portrayal of practices. The lecture hall events and human interaction are, however, socio-culturally situated.

Assessment is not only judged on narrow technical grounds, but also in terms of how it influences learning. It is necessary to consider the context of assessment in higher education, according to Boud and Falchikov (2007:9), when (re)conceptualising assessment. This paradigm reflects issues related to the nature of social reality as well as knowledge.

According to Krauss (2005:758-759), epistemology is intimately related to ontology and methodology. Ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we come to know reality and methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it. Hardt and Negri (2000:128) argue that reality always presents proliferating multiplicities. The epistemological position adopted is, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001:33), more the interpretive understanding of universally accepted laws than a causal explanation and Connole (1993:19) adds that “in the human sciences, understanding is a method of studying humanity through an empathic identification with the other, a grasping of their subjective experience”.

The interpretive (explanatory) perspective proceeds from the assumption that there are reasons for all human action and that such behaviour is preceded by intentions and possibly followed by reflection. Action occurs within a framework of social parameters, imbuing it with certain meaning for the participant and the observer. This meaning is generated through language, other forms of symbolism and negotiation. One of the challenges of research into understanding assessment practices is to correctly interpret the meanings that certain human
actions, resulting from different interactions, may hold for lecturers and students. Kelchtermans, Vandenberghe and Schratz (1994:2450) support this assertion as follows:

Human behaviour is meaningful behaviour. Situations, events and interactions are subjectively interpreted and given meaning. These meanings are the basis for subsequent action. Meaning results from actions with the material, institutional, social and cultural environments and is constructed through these interactions. Understanding human behaviour (assessment) requires grasping the meaning these acts have for actors.

The variety of meaning of human action, as set within certain temporal-spatial contexts, makes it important for this study to describe and interpret the assessment practices that have traditionally remained unchanged, the developments that have occurred and the effects of such processes. The focus of the study narrows from international macro contexts, sources and authorships to a South African context and, more specifically, to the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

During the process of interpretive study that centres on the meaningful forms of human expression – i.e. written, verbal and/or physical (Smith, 1992:102) – two important concepts emerge: human action and social action. Human action is the behaviour or expressions embedded in certain reasons, intentions and motivations. Such action gains meaning in relation to the social (Smith 1992:102), since human behaviour can only be understood within its social context or in a web of social meaning. Simon (1982:24) confirms these premises when asserting:

What is distinctive about...human action...is that it is meaningful...The meaning of an action, furthermore, is not necessarily given by the agent’s intentions alone, but also depends on a system of social relations that determine the conditions of ascriptions of responsibility.

The social context in the processes of assessment is an important aspect of this research. The following fundamentals summarise the relevancy between this study and the interpretive paradigm:

- Students are not considered passive beings within social, political and historical contexts, but as possessing inner abilities that foster individual judgement, perception and decision-making authority.
- Any event (assessment) or action is explained in events and processes in terms of the interaction of multiple factors.
It is extremely difficult to maintain complete objectivity, especially when observing how the subjects (lecturers) misunderstand or understand events (assessment) in terms of their personal system of meaning.

The aim of the study is to gain insight into individual cases (assessment perspectives and practices), instead of developing universal principles or predictable generalisations.

The world consists of multidimensional realities, best studied as a whole, while recognising the meaning engendered by its context.

A study is always loaded with value and those values influence the manner in which the research is contextualised, focused and conducted (Beets, 2007:19).

Despite this, my own descriptions of assessment practices, and especially of the meaning lecturers give to their work, always remain a secondary rendition (Neuman, 2000:74). The endeavour of this research is to gain as intimate a view of lecturers’ practices as possible to describe the nature of their actions and its roots, which is why the study is predominantly localised in the constructivist teaching and learning paradigm (thoroughly detailed in Chapter 4).

My position as lecturer and involvement on several committees at the NWU afforded me the added knowledge of the conditions of the immediate environment, or of work spaces that reflect the culture of the campus. As a lecturer I was able to conceptualise what is going on in the faculties as cases and assisted in accessing the deep-seated theoretical underpinnings of the decisions made by lecturers during assessment. Such observational evidence created new dimensions to understanding either the context or phenomenon studied.

The basic premise of the constructivist approach, in which a student-centred assessment approach is employed, is that students are able to construct knowledge. They construct knowledge through social interaction between the lecturer, student, fellow students and other knowledge sources. This perspective denotes assessment as determining the student’s progress in the process of achieving his/her potential in the relevant subject (Figure 4.1). Given that the information extracted from assessment serves to advance future progress, Joffe (1993:230) asserts, assessment must be considered an integral part of the teaching and learning process and purposefully integrated into the curriculum (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 also shows the emphasis on the so-called student-centred nature of the constructivist approach. The essential implication of the theory, as analysed in depth in Chapter 4, is that lecturers have to structure learning environments and activities to help students to construct understanding rather than just absorb knowledge. The lecturer acts as facilitator or mediator, with an overall consideration of the learning needs of the student, and remains the director of the interaction between learners and lecturer (Figure 4.1).
Assessment serves to support the different phases of each student’s growth toward applying his/her unique abilities to gain knowledge and insight (creation of constructs) during the education process. The above figure cautions that using a socio-cultural perspective necessitates cognisance of the following features:

- Assessment can only be fully understood in terms of the social, cultural and political contexts of the classroom.
- Assessment practices reflect the values and culture of the classroom and especially the lecturer.
- Assessment is a social practice that is created within the social and cultural norms of the classroom.
- Whatever is assessed has social and cultural value.
- The social and cultural knowledge of the lecturer and student will mediate their response to assessment.
- There is a distinction between the typical performance and best performance achievement of the student.
• Student-centred assessment should provide feedback on the assessment process that will enable the student to do self- and peer assessment.

• The criteria and acceptable knowledge for the assessment process must be negotiated between the lecturer and student.

Consequently, assessment should also be diverse if it is to address the range of needs of students and to effectively determine and describe the structure and quality of each student’s progress. Hence the demand in the higher education curriculum that the assessment programme should include different kinds of assessment to provide for the multiple learning styles of students. It is assumed that diversity in assessment activities will provide the lecturer and student with more reliable information, according to which a student can be supported in the quest for deeper learning.

Assessment reveals the existing mental constructs held by the student, as Carlile and Jordan (2005:20) state, and if these constructs are inadequate or flawed, the lecturer can present counter-examples or scenarios that challenge the existing constructs and prompt the student to a re-adjustment. This kind of constructivism is often criticised for disregarding the socio-historical context of knowledge, and the impact of context, other people, language and intent is deemed unimportant (Dann, 2002:24). James (2006:57) further points out the poor conceptualisation of assessment within this perspective to date.

Elaborating or revising an earlier conceptualisation (behaviourist and constructivist) of assessment, Torrance and Pryor (1998:153) aver that student-centred learning is an adaptation of a socio-cultural approach to learning that recognises the importance of context (Figure 4.1). This perspective of student-centred assessment addresses many of the sociological difficulties of learning, given that the social rules that govern the learning context are problematised and resolved. Furthermore, it is also the setting in which students are supported in their individual social realities within the context of the curriculum and university, by a knowledge source, to achieve their full potential. Research on student-centred assessment is not merely about the quality of the product, but also the quality of the actual production process.

It would seem that the lecturer may initiate the learning processes and strategies, such as student-centred assessment, but is still subject to the power or willingness of the student. Within the context of the student-centred assessment practices, as discussed earlier, it appears that the lecturer-student milieu is one in which the energy and/or power relations between the lecturer and student can be equally effective (Figure 4.1). Students are
considered, in contrast to standards-based assessment, as both the recipients as well as the initiators of assessment.

The above insights and Figure 4.1 reflect the complexity and multidimensionality of student-centred assessment. As Carless (2007:57) states:

> It is about grading and about learning; it is about evaluating student achievement and teaching better; it is about standards and invokes comparisons of individuals; it communicates explicit and hidden messages.

Consequently, student-centred assessment leads to both tension and compromise, but a cultural perspective seems to be the best way to describe and understand both the process and the product. James (2006:57) may claim that the perspective is poorly conceptualised, but still there is a considerable amount of research on aspects of assessment from a socio-cultural perspective (Cowie, 2005a:137-151; Føttland & Matre, 2005:503-521).

I opted for case study research design, because I seek to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). The distinct need for multiple case study research arises from the desire to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assessment practices of the different faculties at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, as well as to ascertain the meaning of assessment to participants in the process.

### 1.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter reflects the educational realities I was exposed to as researcher. It details the socio-historical background against which my engagement with the tension and dualism of standards-based in contrast to student-centred assessment took shape. It provides the rationale for the selection of and predilections towards specific perspectives on assessment.

The next chapter provides a justification for the methodological approach adopted in this research study, i.e. a case study approach, into the practices within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). The philosophical position that influenced this choice will be explained and justified.
2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the methodological choices pertaining to the multiple-case research design of this study, for examining lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives in the eight faculties at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

This chapter provides an overview of the background to the specific case study, the rationale for selecting the cases, the propositions being examined and the broader theoretical relevance of the inquiry (Yin, 2014:123). The general strategy is one of theoretical propositions, working data from the ground up, using descriptive frameworks and reviewing rival explanations (Yin, 2014:123).

The multiple-case study research design comprises five components. Yin (2014:36) explains that the first three components – i.e. defining the research questions, propositions and unit of analysis - will lead the research design into identifying the data to be collected. The other two components – i.e. defining the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings – will lead the case study analysis, suggesting how to proceed once the data have been collected.

According to the protocol suggested by Yin (2014:85), the multiple case study has the following sections:

- Section A: Rationale for the multiple case study research design
- Section B: Data-collection questions
- Section C: Collection of multiple case study data
- Section D: Analysing of multiple case study data
- Section E: Reporting on multiple case study data

2.2 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

2.2.1 Multiple case study research design (Section A of protocol)

Denscombe (2003:3) states that the research design needs to suit the research questions posed, in reference to which Mouton (2003:57) mentions that “when we attempt to classify different types of studies, different design types, it is not surprising that we do so according to
the type of questions they are able to answer”. This form of question can, according to Yin (2014:11), provide an important clue regarding the appropriate research method to be used.

Answering the research question consequently requires a research design that primarily describes and interprets human action and interaction. The execution of certain assessment practices is, according to Giddens (1976:15), “a skilled performance, sustained and ’made to happen’ by human beings” and usually conducted in a natural and routine manner on the basis of their knowledge and theories. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:320) describe assessment as a “bounded system...bounded by parameters and that show a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within these boundaries”.

The distinct need for multiple case study research arises from the desire to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assessment practices of the different faculties at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU as well as to ascertain the meaning of assessment to participants in the process. I opted for case study research, because I seek to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

Yin (2014:4), who greatly contributed to the revival of case studies as a credible option for social research, defines the case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence”. The scope and features of the multiple case study research design comprise an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data-collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis (Yin, 2014:17).

A multiple case study enables the research design to cope with the technically distinctive situation, in which there is more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014:17).

The unique strength of the multiple case study is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, documents, artefacts, interviews and observations. The exploratory case study allows the researcher to focus on a “case” (assessment practices in a faculty) and gain a holistic and real-world perspective.

This study draws on a wide body of scholarship in relation to assessment in higher education over the past 30 years, which serves to locate the cases’ (faculties) assessment practices. Theoretical perspectives are explored and refined in order to design the fieldwork – such as studying of the different (cases) faculties at the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU. Secondly,
the case study compares the assessment practices of each case (faculty) with the theoretical perspectives and explains “how” and “why” it influences assessment practices.

2.2.2 Data-collection questions (Section B of protocol)

The heart of the protocol is a set of substantive questions reflecting this study’s actual line of inquiry. The case study questions are distinguished from the interview questions in the sense that the questions are posed to the researcher and not the interviewee (Yin, 2014:89), the purpose of which is to keep the research on track as data collection proceeds. This study concentrates heavily on Level 2 questions, i.e. questions asked of the individual case. It is a protocol for data collection from a single case (faculty), part of a larger multiple case (eight faculties) of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

It is against this background that the research question below (as well as the secondary research questions) explored in this study is posed.

The main question of the enquiry is to what extent, if any, could assessment be (re)conceptualised to overcome the standards-based versus student-centred assessment dualism in the higher education context?

This research problem can, according to Mouton (2003:52), be classified as a real-life problem occurring in World 1 and this classification of Mouton (2003:53-55) makes the research question of this study empirical in nature, since it endeavours to solve a real-life problem. This real-life empirical research problem, according to Mouton (2003:52), relates to certain action(s) within the higher education curriculum and is socio-culturally situated and influenced. Assessment is a social, political and economic problem encountered in everyday life. The only way to solve this World 1 problem is through action and an intervention in the real world (Boeije, 2010:52). Addressing assessment problems thus requires altering lecturers’ perspectives on the purpose of assessment.

Very little research has been conducted on lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives to date. Research into this area of education can thus be viewed as an explorative line of enquiry, in which any research method could be used (Yin, 2014:10). Exploratory research is typically conducted in the interest of “getting to know” or increasing the understanding of a new or little research setting, group or phenomenon and serves to provide insight into a research topic (Ruane, 2005:12).

Answering the research questions entailed learning “how” lecturers assess the students of the eight faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) and “why” they do whatever they do?
The more the research questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g. “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), Yin (2014:4) asserts, the more that case study research will be relevant. This is achieved through a multi-method strategy that would provide as much data on the assessment practices, as they typically occur. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006:4000) add in this regard that “the findings should be derived from research conducted in real-world settings in order to have relevance to real-world settings”.

This study comprises of two basic phases. The research was exploratory during data collection, but then advance to more explanatory in explaining the complexity of assessment practices and perspectives of the lecturers.

The process of identifying situations in which the research method might be relevant raises to possible avenues of study, viz. exploratory and explanatory.

(a) What is the nature of the lecturers’ current assessment practices?

(b) What practical problems do lecturers experience with assessment?

This type “what of” question, according to Yin (2014:10), is a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study of which the goal is to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions. The exploratory case study tests the importance of differentiating norm-referenced from criterion-referenced and content-based from performance-based assessment.

The main question (research problem) was divided into appropriate secondary questions (problems) that once answered, would lead towards a solution of the main problem.

Answering the research question requires an extensive and “in-depth” description of assessment practices and perspectives. The following secondary questions refine the focus of the research:

a) What is the nature of the lecturers’ current assessment practices?
b) What problems do lecturers experience with assessment?
c) What underpins these problems lecturers experience with assessment?
d) How do the lecturers' philosophical beliefs influence their assessment practices?

It is thus investigating how lecturers conceptualise assessment by dividing the main problem into appropriate secondary problems, through a series of questions. The answers to all of these questions lead to a solution of the main problem. The purpose of the fourth question is to inform the close connection between lecturers’ philosophical beliefs and their assessment practices (Bell, 2005:17).
### Table 1.1: Interrelatedness between research questions and assessment problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the nature of lecturers’ current assessment practices?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Issues around content-based rather than performance-based assessment and norm-referenced assessment rather than criterion-referenced assessment. The predominant use of norm-referenced assessment makes the feedback mostly quantitative and judgemental, rather than detailed descriptions of current and expected progress. The absence of assessment information that would promote student-centred learning can be attributed to the dominance of summative assessment (Huysamen, 2002:84; Davidson &amp; McKensie, 2009:2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What problems do lecturers experience with assessment and what underpins these problems?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Issues around the formative and summative purposes of assessment. Summative assessment assesses student performance primarily quantitatively and norm-referenced (to substantiate lecturers’ judgements). Formative assessment assesses student performance primarily qualitatively and towards predetermined criterion (to substantiate lecturers’ judgements). Lecturers who are interested in assessment as learning will assess (substantiate their judgements) student performance primarily through student-centred assessment. Each of the mentioned assessment purposes has its place and time, but the problem is to get the balance right (Nair &amp; Pillay, 2006:304; SAQA, 2005:6; Airasian, 2005:151).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What underpins these problems lecturers experience with assessment?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Issues around standards-based rather than student-centred assessment. The key problem in assessment, revealed by the literature review, is the <em>dualism</em> between the alternative student-centred assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES

Approach to enhance learning and the standards-based assessment approach that demands institutional improvement and accountability. Figure 1.1 illustrates the problem of the fragmented and isolated take-up of standards-based approaches to assessment.

Consistent with the pro-standards-based assessment approach, the technical rational perspective holds that assessment is quantitative, objective, causal and stable – a commodity that can be codified and transmitted. This is in diametric contrast with qualitative, subjective, contextually specific and practical notions of assessment that typify the student-centred approach. (Smith et al., 2013:147).

| **How do lecturers’ philosophical beliefs influence their assessment practices?** | **Problem:**  
Issues around the theoretical and philosophical context of assessment  

The “philosophical” and “theoretical” contexts of assessment are often ignored, according to Yorke (2003:477), assessment is narrowly judged on technical grounds and not on how it influences learning. It ranges from philosophical questions about the fundamentally problematic nature of assessment as a human activity, through considerations of the socio-political context, to issues of educational practice. Assessment in the behaviouristic model tests a student’s recall of facts to determine whether knowledge has been absorbed (Gipps, 2002:73). A narrow interpretation of the assessment process sees its epistemology as instrumentalist, which reinforces behaviourist assessment practices. The behaviouristic assessment elements of marks and promotion serve to alter behaviour and guide students into more desirable directions. Behaviouristic instruction techniques use assessment to ensure accountability, discipline, responsibility and class attendance (in other words behaviour manipulation and control) (Reynecke, 2008:23). This behaviouristic assessment approach robs the student of the right to reflect and make critical judgements on the knowledge and skills to be mastered. |
2.2.3 Collection of multiple case study data (Section C of protocol)

Real-world events must be integrated into the needs of the data-collection plan, making the collection of data about lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives from the eight cases (faculties) in their everyday situations explicit and for which well-planned field procedures are essential (Yin, 2014:88).

A data collection protocol, suggested by Yin (2014:88), was developed that included:

a) gaining access to faculties and lecturers;
b) having sufficient resources while doing fieldwork;
c) developing a procedure for obtaining assistance and guidance, if needed, from other team members or colleagues;
d) drawing up a schedule of data-collection activities set against certain deadlines; and
e) providing for unanticipated events during fieldwork.

Given that a researcher does not have the control over the case study data environment, the following environmental arrangements and field procedures facilitated conducting this multiple case study:

a) Access to faculties and lecturers

The vice-rector (academic) at the time when the research was undertaken enabled access to faculties and lecturers by commissioning the research as part of the strategic processes of the Potchefstroom Campus Plan (2012-2014). The purpose of the research was explained during an executive management meeting to obtain the cooperation of the deans of each faculty, thereby enabling consultation with the academics with the support of their management.

The participation of lecturers was further increased by the researcher’s already established role on campus and lecturers were quite comfortable to share their experiences and viewpoints on assessment. An invitation to participate in the research was sent out to all the deans and directors of the different faculties at the NWU, in which the purpose of the research was explained and academic staff was invited to participate in the focus group interviews. The administrative managers of the faculties assisted the researcher in organising a suitable time and venue for the interviews, usually in the faculty’s seminar rooms, and for the large faculties more than one focus group was held.

The fieldwork was structured and organised by having adequate resources at hand – including a personal computer and stationery - and a pre-established place to record notes privately.
b) Procedure for assistance and guidance

The project was led by the main researcher who facilitated the focus group interviews and invited me to join the research team and this Ph.D. study is thus part of a bigger project. Bearing in mind that academics are the target group as well as a thesis committee, I devoted myself to a rigorous methodological path.

This path began with a thorough literature review to consult authoritative voices on posing carefully formulated research questions and reaching the objectives of the study. I was also dedicated to formal and explicit procedures in conducting this research to facilitate analysis of the case study data and recording the findings in a report (as part of the Potchefstroom Campus Plan), in accordance with the case study protocol (Yin, 2014:110).

A research assistant was responsible for the video recordings to enable the researcher to focus on the interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the video recording (to assist in the transcribing process). The video recordings were transferred from the video camera to a computer, where it was labelled and saved on a password protected computer. The research assistant received a copy of the video recording to transcribe, after which the recording was deleted from his computer. Each transcription was carefully reviewed for accuracy, before proceeding with the data analysis.

c) Schedule of data collection

Data collection activities occurred according to a schedule setting specific deadlines for completion. The project leader facilitated the focus group interviews, which consisted of full-time lecturers for undergraduate students in the various subject disciplines. Although the focus group interviews were subject to a set schedule, the facilitator allowed the discussions to flow naturally as the participants shared their experiences and concerns. The same researcher facilitated all the focus group interviews and the same interview schedule was used for all the focus group interviews.

d) Providing for unanticipated events during fieldwork

The researcher is an academic advisor from academic development and support services on campus, who works closely with lecturers on their teaching practices from which a relationship of trust has grown. The original request to the faculties was to conduct the interviews in two sessions, one for lecturers with less than five years’ experience and another for lecturers with more than five years’ experience. The faculties, however, chose to participate in groups with all levels of experience.
The facilitator was conscious of hierarchy and purposefully addressed all participants in the same manner, thus establishing an atmosphere of collegiality and acceptance. The focus groups were held with each faculty individually, participants thus interacted with colleagues of the same discipline. This contributed to a better understanding of the context and enriched the data collected as the participants shared common understandings and experiences. Participants were allowed to share their experiences and concerns freely, while ensuring that each participant had the opportunity to take part by seeking their input directly.

The interviews were conducted always bearing in mind the two-fold responsibility of the interviewer: (a) follow own line of inquiry, as reflected by the case study protocol, and (b) pose actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serve the needs of the line of inquiry (Yin, 2014:110). Case study interviews require the interviewer to operate on two levels simultaneously: First satisfying the needs of the line of inquiry, i.e. “why” lecturers assess the way they do, while also putting forth “friendly” and “non-threatening” questions to determine “how” lecturers conduct assessment.

Ruane (2005:150) also considers focus group interviews in research of great benefit in that “focus group interview scheduling can also be an effective strategy for countering memory failure or respondent resistance”. Lecturers gave the impression of controlling the pace of the interview and in all likelihood this made them comfortable enough, despite the video camera, to share their knowledge and rationale for their actions as well as their perceptions on students and their particular assessment practices. The interviews thus afforded lecturers the opportunity to air their views on a complex practice and also aid me in discovering the true dynamic prevailing on assessment within the different faculties.

The following schedule (Table 2.1) is a broad depiction of the data-gathering process, detailing the date and activity undertaken during the research for this study.
### Table 2.1: Multiple case study data-collection plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>INSTRUMENT</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov.-Dec. 2011</td>
<td>Autobiographical data</td>
<td>Autobiography</td>
<td>Provided a socio-historical backdrop, against which personal experience of assessment as student, lecturer and researcher is embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of scholarship</td>
<td>Document, content and analysis</td>
<td>Strong theoretical impetus in research-theoretical framework; Identified discourses in assessment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb. 2012</td>
<td>Schedule of questions related to assessment practices</td>
<td>Flexible spontaneous self-representation; Built trust with lecturers and faculty; attended to practical issues; Started data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews of each faculty</td>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td>Questions to elicit comments on reasons for embarking on assessment practices; Obtained information on assessment practices and perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 groups (lecturers &lt; 5 years’ experience; lecturers &gt; 5 years’ experience)</td>
<td>Focus group interview schedule</td>
<td>Described, analysed and explained basis for existing assessment practices; Determined action within policy structure and regulations of university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textual data</td>
<td>All national and international curriculum documents, research documents and policies, study guides, faculty policies and procedures</td>
<td>Transcripts of lecturer observations and interviews returned to participants for verification; Analytical information returned for comment and clarification of analysis commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 2014</td>
<td>Data analysis, participant validation</td>
<td>Participant validation letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2: Research design and methodology
Case study evidence is obtained from documentation and interviews, which calls for mastering different data-collection procedures.

2.2.3.1 Case study documents

The case study entailed consulting a large range of documents, in which the aim of the literature review was to collect data on lecturers’ assessment practices and to capture the distinctive perspectives of the participants in all the faculties.

Every source consulted in research has its own associated array of data or evidence and they are all, according to Yin (2014:103), potentially relevant to case study design. The most important function of documents, in case study research, is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.

The thorough review of documentary evidence, as part of my data-collection plan, entailed the following systematic searches:

Prior to the fieldwork, an Internet search produced invaluable information. During the fieldwork, I sought out documents not available in electronic form in local libraries and other reference centres such studies on assessment, moderation and the academic polices of the NWU.

I soon learned that these documents were often written for a purpose and an audience other than that of this case study (Yin, 2014:107), i.e. documentary evidence reflecting communication among other parties attempting to achieve other objectives. I thus became a vicarious observer, constantly trying to identify these objectives and critically interpret the content of such evidence.

I explored how assessment has conceptually changed in practice and also to establish the pertinent philosophical premises. The literature review was conducted in a variety of ways, of which the following were the most important.

a) Key terms/words search on the databases of the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), The ISI Web of Knowledge, Science Direct and Google Scholar

The term assessment does indeed deliver some literature, but evaluation remains the most common term and is used in all possible contexts. Aside from one or two research accounts and a degree of theory creation, there is very little pertinent literature on student-centred assessment within the South African milieu and even less when the latter term is combined with higher education/curriculum. It is interesting to note that most of the research literature comes from studies conducted in developed countries, but there is a great dearth of and/or
access to research relevant to the South African context and other developing countries (specifically in Africa).

b) The snowball method: searching the bibliographies of academic journals and book chapters to obtain further information and source references

Most of these references relate to formative, criterion-referenced and more recent performance-based assessment sources. The different approaches enabled me to determine whether student- or standards-based assessment is implicitly practised. Much of the research is focused on the teacher’s role, at school level, in the planning and implementation of assessment. There are virtually no studies on student-centred assessment within universities, specifically lecturers’ perspectives. The discourse also largely relates to the school sector, where the issues are rather different and the domains of reference are made explicit.

Seen in the light that the work of constructivists (Chapter 4) on the developmental stages has been influential in school education, all students should – by the time they enter higher education – have progressed to the highest level, i.e. formal operational thinking. The work of authors such as Kohlberg (1964), Perry (1998/1970) and King and Kitchener (1994) takes student development further in that it identifies a dimension of intellectual development – ranging from dualistic to relativistic thinking. Information on particular assessment practices and related learning theories is quite valuable.

I am, as researcher and lecturer, quite aware of the dimension differences between the school sector and universities, which are strongly focused on adult education.

c) A quote search in the Social Sciences Index (SSCI) on the impact of important studies

Sources on formative assessment and socio-cultural perspectives on assessment such as Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard (2006); Cowie (2005a, 2005b); Killen (2005); Gipps (2002); Black and William (1998:2006); and Torrance and Pryor (1998:2004) were explored.

The purposes of the study, outlined in the introductory section, required a type of data with the potential to yield detailed descriptions of how lecturers experience assessment requirements and practices.

This information enabled the study to access lecturers' perspectives and theoretical understandings of assessment to interpret the issues related to assessment. The evaluation of the data may in turn provide lecturers and the research community with the insight needed to examine the relevant issues further.
2.2.3.2 Focus group interviews

According to Yin (2014:110), focus group interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence and is a common device in case study research, which takes the form of resemble-guided conversations rather than structured queries in this study. Ruane (2005:146) avers that “from all data collection techniques available in our search for information, the interview strikes many as the single best device for promoting understanding and getting to the truth”.

With reference to the “truth”, Gay et al. (2006:419) do not view the goal of focus group interview schedules as being “to get answers to predetermined questions, but rather to find out where the participants are coming from and what they have experienced”. The interview method in this study did indeed address both my needs as well as those of the participants.

Upon due consideration of all factors, the researcher set the interview scope at a maximum of eight cases (faculties) and thus adhered to the original intent that Flick (1998:41) describes as “their relevance to the research topic rather than their representatives” (see table below).

Focus group interviews were held with two groups within each of the eight faculties on the Potchefstroom campus, ranging in size from four to twelve lecturers per group and representative of experienced (five years and more) and inexperienced (four years and less) lecturers. More than one interview was conducted with some of the faculties (Table 2.2), due to the large numbers of lecturers in the faculties. The focus group interviews were chaired by the main researcher.

A request was addressed to the directors of schools in the faculties to nominate at least five experienced and five less-experienced lecturers for participation in the focus groups, with whom more than one interview was held in most of the faculties. Although for some participation was obligatory, while for others it was voluntary, most participants were glad to assist. I had no control over the number and identities of the participants.

These focus groups ranged from three to eleven lecturers per group, representative of both experienced and less experienced lecturers and equally divided between the groups to avoid any group from comprising a single level of experience.
Table 2.2: Composition of focus groups per faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences Group 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences Group 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences Group 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences Group 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic and Management Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Group 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Group 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Sciences Group 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Sciences Group 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Group 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Group 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions for the focus group interviews were designed based on themes identified from two previous project reports from academic support services. In 2007, Dr. M. Scott-Van Wyk conducted an extensive project on the Potchefstroom Campus that focussed specifically on the following aspect and its implications:

- The impact of the abolishment of the semester test system (STS)
  - Perceptions of lecturers and students on the abolishment of the STS without consultation
- Perceptions of the management committee about extending the academic year with 20 additional class days
- Purpose of decreasing the number of contact sessions
- Management of STS logistics by the exam division
- Value of the STS for students

Table 2.3: Focus group interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative assessment</th>
<th>Informal formative assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When do you assess with informal formative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you assess with informal formative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you assess with informal formative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the purpose (why) of your informal formative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal formative assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do you assess with formal formative assessment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you assess with formal formative assessment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you assess with formal formative assessment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the purpose (why) of your formal formative assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summative assessment</th>
<th>When do you assess with summative assessment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you assess with summative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you assess with summative assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the purpose (why) of your summative assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews took two or more hours, over an extended period of time covering two sittings. This type of interview can, according to Yin (2014:111), be classified as the *prolonged case study interview*. It allowed the interviewer to delve into interviewees’ interpretations, opinions and events or insights, explanations and meanings related to their assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). This information was very valuable for identifying discrepancies in assessment practices and perspectives as well as to corroborate or contradict other sources of evidence.

The interview provides participants with the opportunity to share their story, pass on their knowledge and provide their own perspective on their assessment practices. Mgqwashu
2007:96) adds that many of the assumptions and purposes, feelings and knowledge that have organised and continue to organise a person’s or a society’s life are difficult to access directly. The less contested and controversial they are, the less an interviewee will be aware of them and be able to talk about them.

Conversely, to ask a person’s explicit knowledge and approach is to access only material that they themselves experience as consciously controversial and needing articulation and therefore capable of fairly quick expression in words. The knowledge and insight of colleagues about assessment as well as the number of years as a university practitioner, gender and qualifications served as criteria for selecting participants.

2.2.3.3 Direct observation

Because this research took place in the real-world setting of the case it created the opportunity for direct observation. This real-world setting of assessment within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) enabled the researcher to observe the relevant social and environmental conditions, as yet another source of evidence for this case study research. This involved observation of meetings, sidewalk activities and classrooms. The video recording of the interviews was an especially valuable source of evidence.

My position as lecturer and involvement on several committees at the NWU gave me the added knowledge of the conditions of the immediate environment or of work spaces which reflect the culture of the campus. Such observational evidence created new dimensions to understanding either the context or phenomenon studied.

The study relied on experiential biographical data drawn from lecturers’ assessment experiences. Using information at it emerged served to locate and to some extent identify approaches to assessment.

Biographical data enabled me to conceptualise what is going on in the faculties as cases and assisted in accessing the deep-seated theoretical underpinnings of the decisions made by lecturers during assessment. Experiential biographical data facilitated deductive engagement on my part as researcher. Drawing on my understanding of how lecturers conduct assessment and their assessment perspectives made it possible for me to make analytical deductions from the data.

The biographical data also provided opportunities to engage critically with lecturers’ conceptual understandings of the relationship between assessment and its theoretical underpinnings. This critical engagement in turn offered the study insight into the actual experiences of participants in terms of how they feel and what implicit aspects of their practices serve them best. Writing
about these types of data, Mgqwashu (2007:103) rightly points out, could assist a researcher in “getting at implicit aspects of experience to make them explicit”.

The qualitative data provided me with information on the nature of assessment practices as well as the nature, scope and cause of the difficulties that the participants experience.

2.2.3.4 Participation observation

Participation observation provides certain unusual opportunities for collecting case study data, but also involves major challenges (Yin, 2014:116). The most distinctive opportunity is related to the researcher’s ability to gain access to events or groups that are otherwise inaccessible to a study. Another distinctive opportunity is the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone “inside” a case rather than external to it.

Chapter 1 introduces me as subject and researcher of this study. This first tier of the data-collection process contains information regarding the experiences of assessment I have had as a student and a lecturer, also reflecting the socio-historical background of such experiences. As Mgqwashu (2007:119) says, the use of personal educational experiences as a data source in a study is an attempt to indicate the extent to which “each of us is shaped by all the influences exerted upon us, by the way in which we have responded to them, and by what we as individuals decided to do as a result”.

My experiences not only informed the research question and served as one of the data sources in this study, but also formed the basis of my research interests. The data, including the associated critical engagement, offered significant clues for the process of understanding data collected from the different faculties. Accessing the participants at the NWU was relatively easy, because I work with them on a day-to-day basis.

Several transcripts from focus group meetings with lecturers, reports, minutes of subject and phase meetings, and policies are at my disposable. Mgqwashu (2007:111) correctly points out that these types of data excel at “telling the story” from the participant’s viewpoint, providing the rich descriptive detail that sets results into their human context. Setting results into a human context enables and facilitates opportunities for a thorough organisation of data (as discussed in Section 5.3), an informed understanding of the issues involved, and critical engagement with the assumptions and possibilities inherent in the phenomenon studied.

It is on the basis of my “story” and access to the “stories” of colleagues who have been involved in assessment that this study investigates ways that will raise all role players’ awareness of the standards-based and student-centred dualism and that this dualism creates tension that has the potential to fracture the teaching, learning and assessment processes in higher education.
The protocol questions include *empty table shells* indicating the data to be collected. The relevant data are qualitative (categorical and narrative), which is displayed in the study in the form of tables. The empty table shells help to identify exactly what data are being sought and ensure that parallel information is be collected from the different cases (faculties) in this multiple-case design. The table shells aid in understanding how to process the data once collected and in so doing the completed table shell (table in the next chapter) becomes the basis for analysis.

### 2.2.3.5 Ensuring high quality of case study data collection

The case sources of evidence was maximised through the principles of data collection:

a) **Principle1: Multiple sources of evidence**

The major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use triangulated data. Consulting multiple sources of evidence in case study research allows the researcher to address a broader range of historical and behavioural issues. However, the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of *converging lines of inquiry* (Yin, 2014:120).

Data triangulation bolsters the belief that the case study findings or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate, because it is based on several different sources of information (Yin, 2014:120). By developing convergent evidence, data triangulation helps to strengthen the construct validity of the case study research design.

Change in lecturers assessment practices and perspectives in higher education can cover a wide variety of phenomena related to standards-based versus student-centred assessment. Construct validity was sought by defining, in accordance with Yin (2014:46), assessment in terms of specific concepts (and relating them to the original objectives of the study) and identifying operational measures that match the concepts, citing published studies that make the same matches.

Three tactics served to increase construct validity, the first of which was multiple sources of evidence that encourage convergent lines of inquiry – a tactic relevant to data collection. A number of data-gathering techniques were employed over the course of the research, with the interviews as core method. The policy documents and study guides served *inter alia* as multimethod strategy for further triangulation of data.

In this regard McMillan and Schumacher (2006:325) explain that “different strategies may yield different insights about the topic of interest and increase the credibility of findings”. It was quite a challenge to develop a deeper understanding of patterns and other complexities for the social
milleus of eight cases of assessment that are socio-culturally situated, through careful observation of the recordings, and not be overwhelmed by the diversity. Producing and developing detailed data and descriptions of the context of each case (faculty and lecturer) through this process enabled me to judge whether some of the patterns or trends are transferable to other cases, based on the differences or correspondences of those contexts.

b) Principle 2: A case study database

The second principle centres on organising and documenting the data collected for case studies. I created a separate and orderly compilation of all data from this case study for each faculty.

Data from each faculty were coded according to each critical question and each transcript was coded, line by line, in order to identify each participant’s understanding and conceptualisation of the specific assessment practice. This was quite challenging, given that the data were narrative accounts and had to be unpacked and reorganised in order to construct concepts emerging from the eight faculties. Then these concepts had to be compared, merged, recoded, renamed and ultimately modified into clear, manageable and meaningful concepts. Table 2.4 illustrates how data from each research site were organised and analysed in terms of each critical question. The goal of analysing data this way was not necessarily to verify certain hypotheses, based on various conceptual ideas, but to formulate hypotheses by comparing data within and across different faculties. The purpose of such a comparison was to ascertain the extent to which concepts that emerged out of the qualitative data, yielded by the interview questions, fitted closely with the incidents they were representing. Many of the relevant documents used in this case study is readily retrievable for later perusal.

The database, consisting of tabular materials created by the researcher, was organised and stored to allow later retrieval.

c) Principle 3: Chain of evidence

This case study maintains a chain of evidence to increase the reliability of information. The final report adequately cites the relevant sources used to arrive at specific findings by referring to specific documents, interviews and observations. The specific sources contain the actual evidence, as per the key phrases or words in the documents, highlighted with yellow pen. The methods sections also indicate the circumstances – the time and place of an interview - under which the evidence was collected, in accordance with the procedures stipulated by the protocol. There is also clear cross-referencing to methodological procedures and the resulting evidence.
d) Principle 4: Data from electronic sources

Great care was taken with sources obtained on line, such as an interview. Sources consulted were cross-checked, including the information derived from them. Cross-checking online material with other sources was an important way of understanding a potential slant, incompleteness or even interpretive bias.

2.2.4 Analysing multiple case study data (Section D of protocol)

This case study research design is based on a general strategy for analysing data from multiple case studies. It is strategy originating from theoretical propositions, working data from the ground up, using descriptive frameworks and reviewing rival explanations (Yin, 2014:123). Several specific and analytic techniques relevant to multiple case studies were employed: pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis and the organisational-level logic model. Similar replication logic was applied and rival propositions and threats to internal validity within each individual case (faculty) were addressed.

A general analytic strategy was developed, in preparation for conducting case study analysis, linking the case study data to concepts of interest and giving a sense of direction to analysing the data (Yin, 2014:123). Data analysis in this study consists of examining, categorising, tabulating, testing and recombining evidence (Yin, 2014:123). I started with my own strategy of reading through the data to identify promising patterns, insights or concepts to define my priorities for what to analyse and why. The organisation of data included:

- putting information in different arrays;
- drafting a matrix of categories and placing evidence within such categories;
- creating data displays – flowcharts – for examining the data;
- tabulating the frequency of the different events; and
- arranging information in chronological order.

The study’s theoretical orientation guided the case study analysis, suggested by Yin (2014:136), in which the literature review revealed how assessment developed conceptually and practically over the past 30 years. Identifying patterns, insights and concepts enabled the construction of a classification framework, displayed in Chapter 5. Table 2.1 categorises the evolution of assessment and grounds it theoretically within disparate paradigms, providing a conceptual tool for advancing arguments and for facilitating thinking/learning, i.e. for heuristic purposes. The assessment types mentioned were variously explored for a more nuanced understanding of assessment and for how they may be brought to bear on assessment theory and practice.
The research question necessitated breaking down the problem into secondary questions, in order to divide the main problem into appropriate secondary problems (Table 1.1) and I then addressed these with the aim of solving the main problem. I started the data analysis of the “small questions” first, to identify evidence that addresses the first question, and drew a tentative conclusion based on the weight of the evidence.

I then proceeded to the larger questions and repeated the procedure, until I addressed the main research question. In this sense, the descriptive approach helped to identify an overall pattern of complexity to explain lecturers current assessment practices and perspectives in the eight cases (faculties) at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) (Yin, 2014:134).

I constructed three categories in which each informed the subsequent category and finally the final category.

Table 2.4: Categories for assessment approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSMENT APPROACHES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORM-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(quantitative assessment: marks, numbers, percentages, averages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRITERION-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(qualitative assessment: learning outcomes, assessment criteria, grading, rubrics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT-BASED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(syllabus driven, facts, concepts, theories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(work-integrated assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(norm- and content-based assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT-CENTRED ASSESSMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(alternative assessment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Textual data (words and phrases) matching the above categories, built up towards more complex categories as multiple combinations were found. Studying words and phrases to determine meaningful patterns, the following combinations were found and characterises lecturer’s approaches to assessment.

2.2.4.1 Analytic techniques

The following analytic techniques were used to analyse the case study data:

(a) Pattern matching

The aim of the content analysis was firstly, to provide examples – across a wide range – of the assessment practices and perspectives that illustrate or demonstrate a certain pattern. The data drew from my own experiences with assessment. Secondly, the empirical and descriptive pattern (that derived from the content analysis) was defined prior to the data collection from the faculties and classifies this case study as a descriptive one. The findings from the data
collected from the eight cases (faculties) were compared and matched with the data’s findings from the literature, which Yin (2014:143) refers to as pattern matching logic. The findings from the cases were similar and congruent to the empirical patterns from the content analysis, strengthening the internal validity of the case study (Yin, 2014:143). Yin (2014:143) deems pattern magic logic to be one of the most appropriate techniques for this kind of study.

Rival independent variables forming a pattern focused analysis on the “how” and “why” of an outcome in each case. Each rival explanation involved a pattern of independent variables that is mutually exclusive: If one explanation is to be valid, the others cannot be (Yin, 2014:146).

This means that the presence of norm summative assessment precludes formative assessment, content-based assessment precludes performance-based assessment, norm-referenced assessment precludes criterion-referenced assessment and finally with the overall pattern of results and its degree standards-based assessment precludes student-centred assessment.

Although the procedure for explanation building is more relevant to explanatory case studies, according to Yin (2014:147), this case study used a second analytic technique of pattern matching with the aim to analyse the case study data by building an explanation about each case. Assessment in each case is “explained” according to a presumed set of causal links stipulating “how” and “why” it happened. These explanations reflect theoretically significant propositions, whose magnitudes might start to offset the lack of precision (Yin, 2014:147). The causal links reflect critical insight into the NWU assessment policies, procedures and processes. The policy propositions, if correct, could lead to recommendations for future policy actions.

While case study evidence was examined, explanatory propositions were revised and evidence again examined from a new perspective in this iterative mode. The eventual explanation is the result of the following series of iterations:

- Making an initial theoretical statement
- Comparing the finding of an initial case against such statement
- Revising the statement
- Comparing other details of the case against the revision
- Comparing the revision to the findings from more cases

This process was repeated several times, with the objective of gradually building an explanation to show how rival explanations cannot be supported, given the actual set of case study findings (Yin, 2014:149).
(b) Complex time-series analysis

This case study explores the implications of the patterns of change characterising approaches to assessment. Yin (2014:151) states that the more intricate and precise the pattern, the more the time-series analysis will also lay a firm foundation for the conclusions of the case study.

The time series in this multiple case study are postulated to be more complex, because the rise in trends such as formative and criterion-referenced assessment is followed by a decline of summative and norm-referenced assessment within the same case. This type of mixed pattern, across time, would be the beginning of a more complex time series.

Changes in approaches to assessment do not occur at all once, but is a process aimed at achieving more authentic and student-centred ways of assessing. Changes in approaches to assessment should not be represented in binary terms of formative assessment/summative assessment, but rather seen as occupying a continuum of change from traditional standards-based to more student-centred forms of assessment (Le Grange & Beets, 2005a:1199). The strength of a case study would not merely be in assessing this type of time series, but in developing a rich explanation for the complex time series (Yin, 2014:152).

(c) Chronological sequence

Although the case study examined international assessment trends since 1980 onwards in detail and with precision, the important objective was to explore the relevant “how” and “why” questions about the relationship of events over time and not merely to observe the time trends alone.

What are lecturers’ assessment perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus)? How do lecturers understand, experience and conduct assessment? Why do they assess the way they assess?

One way of determining this was to analyse lecturers’ assessment practices, to identify aspects of emphasis: the language used to describe assessment practices reveals its meaning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:1). The important analytic purpose was to investigate presumed causal events, because the basic sequence of a cause and its effect cannot be temporally inverted. The analytic goal was to compare the chronology with that predicted by the content analysis – in which the theory has specified one or more of the following conditions.

The participants’ differing assessment practices and perspectives represent a continuum of possibilities and it is very difficult if not impossible to classify it narrowly. The time period in this multiple case study is marked by classes of events that differ substantially from those of other time periods (Yin, 2014:154). For example, as indicated in the literature review, in the 1980s assessment of learning (summative assessment) dominated assessment practices across the
globe. These events and assessment patterns were carefully determined and documented by the researcher, following one predicted sequence of events. Comparisons to other cases, as well as the explicit considerations of threats for internal validity, strengthened the inferences (Yin, 2014:154).

**(d) Organisational logic model**

Yin (2014:162) recommends the organisational logic model for examining theory of change in this type of case study data. The organisational logic model entails matching empirically observed events to theoretical predicted events, stipulating and operationalising a complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time. The events are staged in repeated cause-effect-cause-effect patterns, whereby a dependent variable (event) at an earlier stage becomes the independent variable (causal event) for the next stage (Yin, 2014:155). The organisational logic model details the extent to which the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) (as an organisation) assessment perspectives and practices comply with the set expectations of new paradigms.

The intention of this study is not only to reposition debates about assessment practices and policy, but to also illustrate some practical directions for development. It addresses important questions about the relationship between assessment and pedagogy as well as the appropriate kinds of contribution that assessment can make.

Student-centred assessment, due to its cyclical nature, allows for ongoing revisions to how assessment is executed as well as to assessment design and other factors related to the impact of the intervention within the given context. For instance, in addition to determining the reliability of an assessment practice in a specific assessment context, key questions addressed in the assessment might include:

- Under what particular circumstances was the intervention performed?
- Did the circumstances influence the manner in which the assessment was conducted?
- Were changes to the assessment design and curriculum design required as a result?

Knowing the situation-specific factors that influence the impact of the assessment – the how, when and why – enhances the relevance of the assessment to the lecturers and the students.

When (re)conceptualising assessment, it is necessary to consider the context of assessment in higher education (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:9). Attending to contextual conditions is an integral part of logic models and these conditions are not only likely to be an important part of every case study, in some conditions they may even overwhelm the “case” being studied. This study not only judges assessment on narrow technical grounds, but also considers how the
past as well as the current context influence assessment. This ranges from philosophical questions about the fundamentally problematic nature of assessment as a human activity, through considerations of the socio-political context, to issues of educational practice. The socio-cultural perspectives consider a range of contextual variables that impact on lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives.

(e) Cross-case synthesis

The analysis of case study data from the eight cases (faculties) at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus applies to multiple-case studies. Conducting a cross-case synthesis is the endeavour to explore whether the cases being studied had replicated or contrasted with each other. The more cases studied, the stronger the findings (Yin, 2014:164).

The researcher conducted a cross-case analysis by treating each analysis as if it were a separate “case”. Table 2.6 displays data from the individual cases according to the uniform categories capturing the findings from eight faculties. Each of the eight faculties’ assessment practices and perspectives are categorised and ground theoretically within disparate paradigms.

Table 2.5: Findings of an individual case captured according to the uniform categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LECTURER'S DOMINANT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN A FACULTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRUCTURALISM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum as product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm-referenced assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content-based assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards-based assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arranging a whole set of categories or features of assessment practices and perspectives, as indicated in the table, effectively profiles each case (faculty) – on a case-by-case basis. This array permits the analysis to probe whether different cases appear to share similar profiles and deserve to be considered instances (replications) of the same “type” of general case (Yin, 2014:166).

Alternatively, the profiles may be sufficiently different that they deserve to be considered as contrasting cases. The predicted similarity or contrast derived from the literature is displayed in Table 5.1. The findings, based on the observed profiles from the eight faculties, either confirm or disconfirm the original expectations and connect to the prior research reviewed in developing the original design.

The preceding example illustrates the conduct of a cross-case synthesis, when endeavouring to explore whether the cases being studied had replicated or contrasted with each other as illustrated in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Cross-case synthesis for the eight cases capturing the findings according to the uniform categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Formative vs. Summative Assessment</th>
<th>Norm-referenced vs. Criterion-referenced Assessment</th>
<th>Content-based vs. Performance-based Assessment</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Positivist vs. Interpretivist</th>
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<td></td>
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</table>

The analysis dissected and arrayed the evidence from the eight evaluations in the form of word tables. Generalisations about lecturer’s assessment practices and perspectives were derived from replication logic, given the positive results of the analysis. A qualitative analysis of the entire collection of word tables then enabled the study to draw cross-case conclusions about the eight individual faculties.
2.2.4.2 **Triangulation: Rationale for multiple sources of evidence**

The use of multiple sources of evidence in this case study research allows the researcher to address a broader range of historical and behavioural events (Yin, 2014:181). The most important advantage of multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry. This multiple case study research design follows from the principle in navigation, whereby the intersection of different reference points is used to calculate the precise location of the object. The finding or conclusion of this case study is thus likely to be more convincing and accurate, because it is based on several different sources of information.

This case study is concerned with the complexity of assessment within a higher education curriculum context. The complexity of the topic is carefully detailed and data triangulation is thus an appropriate device for analysis, in that multiple sources serve to corroborate findings.

Such complexity, I have realised, could be described in terms of multiplicity of assessment problems. Relying on theoretical propositions not only shaped my data-collection plan, as Yin (2014:136) indicates, but also yielded analytic priorities. The classification framework (word tables) helped to organise the entire analysis, pointing to relevant contextual conditions to be described as well as explanations to be examined.

This conceptual tool enabled the researcher to develop a case study description, as a third general analytic strategy, and organise the case study according to a descriptive framework. The descriptive framework organised the case study analysis and data were collected about each topic linked to a related problem. Developing convergent evidence aided data triangulation to strengthen the *construct validity* of the case study (Yin, 2014:121).

Multiple sources of evidence essentially provided multiple measures of assessment within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) and increased confidence in the accuracy of the findings. This multiple case study adopted a relativist or interpretivist orientation to appreciate the possibilities of multiple *realities*. Triangulation remained important, to ensure that the case study rendered the participants’ perspective accurately (Yin, 2014:123).

The study’s theoretical orientation guided the case study analysis, suggested by Yin (2014:136). The strategy is based on theoretical propositions, working data from the ground up, using descriptive frameworks and checking on rival explanations (Yin, 2014:123) all triangulating on the same set of research questions.
2.2.5 Reporting case studies (Section E of protocol)

This section discusses the specific compositional structures of this specific case study. Preference of the potential audience dictates the form of this multiple case study report. This composition phase is seen as an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the enhancement of the quality of assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

The potential case study audience is, therefore, academic colleagues and the relationship between the case study, its findings and previous theory or research is likely to be foremost. This study is also part of my Ph.D. thesis and, therefore, the thesis committee is another audience, making the mastery of methodology and theoretical issues as well as an indication of the care with which the research was conducted important (Yin, 2014:180).

This multiple method case studies purpose is mainly exploratory and explanatory and has, therefore, the following compositional structure:

- **Linear-analytic**: The sequence of the sub-topics begins with the problem being studied and a review of the relevant prior literature. The subtopics proceed to detail the methods, the data collected, data analysis and the findings, ending with the conclusions and their implications for the original issue or problem investigated.

- **Chronological**: This multiple case study follows the assessment trends of the past 30 years and case study evidence is, therefore, presented in chronological order. The sequence of the sections progress through the early (traditional outcomes-based assessment, middle (transitional outcomes-based assessment) and late phases (transformational outcomes-based assessment) of a case.

The full multiple-case report comprise the individual cases (faculties), presented as separate sections in the next chapter. In addition to these individual cases, the full report contains an additional section covering the cross-case analysis and results.

As research method, the case study provides insight into NWU (Potchefstroom campus) and its assessment practices. The last chapter of this study, based on the results of the case study, thus contributes towards new knowledge.
2.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS, CREDIBILITY, CONFORMABILITY AND DATA DEPENDABILITY

Trustworthiness, credibility, conformability and data dependability of the case study research design were achieved through the procedures and principles suggested by Yin (2014:45-46).

The aim in research is to produce high-quality analyses, which requires attending to all the evidence collected; displaying and presenting the evidence apart from any interpretation; and considering alternative interpretations (Yin, 2014:123). The methodological approach of this research is inductive, generating theory and not testing theory. This study’s findings are confined to a single domain and any generalisation only pertains to the assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). External validity is increased by means of replication logic in multiple case studies related to the eight faculties. This case study is only generalisable to theoretical propositions, not to populations or universes (Yin, 2014:21), and does not represent a “unit of analysis”.

The goal of this study is to expand and generalise theories, not to extrapolate probabilities. According to Yin (2014:40), theoretical propositions play a critical role in aiding the researcher to generalise the lessons learned from the study. The research questions, which favour explanatory case study research design, are made up of “how” and “why” questions (and collecting additional data) that aids the quest for generalisations – i.e. striving for external validity (Yin, 2014:48).

This process already starts in the research design phase with the identification and establishing of appropriate theory and theoretical propositions. Documenting the procedures followed for the first case and repeating the process for each case minimised the errors and bias in the study and increased its reliability (Yin, 2014:48). This was achieved by means of a study protocol and developing a case study database. Further strategies to increase the quality of the research design are described in greater detail in the data-collection, data-analysis and compositional phases of this study.

The question of reliability was addressed by making as many steps as operational as possible and conducting the research as though someone was looking over my shoulder. My reporting and discussions with my study leader became a kind of peer enquiry, in which my previous analyses and future strategies were reviewed. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:329) are of the view that “such a discussion makes more explicit the tacit knowledge that the inquirer has acquired.

The peer debriefer also poses searching questions to help the researcher understand his or her own posture and its role in the inquiry”. This was indeed my experience.
2.7 Ethical Aspects

Following the case study protocol and avoiding bias I strove to be open to contrary evidence and tested my tolerance for contrary findings by reporting preliminary findings to my promoter and critical colleagues. These colleagues offered alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection and analysis. I sought to uphold the highest of ethical standards while conducting the research by accepting the responsibility to scholarship by refraining from plagiarising or falsifying information and avoiding deception.

I valued honesty and accepted responsibility for my own work by maintaining a strong professional competence that includes keeping up with related research, ensuring accuracy, striving for credibility as well as understanding and divulging the needed methodological qualifiers and limitations to the work.

Le Grange (2001:93) explains that interpretive research describes renditions of human action, intention and experience as they actually occur and not as research objects. This makes ethical considerations an absolute necessity.

Van der Walt (2008:165) defines ethics as “convictions of what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable and good or bad”. My position as lecturer and employee of the NWU could be both good and bad for the validity and reliability of the research. As Gay et.al, (2006:77) warn, “the closeness between participants and the researcher helps to provide deep and rich data, but it also creates unconscious influences that raise issues for objectivity and data interpretation”.

I naturally have my own perspectives, which influenced my analysis of the data and events observed, heard and experienced. The remedial mechanism to counteract this aspect was my intense consciousness of the need to preserve the credibility of my interpretations and the respect I have for all the role players in the research. This sentiment was especially anchored in the following statement by Gay et al. (2006:77): “Respect and concern for your own integrity and for your participants’ dignity and welfare are the bottom line of ethical research.”

The following steps were taken to meet the ethical requirements:

- Permission was obtained from the NWU to conduct the research. The research forms part of the NWU’s assessment project and the researcher was approached to assist in this project.

- A letter clearly indicating that participation is voluntary and that all responses would be private and confidential accompanied the questionnaire distributed to the faculties.

- The goal of the research was explained to the participants.
• It was agreed with the NWU that the findings of the research would be made readily available.

• Care was taken to guard against preconceptions and results were analysed and interpreted as objectively as possible.

• The identities of the participants and faculties were also kept confidential.

Finally, the analytical tools generally associated with qualitative research, viz. content analysis, are reviewed herein to show their appropriateness for analysing the data collected and produced for this study. Appropriate ethical and methodological challenges in the research process are addressed.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a justification for the methodological approach adopted in this research study, i.e. a case study approach, into the practices within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). The philosophical position that influenced this choice is explained and justified. This chapter described and explained the methodological choices made as part of investigating how lecturers understand and conduct assessment in a higher education curriculum context. Such methodological choices are also used to engage with theories that inform these assessment perspectives and practices.

The next chapter analyses the evolution of assessment over the past three decades in higher education, with specific reference to the transformation of assessment, in the form of a document analysis. I specifically explore the implications of the patterns of change characterising approaches to assessment, viz. the standards-based in contrast to student-centred assessment dualism. The assessment discourses, over the past three decades, are variously reviewed for a more nuanced understanding of assessment and to examine how these discourses might bear on assessment theory and practice.
Chapter 3: EVOLUTION OF ASSESSMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the evolution of assessment over the past three decades in higher education, with specific reference to the transformation of assessment, in the form of a document analysis. Furthermore, this study has drawn on a wide body of scholarship in relation to assessment in higher education over the past 30 years and is thus a literature review as well. Theoretical perspectives were explored and refined in order to design the fieldwork.

New developments and changes, Dreyer et al. (2010:3) argue, can be ascribed to both external and internal factors that shape higher education assessment. External pressure from changing employment conditions and the growing power of community and internal pressure from the increase in class size, revision of the curriculum and the need to improve student support have all led to a substantial shift in the nature of assessment practices.

Similar changes, Dreyer et al. (2010:3) indicate, also took place with the introduction of outcomes-based education in South Africa.

The areas targeted for change were the following:

- Student achievement that was reported in symbols and percentages and compared to that of other students (norm-referenced assessment)
- Assessment of a single characteristic, isolated knowledge or discrete skills (fragmentation)
- Assessment that views learning as the accumulation of independent facts and skills (content-based assessment)
- The once-off (high-stakes) test and examinations that dominated assessment (summative assessment)
- Lecturer-driven assessment, where assessment standards direct and guide the assessment process (standards-referenced assessment)

Integral to the development of prescriptive, detailed formats of outcomes-based assessment is a powerful professional and political rhetoric over “student-centredness” and “autonomy”. Individuality, personal development and autonomy are key tenets in liberal and humanist approaches to learning for the proponents of outcomes-based assessment:
...the outcomes model is based on the assumption that learning is a personal and individual experience and that to standardise it by adopting specific modes and time periods is not the most effective means for group to achieve a set of learning outcomes. Individuals need to manage their own learning experience in a manner which recognises where they start from, their preferred styles and modes of learning and the time and opportunities they have for learning... (Jessup, 1995:34)

The focus of outcomes-based assessment thus shifted from a system for accountability to the measuring of student learning. This shift may have occurred at different times for the countries following this education approach, but the impetus was the same: the increase in student population leading to the debate over standards or the quality of standards. It is also interesting to note that problems encountered up to the 1980s, from the techno-rationalist and positivistic perspective, were addressed by reconceptualising assessment standards with emphasis on validity and reliability.

3.2 FIRST DECADE OF ASSESSMENT: 1980-

3.2.1 Introduction – Rise of traditional outcomes-based education (OBE)

Higher education assessment was the focus of considerable criticism, throughout the world, in the 1980s. It is important to note that critics (and assessment researchers) come in many guises but at its simplest, a researcher with a positivist perspective – as evident in this decade - views assessment as a procedure that aims to be as objective as possible.

Techno-rationalism dominated assessment research in the USA and UK, Orr (2007:1) explains, in this decade. Techno-rationalist assessment researchers seek “perfect control” by aiming for explicitness and clarity. With this positive perspective in mind and before reviewing some of the critics, it is necessary to describe the background to the assessment developments in higher education of the 1980s.

Understanding the modern-day difficulties experienced with assessment in universities requires insight into the historical context of its development. Universities were elitist institutions, only a prospect for the intellectually and financially able. The rise of democracy and humanistic idealism in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe led to increasing involvement of governments in higher education. Growing prosperity after the Second World War enabled free tertiary education, which the increase in student numbers eventually made unaffordable and led to falling standards.
The increase in class size as a result of mass intakes changed the face of higher education and, according to Morgan et al. (2004:4), criticism about the quality of the higher education curriculum can be ascribed to *inter alia* higher education’s change from a system serving the elite to a system for the masses.

The number of students worldwide increased from 29 million in 1970 to more than 180 million to date, in which the rise in sub-Saharan Africa came to 10% per annum. Growth in student numbers leads to higher participation rates, i.e. the number of students as percentage of the 20-24 age groups. Prior to the Second World War this participation rate was less than 3% in Europe, while today it is 70% in Western Europe and in excess of 80% in America.

Universities in the USA and UK especially came under fire. The criticism can be ascribed to *inter alia* higher education’s change from a system serving the elite to a system for the masses, as was the case in the USA and UK, according to Morgan et al. (2004:4). Compared to the USA, where some 60% of the youth participates in higher education, the UK’s target participation ratio of 30% still seems elitist. Yet in the 1970s participation in the USA was approximately 12% and affordability and maintaining standards were at risk.

Allegations of falling standards arose, whereby critics contended that some universities offer courses lacking intellectual rigour and universities have been “dumbed down”. There was also concern about the deterioration in the calibre of students entering universities, claiming that “soft marking” had become common practices and the quality of education was generally being compromised.

Knight (1993:13) cites 25 reasons why results of summative assessment are not sufficiently valid for the range of purposes they are intended to serve and yet, the educational development community strongly advocate the central role that assessment can play in both the enhancement of teaching and learning as well as the assurance of quality.

South Africa’s difficulties in higher education are not unique. The growth and nature of the student population is considered, from a demographic perspective, as one of the most radical developments in the world. Student numbers have increased from 472 000 in 1993 to 1 202 000 in 2015, more than doubling the intake within 20 years, at a growth rate of 4,5% per annum and resulting in a student-lecturer ratio of 38 in 1994 to 55 in 2015.

Upholding standards has become a challenge with this increase in student numbers, naturally leading to larger classes, and together with the deteriorating relationship between lecturer and student has had an adverse effect on student learning. Interaction between lecturer and student as well as between students are inhibited and either the percentage of formative assessment is reduced or the quality or timelines of feedback. The research of Botha
(2002:361-371) reveals that education is *lecturer-driven and content-based* with a strong emphasis on transmission through lectures, the textbook and the examination that results in information overload for students and predominantly surface and strategic approaches.

In South Africa, according to Botha, Fourie and Geyser (2005:60-70), students often devise strategies to compensate for under-preparedness. They do not know where to focus or what to prioritise so they “spot”, rote learn, regurgitate and write down the content they have memorised and not what was asked. Students find this process tedious and opt out. Students who are overloaded with content, who do not see the relevance of what they are learning and whose experience has led them to believe they cannot do certain tasks will become demotivated and leave. This is the reason that 60% of first-year students fail and 55% leave the university after four or five years of study without a qualification.

Assessment reform is necessary to sharpen up university systems, quality assurance and control systems. In the 1980s, universities focused on input factors as a means of defining and protecting standards. Quality assurance in the 1980s occurred through the *measurement model* – a process that examines the aims, structure, inputs, processes, products, outputs and projected outcomes of higher education systems (programmes/institutions) and maintains, improves and enhances quality.

In relation to this, McMillan (1988:15) points out that a major challenge in assessment’s first decade was defining "quality". Instead of documenting excellence according to variables related to learning, lecturers worldwide assessed educational quality more directly by examining the nature of the knowledge and the degree to which students assimilated it.

All of the above features are, to a certain degree, consequential of the desire to enhance educational accountability. Confirming the emphasis of assessment for accountability purposes, King and Evans (1991:74) explain that the genesis of the traditional outcomes-based education was the proposed solution in the search for educational accountability and resulted in the rapid spread of various forms of outcomes-based education in countries such as the USA and the UK during the 1980s and 1990s.

Assessment in the 1980s served to ensure accountability, Banda (1993:375) indicates, whereby assessment scarcely attained its full potential and, as Astin (1993:xi) explains, did not address the practice needs of institutions that might have wished to improve the educational process through assessment. The purpose of assessment was to improve the education system, centred on quality-assurance systems and procedures in which the system was “uppermost”. Vroeijenstijn (1995:1) agrees and adds that assessment aimed at quality assurance, quality enhancement and quality improvement, on government demand.
In this heightened evaluative role of the government, the purpose of assessment shifted from systems maintenance to control over “strategic change”. The formulation of higher education learning outcomes was regulated by industry, conflating the higher education “industry” with industry generally and establishing in higher education institutions a correspondence between the mode of regulation of higher education institutions and the mode of regulation in the economy. Idealised ways in which correspondence might be established are illustrated in the demands of the Business Council of Australia for:

...a comprehensive system of performance and accountability measures giving valid and reliable assessments if student and lecturer performance accompanied by a rigorous system of accountability for performance targets based upon a clear set of educational objectives for the systems themselves and for the nation. (Loton, 1991:15)

This development reflects, according to Stenhouse (1975:83), the growing interest in predefined learning outcomes and specifications of assessment criteria, as the basis for modular and more public assessment procedures. Ecclestone (1999:29) agrees, pointing out that the learning outcomes produced by universities in this decade are similar to those in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives (1956) and Mager’s Behavioural Objectives (1962).

Ecclestone (1999:29) asserts that the trends towards more prescriptive formats of outcomes-based education in higher education in the UK and Australia were integral to proposals by the Dearing Committee to create national degree standards and a new system for external examiners.

Change in employment conditions also led to a substantial shift in the nature of assessment. It is not possible briefly summarise the precise manner in which global economic tendencies impacted on higher education, but suffice it so say that as Western economics moved to position themselves in terms of improved international competitiveness, higher education and skills formation surfaced as major features of this process of structural readjustment (Ilon, 1994:96).

According to Knight, (1993:13) higher education in the USA was wholly condemned in the early 1980’s by the business sector, through infamous statements in documents such as Nation at Risk. Knight (1993:13) refers to the numerous national reports questioning the “integrity in the curriculum”, describing the USA as a “nation at risk” and urging higher education “to reclaim a legacy”.

Smyth and Dow (2006:292) point out that there were a number of broad contemporary trends in Western countries that frame the worldwide infatuation with outcomes, e.g. a push for higher productivity through technological innovation. The role and function of higher education
underwent dramatic change in this decade in response to these economic imperatives (Smyth & Dow, 2006:292). These economic imperatives include: the control of higher education by gearing it towards economic aims, through greater emphasis on vocationalism, as well as changing the ideology and the discourse of higher education and through a restoration of the primary notions of human capital theory. Coupled with this was a worldwide move towards recentralising control over higher education through national curricula, testing, appraisal, policy formulation, profiling, auditing and the like, while giving the impression of decentralisation and handing control down locally.

The image of higher education was also revamped by reconfiguring the teaching profession to present lecturers as deliverers of knowledge, testers of learning and pedagogical technicians. In reality the work of teaching was increasingly being routinised and proletarianised, with lecturers subjected to the discourses as well as the practices of managerialism – tighter control by outsiders, better forms of accountability, more sophisticated surveillance of outcomes and greater reliance on measures of competence and performance (Smyth & Dow, 2006:293). The notion of a broad liberal higher education was struggling for its very survival in a context of instrumentalism. Higher education was blamed for the economic crisis, while at the same time held out as the means to economic salvation – if only a narrow, mechanistic view of higher education is embraced.

In the enhanced evaluative role of the state that accompanies these changes, the purpose of assessment shifts from systems maintenance to control over “strategic change”. Higher education, according to Neave (1988:8), was increasingly employed worldwide for the establishment of benchmarks “against which performance of particular areas of the national economy may be placed and the allocation of resources undertaken”.

As Neave (1988:9) puts it:

> Evaluation seeks to elicit how far goals have been met, not by testing the prior conditions but by ascertaining the extent to which overall targets have been reached through the evaluation of the 'product'.

The focus is not upon the linking of a product to objectives through resources, but rather on the assumption that targets are more likely to be reached if resource allocation is made subsequent to and dependent upon the degree to which an has fulfilled specified criteria Neave (1988:9). Neave (1988:10) says evaluation of this kind works through control of product not through control of process. This shift in evaluative focus away from input has three discernible effects:
• It moves away from issues of access, equity and social justice.

• There is a redefinition of the utility of higher education in the light of purposes framed in terms of “national priorities” construed in market terms.

• Public policy reaches down to institutional level so as to regulate responses.

These concerns were given a closer examination in Australia in government paper, prepared for the review that dealt specifically about teaching and learning issues. According to James (2006:1), no public statement was made of what standards of achievement or performance are accepted to be at the threshold or minimum for particular qualifications in the higher education community in this decade. If articulated academic standards are to be maintained, academics need to share a common understanding of standards.

This, according to Neave (1988:10), constitutes a substantial redefinition of higher education in terms of the perceived needs of the “market” and not of “individual demand”. In Australia, these broader economic and policy tendencies are manifested in outcomes-oriented assessment and curriculum development that has been increasingly central to the development of a national curriculum framework since the late 1980s.

Miller (1979:11) makes the interesting point that universities exist because governments need them to achieve their socio-economic goals – so one of the purposes of higher education must be “to meet the needs of government and will be somewhat different according to the country or government”. This is not an uncontested purpose; many academics are resistant to intrusions on university autonomy. Higher education has traditionally enjoyed academic freedom and autonomy in determining the scope of its programmes and research agendas. However, increasingly there are calls for a more instrumentalist approach with a focus on employability, specific outcomes and competence, and greater accountability (Miller, 1979:11).

3.2.2 Teaching and learning

3.2.2.1 Curriculum as product

In the 1960’s and 1970’s the nature and the structure of the curriculum – curriculum as content – dominated the thinking in universities around the world and particularly in the UK (Priestley & Humes, 2010:347).

This content-based curriculum is structured around “disciplines” or “subjects”. Being educated, according to this model, requires initiation into the various forms of knowledge, each of which has its own central organising concepts and characteristic methods of investigation developed over time. Content-driven approaches to curriculum planning are criticised on several grounds,
the first of which is selection. It is clearly not possible to teach the whole corpus of human knowledge, so selection has to be made. In multi-cultural societies, like South Africa and Australia (James, 2006), any attempt to teach from a dominant cultural system will raise questions of alienation and relevance.

It has been well documented that curricula based on the selection of content tend to encourage the didactic teaching and passive study of fragmented and decontextualised facts (Priestley & Humes, 2010:347).

While the content-based approaches, according to Bellis (2001:184), dominated up to the 1950’s, the 1960s and 1970s saw a much greater emphasis on the product of learning. Performance-based assessment and competency-based education was instituted in the USA towards the end of the 1960s (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:8), mainly in response to complaints raised by the industrial sector about the insufficient preparation of students for industry and life after graduation.

Pickford and Brown (2006:xvii) go on to explain that in the past universities were principally concerned with teaching and assessing high-level content, focusing on skill only in a relatively limited range of vocational and professional courses. Advocates of competency-based education averred that this approach would focus on the integration of outcomes, objectives, teaching experiences and assessment instruments.

This model was considerably influenced by the behaviourist schools of psychology and the movement towards “behavioural-stated” learning objectives. In the UK objectives were initially utilised in schools and later became a fundamental part of competency-based education.

Competency-based education, according to Priestley and Humes (2010:347), is a strong behaviourist objectives model, where the curriculum states specific outcomes and assessment criteria designed for assessment purposes.

The approach was further bolstered by business learning environments adding the often called “more practical approach”. This strong movement, particular in education, towards competency-based education focuses on the “destination”, “the product”, “the result” of learning Bellis (2001:184). Assessing the “product” or the “result” of learning is called assessment of learning or summative assessment.
3.2.3 The nature of lecturers’ assessment practices

3.2.3.1 Summative assessment versus formative assessment

Nair and Pillay (2006:304; SAQA, 2005:6) indicate that in the 1980s assessment of learning (summative assessment) dominated assessment practices across the globe. Beets, Reddy, Le Grange and Lundie (2015:21) define summative assessment as assessment that takes place at the end of the learning experience, usually in the form of one main test or examination that is written at the end of the semester or year.

The aim of the examination is to determine students’ degree of knowledge of the content. Davidson and McKensie (2009:2) point out that summative assessment relates to the syllabus-driven or content-based approach, in which the content is both the starting and end point.

3.2.3.2 Content-based assessment versus performance-based assessment

According to Beets et al. (2015:21) traditional teaching practice focus largely on developing a student’s memory capacity and ability to recall information. Judgements are made about what students know at the end of the semester or year in order to decide whether they can be promoted to the next grade or year. In such systems, the end product is assessed and is almost always constituted by the recall of information. Since mastery of content is uppermost, intellectual demands are basically limited to memory and comprehension of the cognitive levels, leaving little opportunity for the development of students' higher-order skills (Davidson & McKensie, 2009:2).

Beets et al. (2015:21) agree and argue that these assessment or types of assessments are not concerned with the students’ other skills or level of competence. Moreover, the traditional examinations and class tests are chiefly concerned with assessing lower order abilities in the cognitive domain. The cognitive domain deals with recall or recognition of knowledge (lower-order ability) and the development of thinking and problem-solving skills.

The intellectual demands of this type of assessment confine students to merely assimilating content somehow and then reproducing it in pen-and-paper examinations, Huysamen (2002:84) points out, rendering them unable to demonstrate the desired skills in practice.

Dreyer et al. (2010:110) take this argument in terms of content to the next level and argues that traditional outcomes-based assessment focusses on propositional knowledge rather than procedural knowledge and often uses a limited range of methods, particular the essay, intent on disciplinary goals at the expense of more broadly stated outcomes. The assessment of content-based approaches is mostly quantitative and norm-referenced (Beets et al., 2015:21).
3.2.3.3 **Norm-referenced assessment versus criterion-referenced assessment**

Norm-referenced assessment is probably the most traditional and most prevalent form of achievement assessment, in which students are compared to each other. Student performance is spread against the normal distribution curve, to award a certain value to that performance (Meyer et al., 2010:53). Hodnett (2001:5) adds that the aim of this kind of assessment is for learners’ scores to be “normal” against an average or median, within a predetermined range. Marks are awarded to a student relative to his/her place in a group, measuring relative rank and not growth. Promoting learning is not the primary objective.

Aside from the fact that learning is not the primary objective, as Hodnett (2001:179) states, norm-referenced assessment is in actual fact devastating to many students. Weaker students quickly realise that they achieve bad results regardless of the quality of their work. Students who are continually labelled inadequate and never experience success eventually refuse to make any kind of effort, stunting their growth. Gifted students realise proficient test-writing skills achieve good results and many of these students discover that little effort is required to maintain their relative rank in the class.

Techno-rationalist assessment lecturers aim for explicitness and clarity, Orr (2007:645) explains. Dominated by a techno-rationalist perspective, the qualitative assessment approach is seen as threatening the accuracy and reliability of assessment. Emphasis on measurement and norm-referenced assessment form part of various strategies to safeguard its effects, since marks and percentages are “justifiable” and transparency is achieved.

3.2.3.4 **Standards-based assessment versus student-centred assessment**

A “standard”, according to Beets et al. (2015:21), is something that is fixed and against which performance is measured. Referring to standards-based assessment, Beets et al. (2015:21) point out that the ways of knowing and the extent to which students understand and have meaning of the knowledge are linked to assessment.

Killen (2005:142) considers standards-referenced assessment as an integral part of the curriculum, whereby learning outcomes and assessment standards serve as starting points for the development of learning programmes. The frame of reference or guidelines aid the lecturer in developing suitable teaching, learning and assessment strategies that correspond to the learning outcomes and assessment standards. The assessment standards direct and guide the assessment process, which Boud and Falchikov (2007:117) refer to as *lecturer-driven assessment*.
Lecturer-driven assessment teaches students how to comply with their lecturer’s expectations and standards through assessment practices. Although self-assessment is a student-centred activity, Boud and Falchikov (2007:119) indicate that this involvement of the student can also be standards-based in terms of lecturer-driven self-assessment. Instead of students judging their learning in reference to the requisite standards of the programme of study, the lecturer acts as the sole benchmark for students’ judgements of their learning and does not refer to the above standards upon judging students’ self-assessment outcomes. Consequently, students may focus only on the lecturer’s expectations, not the expected standards of the programme of study.

3.2.4 Traditional outcomes-based assessment contested

The objectives model has a long and somewhat controversial history, particularly in the USA. Many educationists have decried attempts to define the developmental process of education in the form of rigid and predefined outcomes. Stenhouse (1975:83) deems objectives-based curricula too narrow in focus, too lecturer-driven and insufficiently sensitive to the complexities of learning and the dynamics of the classroom. According to Hyland (1994:32), the four basic objections to the adoption of objectives are that:

- “these objectives can rarely be determined in advance;
- the emphasis on outcomes undervalues the importance of the learning process;
- not all learning outcomes are specifiable in behavioural terms; and
- learning may occur that is not being measured.”

Hyland (1994:32) further point out that the predefinition of objectives is said to deny the validity of the original experience students bring with them to the classroom, increase the difficulties involved in local curriculum planning and may assume that the norms of the present society are fixed. Predefining the educational experience potentially narrows the curriculum, shutting off possibilities for spontaneous learning opportunities that frequently crop up in all classrooms. The subsequent loss of collective learning separates students’ sense of individuality and perception of needs from opportunities to understand the social forces governing their environment. This results in “alienated relations within the wider social formation”, according to Edwards and Usher (1999:92), and individualised approaches to study and assessment obscure a sense of self as part of a social group of students learning together.

Ecclestone (1999:41) asserts that from this perspective, outcomes-based assessment mystifies the ways in which the realities of unequal power relations – between lecturers and
students and between students themselves – structure students’ experiences. An emphasis on summative assessment and lecturer-driven approaches not only fragments learning, but also isolates students from each other. Using assessment for accountability purposes in this way, Davidson and McKensie (2009:5) warn of the tendency of assessment policy and practice guidelines to emphasise summative assessment, through attention to procedures around assessments.

The risk of too much emphasis on rules, regulations, moderation and oversight is the compliance of lecturers with procedure at the expense of effectively determining whether or not students are progressing successfully towards attaining the skills, knowledge and attributes defined in the graduate profile. Staff and students may conclude that student learning is taking a back seat to quality-assurance processes, driven by institutional risk management and not quality.

3.2.5 Conclusion

This section explored the implications of the traditional outcomes-based education for assessment within the higher education curriculum in its first decade. It shows that the debate in this decade about outcomes-based assessment becomes technical, without an understanding of the complexities of universities or how academics view their diverse roles. If unchecked, there is a real danger that the uncritical acceptance of increasingly prescriptive, standardised outcomes will create cynical, instrumental attitudes to learning in lecturers and students alike and remove critical dimensions of student-centredness from higher education. The power of outcomes-based assessment to shape the wider of cultural and social purposes of learning is overlooked.

It is clear that the traditional outcomes-based assessment of this decade presents important and timely challenges to assessment practices in higher education and many of its supporters are genuinely concerned to create more open debate about outcomes, amongst a wider community of interest that has been traditionally the case in this decade.

Concerns about the quality of teaching and learning led towards more prescriptive formats of outcomes-based assessment in higher education, which is classified in this section as the traditional outcomes-based education. Potentially, traditional outcomes-based assessment can enhance students’ motivation and autonomy and have positive effects on curriculum development. However, if taken too far, it also endangers more critical, open-ended notions of student-centred learning.
3.3 SECOND DECADE OF ASSESSMENT: 1990-

3.3.1 Introduction: The rise of transitional outcomes-based assessment

Higher education institutions around the globe were confronted in the 1990s with a range of developments, such as new modes of teaching and learning, which necessitated curriculum revision and the improvement of student support. These developments that Dreyer et al. (2010:110) refer to as *internal pressure*, led all to a substantial shift in the nature of assessment. It is also interesting to note that this *external pressure*, e.g. criticism from industry or government (as seen in the first decade of assessment) tended to be counterproductive. Higher education’s response was to turn assessment into a tool to demonstrate accountability, leading to standards-based assessment. In contrast pressure from “the inside”, such as increase in class size and improvement of student support, tends to be more innovative and promotes a growing sophistication towards assessment leading towards integrated assessment or assessment for learning.

In the 1990s the realisation hit home that assessment is integral to and almost inseparable from teaching and learning, in that it determines approaches to learning (Knight, 1993:13). However, according to Dann (2002:28), it is ironic that the potential role and function formative assessment could play garnered great prominence in the late 1980s, because of fears associated with the emergence of a national prescribed outcomes and standards in the UK. The heightened involvement of industry or government in defining standards was viewed as a threat to higher education institutions’ autonomy.

Warnich (2008:30) distinguishes between the two decades as “traditional outcomes-based education” and “transitional outcomes-based education, with *transitional outcomes-based education* as the second and “redefining” phase preceding the *transformational phase*. He explains that the transitional model differentiates between development phases, progressively moving towards the *transformational model* as follows (Warnich, 2008:30):

- The first phase characterises content as a means to an end, viz. the mastery of learning outcomes. Only content considered essential and sufficient for mastery of the intended learning outcomes is identified, selected and arranged. The learning outcomes don’t exist in a vacuum, but are clearly embedded in applicable content.
- The second phase, typical of the 1990s, is a systematic shift towards applied integrated learning. The design of learning programmes also provides for the integration of learning outcomes, applicable to and across learning programmes. The integration of learning outcomes doesn’t only support the interrelated mastery of particular learning outcomes,
but also the demonstration of applied competencies within the exit-level outcomes. These higher-order skills serve as guidelines for the design of suitable teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

In the second decade, according to James (2006:6), the use of input factors as a measure or safeguard for standards was strongly challenged by contemporary trends in access, modes of delivery and modes of student participation. The selectivity of student admissions in Australia, for example, was a less significant factor in mass higher education systems that are actively seeking to attract broader student base and to recruit students regardless of prior educational advantage or disadvantage (James, 2006:6).

According to James (2006:1), up to the 2000s there was little sustained discussion and analysis of standards in Australia. As a result, knowledge on relative standards was non-existent and it was difficult to identify the processes by which standards were defined and monitored. Many of the issues of Australian higher education corresponded to those in developed nations. Countries such as the US experienced the same significant growth in student numbers as Australia during the 1980s and 1990s as well as a questioning of their standards. This criticism, according to James (2006:2), related especially to the increase of approximately 15% of international students.

Australia, according to James (2006:2), saw its higher education system expand throughout the 1990s and also the decline in public funding available to universities. It was indeed the rapid growth in international students and the requirement to prepare graduates for international careers that invited new thinking about the nature of academic standards in Australian universities. James (2006:2) explains that the expansion towards mass participation created public funding difficulties and universities in Australia faced a steady decline in public revenue allocations. At the same time, the Australian government expected universities to play a stronger role in national economic development and encouraged universities to be more entrepreneurial and seek alternative sources of revenue. While the Australian federal government was committed to market forms of arrangements, there were centralised tendencies, including interest in national mechanism for articulating and monitoring student outcomes (James, 2006:2).

These new ways of formulating student-learning outcomes included explicit precise learning outcomes that shift attention from traditional forms of course structures and teaching “inputs” to “what is actually learned”, enabling alternative ways of generating evidence to achieve the outcomes, instead of requiring attendance and timeserving. In turn, it focused attention on the most practical, efficient methods for individuals to demonstrate their achievement and was
unflatteringly contrasted with the implicit accusation of lecturers’ self-interest, undisclosed criteria and obfuscation of assessment decisions (Ecclestone, 1999:33).

Likewise, process-based measures (such as in Australia) for signifying standards were likely to become less appropriate as the pathways through which students achieve learning outcomes were widely deemed less significant than the learning outcomes themselves – the duration of the study, for instance, became significantly less important than it was once thought to be (James, 2006:6).

Under such circumstances, in which university entry pathways and the modes of student participation and engagement with learning resources diversify, student learning outcomes might provide the ultimate test and safeguard for standards. Standards are embodied in assessment practices and are outcomes-orientated, i.e. standards are more closely associated with the nature and levels of learning than students demonstrate during their university studies (James, 2006:6).

This period reflected a growing sophistication in the way universities tackled assessment as a quality approach, versus assessment as support for learning and ultimately to the attainment of learning (Knight, 1993:11). The approach measured quality and effectiveness in terms of student learning and also required a more flexible and innovative teaching method, in order to facilitate the relationship between assessment and learning.

Outcomes-based assessment, according to Ecclestone (1999:33), raises the spectre of grading and norm-referencing, where students rarely know the basis for their respective grades. It also attacks assessment which measures “academic” knowledge at the expense of a broad range of skills. Advocates of transitional outcomes-based assessment also argue that instead of lecturers deciding when and how assessment will occur, students can take more control over assessment by initiating formative and summative assessment when they have valid evidence of achievement to meet the criteria.

In the USA the change associated with an increased emphasis on standards arose from the assumption that new forms of testing that comprise of more challenging and authentic tasks would promote the achievement of higher-order skills. Resnick and Resnick (1992:59) confirm this assumption by stating that “…if we put debates, discussions, essays and problem solving into the system, students will make time practicing those activities”. Standards-based assessment should, therefore, be designed to raise standards, but through testing that embodies the key objectives of what the student is supposed to learn.

Transitional outcomes-based assessment in higher education was prescriptive in that it required lecturers to define as precisely as possible the scope and content of learning
outcomes and competencies, to involve other interested parties in defining these and then to be far more explicit and detailed about the criteria for assessment decisions than was previously the case. Such developments, together with more standardised systems for quality assurance, were a profound challenge to practices in higher education in this decade with its many vulnerable targets (Ecclestone, 1999:33).

3.3.2 Teaching and learning

3.3.2.1 Curriculum as a process

Transitional outcomes-based education views the learning and teaching process differently from the traditional outcomes-based curriculum, where knowledge is transferred intact from the lecturer to the student. Instead, according to the transitional outcomes-based education, knowledge is deemed as being constructed in the mind of the student. Each student brings his/her own prior knowledge and experiences to any learning situation. Students make sense of the new knowledge in the context of their own knowledge and then develop their original concept, as learning takes place. The process of learning is, therefore, just as important as the end product.

Priestley and Humes (2010:350) state that the above argument does not devalue the place of content (or indeed objectives) within a process model, citing as example: A process curriculum may place great emphasis on the selection and organisation of content (i.e. through traditionally recognised subjects). They define a process curriculum as fundamentally a curriculum based on democratic values, comprising a set of structured activities enabling students to “come into presence” as unique individuals. They identify the three fundamental rights of students, potentially served by a process curriculum, as: individual enhancement, inclusion and participation.

The form and direction of enquiry, according to Priestley and Humes (2010:350), have to be flexible and open-ended, rather than pre-determined, in order to maximise potential for growth and development and resulting in rather unpredictable outcomes. Process curricula are based on intrinsic principles and procedures, rather than on extrinsic objectives. They are typically predicated on the envisioned perception of an autonomous adult and a learning process (often dialogical, inquiry-based and experiential) that may serve as the route to achieving this state.

3.3.3 The nature of lecturers’ assessment practices

Knight (1993:13), who vigorously opposed the objectives model of the previous decade, points out that assessment, as integral component of student-centred teaching, has the potential to
have a profound impact on courses, curricula and institutions. Reframing assessment to primarily support more efficient learning – i.e. developing the ability to use useful and timely feedback in order to understand and recognise quality, with the aim of improving performance and fostering self-regulation – will open up possibilities for lecturers to develop a better understanding of students' learning and to reflect on the effectiveness of the teaching practice involved. This leads to a reconceptualising of conventional assessment practices, to suit contemporary modes of learning.

Mothata, Van Niekerk and Mays (2005:87) explain that a change to transitional outcomes-based education impacts deeply on conventional assessment practices, in regard to which they summarised a number of ways in which the transition to outcomes-based assessment engenders change in the following dichotomy between “conventional” versus “outcomes-based” practices:

**Table 3.1: Dichotomy between “conventional” versus “outcomes-based” practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONVENTIONAL ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of a single characteristic: isolated knowledge or discrete skills</td>
<td>Multi-dimensional assessment: knowledge, abilities, thought processes, meta-cognition and emotional factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural approach to learning and assessment; accumulation of independent facts and skills; assessment activity apart from learning; discrete, independent knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Cognitive approach to learning and teaching; application and use of knowledge, assessment integrated with learning and training; integrated and cross-disciplinary assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of assessment on retention of knowledge</td>
<td>Assessment covers a range of assessment criteria that includes skills, knowledge, comprehension, values and attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment by lecturers and external examiners who mark the work and calculate the final result in numeric form</td>
<td>Assessment includes lecturer assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment and leads to a descriptive statement of student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly individual assessment: Students are assessed individually, with a large degree of secrecy around testing</td>
<td>Assessment criteria discussed with students; group, peer and self-assessment; collaborative learning and products; collective skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONVENTIONAL ASSESSMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A largely predetermined curriculum structure, with a set assessment and accreditation system</td>
<td>Training programmes, teaching and assessment considered flexible and resources adaptable to clearly defined learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and assessment systems are aims in themselves</td>
<td>Assessment based on an early defined framework of performance outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative (norm-referenced); test-/exam-driven</td>
<td>Criterion-referenced assessment; continuous assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment determines learner knowledge through a test or example</td>
<td>Assessment/evaluation over time, including practical demonstration of learner knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent records</td>
<td>Achievement profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent assessments</td>
<td>Evidence over time, e.g. portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks reflect achievement</td>
<td>Demonstration reflects achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-based credits</td>
<td>Demonstration-based credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pen-and-paper testing; handbook-based knowledge, academic exercises and set criteria</td>
<td>Believable testing: use of knowledge in real life; meaningful contexts, explicit assessment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing and grading with each step; all mistakes included in a permanent record, as constant reminder of previous failure</td>
<td>Failures treated as unavoidable steps in students’ development, internalisation and demonstration of high-level competencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the previous decade of the traditional outcomes-based assessment approaches it was common to contrast the contemporary with the traditional (Ecclestone, 1999:33), typically distinguishing between formative and summative assessment - the latter being concerned with determining the extent to which a student has achieved curricular objectives.
3.3.3.1 Summative assessment versus formative assessment

A major issue emerging in this decade was the importance of defining relationships between approaches to student assessment in higher education, particularly in Australian higher education (James, 2006:1). When deeming assessment as the culmination of the teaching and learning process, Yorke (2003:479) cautions that the distinction between formative and summative assessment is far from sharp, since some assessments (e.g. in-course assignments) are deliberately designed to be simultaneously formative and summative – formative, because the student is expected to learn from the feedback provided and summative, because the mark awarded contributes to the overall grade at the end of the study unit. Summative assessments in relation to curricular components (e.g. the student passes or fails a module) can act formatively, should the student learn from them.

Beets (2007:64) supports the above observation and argues further that although many within higher education tend to separate summative and formative assessment, assessment is a single process and that formative and summative assessment are complementary components of this process. Formative assessment mainly provides the students with feedback focused on growth, progress and development. Feedback is aimed at indicating to the student how to proceed to the next level or how to solve a problem. The “feedback” of summative assessment is the measurement of the student’s progress at a given stage, usually upon completion of a unit, lesson or programme. Hodnett (2001:4) confirms that the complementary value of summative assessment definitely makes a real contribution to the student’s final results and as soon as the student has had the opportunity to learn, evidence of that learning realises in the form of a summative measurement like an examination, unit test, assignment, demonstration, etc. The final results should indeed primarily be based on all the summative measurements (Hodnett, 2001:4).

There are many reasons to assess learner performance, which include monitoring; diagnosing existent knowledge and barriers to learning; selection; guidance; support; certification; and progress. Keeves (1994:364) explains that assessment forms the basis of teaching decisions such as baseline and diagnostic decisions, formative decisions and summative decisions.

Diagnostic assessment of knowledge and skills, conducted prior to any form of instruction by the lecturer, provides evidence of the current status of learning of each student (Hodnett, 2001:3) and serves as guideline for the development of suitable teaching, learning and assessment strategies that will ensure maximum progress. Strategies for diagnostic assessment can either be formal or informal, in which the latter is unstructured and often accomplished through questions posed by the lecturer. The information obtained assists the
lecturer in determining the students’ entry levels – e.g. their knowledge related to a lesson topic. The alternative may be a formal diagnostic assessment, i.e. a scheduled and structured assessment, often a preliminary test (baseline assessment measuring the student’s prior knowledge). In support of the above, Louw (2003:22) indicates that effective assessment plays a vital role in diagnosing learning progress and problems of the individual student or the group or educational system as a whole.

The application of alternative assessment, as indicated by Stiggins (2005:326-328), requires academic staff to assess in a manner that will allow them to identify the kind of improvements needed and communicate this information to students (Davidson & McKensie, 2009:4-5). Students thereby also obtain the information necessary to guide and promote their own learning, to meet the intended outcomes. Stiggins (2005:326-328) characterises this approach as follows:

- Students are introduced to achievement expectations from the beginning of the learning process, to see and understand the scaffolding they will be climbing to reach those standards.

- Students partner with their lecturer to continuously monitor their current level of attainment, in relation to agreed-upon expectations, to enable them to set goals for the next stage of learning and thus play a role in managing their own progress.

- Students observe their own growth during the learning process, feel in control of their own success and believe that continued success is within reach with continued effort.

- The focus is placed on day-to-day progress, as students climb the curricular scaffolding leading up to learning outcomes and assessment standards.

- Student success does not hinge merely on lecturers’ processing of results or how efficiently data are managed, although these things can contribute to student success, but also rests on how and whether students apply those results.

- Effective implementation triggers an optimistic response to assessment results from students. It starts by providing students with a clear, learner-friendly version of the achievement target to be mastered, including models of strong and weak work. These examples reveal the expected final results to students.

- Lecturers provide students with continuous descriptive feedback. This consists not merely of grades or scores, but also of focused guidance specific to the learning targets.
• Students are taught to improve the quality of their work, one dimension at a time, and monitor their own improvement over time that they may close the gap between their current performance level and the desired performance level.

The above characteristics of formative assessment clearly reflect that assessment is integrated with teaching and learning. Beets (2007:69) explains that formative assessment occurs continuously and makes teaching, learning and assessment all part of the same process. This type of assessment can be conducted both formally and informally, Beets (2007:69) indicates, as explained below.

(a) **Informal formative assessment**

According to Brown and Glasner (1999:6), informal formative assessment is the daily monitoring of student performance and is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. It takes place in the course of events, but is not specifically stipulated in the curriculum design and includes instantaneous feedback during a learning activity as well as comments on drafts of portfolio items.

Contrary to Brown and Glasner’s (1999:6) suggestion that formative assessment is primarily characterised by being continuous, Yorke (2003:479) argues that there is no necessity that it be continuous: Formative assessment can be very occasional, yet still embody the essential supportiveness towards student learning.

(b) **Formal formative assessment**

Formal formative assessment is conducted according to a specific curricular assessment framework (Yorke, 2003:478), in a systematic and structured fashion, to determine students’ degree of progress in a module. Examples of formal assessment tasks include projects, oral presentations, demonstrations, performances, tests, examinations, practical demonstrations, etc.

Yorke (2003:480) as well as Torrance and Pryor (2001:616) identify two “ideal-typical approaches to formative assessment”, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive in practice: one “convergent”, the other “divergent”. These ideal types seem to be associated with lecturers’ differing views of learning and of the relationship of assessment to the process of intervening to support learning, which could be said to represent a continuum of possibilities for classroom lecturers. Convergent and divergent approaches are incorporated to create a model of classroom assessment as an intersubjective social process, situated in and accomplished by interaction between students and lecturers (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).
Convergent formative assessment tests whether students can fulfil pre-specified objectives, Torrance and Pryor (2001:616) explain, whereas divergent formative assessment tests students’ ability to succeed in more open-ended tasks. In convergent assessment it is important to determine if the student knows, understands or is capable of a predetermined concept. It is characterised by detailed planning and is generally accomplished by closed or pseudo-open questioning and tasks.

This kind of testing is important and inevitable, given the convergence of the curriculum and constrains on lecturers’ time. Here the interaction of the student with the curriculum is viewed from a curricular perspective. The theoretical origins of such an approach would appear, at least implicitly, to be behaviourist and derived from the mastery-learning models, involving assessment of the learner by the lecturer (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).

Fulfilling the key purpose of higher education of facilitating the autonomy of students in a world of life-long learning necessitates that assessment contains a significant proportion of divergence, according to Torrance and Pryor (2001:616).

Divergent assessment centres on discovering the student’s knowledge, comprehension and capability, rather than the intentions of the lecturer. It is characterised by less-detailed planning, where open questioning and tasks are more relevant. Torrance and Pryor's (2001:628) further investigation of divergent approaches reflects divergent assessment as potentially more powerful in fostering the social and intellectual conditions in the classroom that would lead to enhanced learning.

Divergent assessment entails adopting a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development. Wood (1987:242) captures the essence of formative assessment in his discussion on a student’s “maximum performance” in light of Vygotsky’s (1978) “zone of proximal development” (which — broadly stated — is the region between the students existing problem-solving ability and the ability to solve more complex problems given guidance and support from the lecturer), by proposing active collaboration between the lecturer and the student to produce a best performance.

Assessment is thereby jointly accomplished by the lecturer and the student geared towards future development, rather than measurement of past or current achievement. Torrance and Pryor (2001:628) employ divergent assessment as a heuristic device to explore and expand the boundaries of classroom practice.
### Table 3.2: Convergent assessment versus Divergent assessment

*(Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONVERGENT ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>DIVERGENT ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment aimed at discovering if the student knows, understand or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.</td>
<td>Assessment aimed at discovering what the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Practical implications

This is characterised by:

- a. precise planning and an intention to adhere to it;
- b. tick lists and can-do statements;
- c. an analysis of the interaction of the student and the curriculum from the perspective of the curriculum;
- d. closed or pseudo-open questioning and tasks;
- e. a focus on contrasting errors, with correct response metacognition;
- f. judgemental or quantitative evaluation; and
- g. involvement of student as recipient of assessment.

#### Theoretical implications

This is characterised by:

- a. a behaviourist view of learning;
- b. an intention to teach or assess the next predetermined thing in a linear progression; and
- c. a view of assessment as accomplished by the lecturer.

This view of assessment centres on repeated summative assessment or continuous assessment.

### Practical implications

This is characterised by:

- a. flexible planning which incorporates alternatives;
- b. open forms of recoding (narrative, quotations, etc.);
- c. an analysis of the interaction of the student and curriculum from the perspective of the student and curriculum;
- d. open questioning and tasks;
- e. a focus on miscues – aspects of students work yielding insight into their current understanding;
- f. prompting descriptive, not purely judgemental evaluation; and
- g. involvement of student as initiator and recipient of assessment.

### Theoretical implications

This is characterised by:

- a. a socio-constructivist view of learning;
- b. an intention to teach in the zone of proximal development; and
- c. a view of assessment as accomplished jointly by the lecturer and the student.

This view of assessment is more closely related to contemporary theories of learning and accepts the complexity of formative assessment.
Torrance and Pryor (2001:628) consider the initial starting point for the development of effective formative assessment as the development of pedagogical self-awareness. This entails recognising and being cautious about cueing “right answers” through routine, taken-for-granted lecturer-student interaction. Both convergent and divergent assessments prove to be illuminating and provocative abstractions, which aid conceptualisation of the approaches to formative classroom assessment.

The understanding that a range of assessment strategies and practices can be developed and employed is important for a sense of security in further explorations – refuting the notion that a completely new approach is required.

3.3.3.2 **Content-based assessment versus performance-based assessment**

In the 1990s education moved increasingly toward teaching life and practised skills (Costley, 2007:2). Developing the knowledge and skills to function productively in the workplace necessitated high-level content to be practically oriented. Work-integrated learning, as constructed at many universities, particularly in the UK and USA can be ascribed to the shift from elite to a mass model of higher education (Costley, 2007:2-3). It was a move towards more knowledge-based or innovative economies and as addressing an age of super complexity.

The highly contextualised nature of work-integrated learning became an area where assessment and evaluation posed particular challenges to lecturers in the devising of mechanisms that are appropriate across a wide range of circumstances (Costley, 2007:2).

This kind of learning is a much newer development, arising from contemporary priorities, where work settings are being more consistently addressed by higher education, and involves the value of a university education for a wider section of the community and the linking of learning to a very close relationship with work (Costley, 2007:1).

3.3.3.3 **Norm-referenced assessment versus criterion-referenced assessment**

Criterion-referenced assessments are interpreted by comparing the assessment results with one or more external variables (called criteria), considered to provide a direct measure of the behaviour or characteristics in question and such comparisons are usually made by calculating correlations or regressions. Criterion-referenced assessment is a useful concept, Killen (2003:8) explains, in situations where a standardised assessment task is repeated with
different groups of subjects, after its correlation with a direct measure has been established and has proved to play a powerful role in the promotion of teaching and learning.

Not only is criterion-referenced assessment more reasonable than norm-referenced assessment, according to the NCREL (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory) (2006:9), but it also leads to better results. Brown, Race and Smith (1997:3) find that when students are given or negotiate the criteria, by which they are to be assessed, they tend to achieve the required outcomes more effectively and they also tend to achieve better results. Overt criteria tend to improve the overall marks of a cohort of students.

Criterion-referenced assessment is the ideal and yet, it may be quite startling to markers to find that the overall standards of achievement are higher for norm-referenced students. Criterion-based assessment is, however, considered the fair choice when promoting a competence-based programme of assessment.

Louw (2003:24) also confirms that criterion-referenced assessment supports teaching and learning and renders better results than traditional assessment. Journals, projects, self-assessment, oral presentations and written examples are all examples of assessment techniques that could offer the student a fair opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills.

Louw (2003:24) explains this as follows:

Alternative assessment can also help lecturers further to understand what students are learning and know when to adjust their teaching.

Students are assessed holistically on their knowledge and their ability to apply it in a project, to determine what they are doing right. Assessment is geared towards the criteria in a positive manner and also towards the student’s strong points, in other words what the student is capable of and not what the student is not capable of accomplishing (Louw, 2003:24).

Allen (2004:3) points out that the increasing use of criterion-based approaches was a consequence of its theoretical rationale and educational effectiveness, with the exception of innovations geared explicitly to content. Analysis showed the lack of a common definition of criterion-based approaches or their implications for practice, inhibiting a high-quality discourse, and these learning outcomes would, therefore, require innovative means of assessment.

Anderson (1998:13) cautions lecturers to move slowly and communicate the criteria and rationale behind alternative assessment practices carefully. Lecturers should listen to students, negotiate the criteria with them and ask for their feedback. Torrance and Pryor (2001:628) similarly encourage lecturers to tread carefully and advise against a rush to judgement, making interventions in the form of feedback related to the criteria. The feedback should clearly identify
the extent to which the task has been completed and the extent to which and the ways in which its quality could be improved, which would be further enhanced if students are provided with the opportunity to enter into dialogue and make their own judgements. Clarity is then achieved not so much through prescription as through dialogue (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:628).

According to Torrance and Pryor (2001:628), communicating the quality criteria to students is crucial. The criteria need to be discussed at the beginning of a task, but a continuing dialogue with groups and individuals is also necessary as tasks are pursued and various forms of drafting take place. Specifying the assessment criteria enhances the student’s understanding of the assessment task.

Yorke (2003:484) explains that the student interprets and responds to the assessment task, according to his/her level of intellectual development, bearing the assessment criteria in mind. The lecturer then assesses (interprets) the student’s performance against the specified criteria and provides feedback by means of grades and/or commentary. At this point, there is potential for dialogue between student and lecturer. How the student interprets the assessment, together with his/her psychological state and disposition regarding subsequent action are key influences on learning, according to Laurillard (1993:102).

Communication between lecturers is vital to ensure that individual assessment items have face validity in the light of a degree of shared understanding on the meaning of the benchmark statements for a particular subject (Holroyd, 2000:47). Students should be encouraged to engage in this dialogue with each other as well as with the lecturer, in which a variety of questions (perceived by students as “helping” questions) serve to elicit understanding and guide progress. This is essential for communicating quality criteria and realising “scaffolding” in action. Particularly useful forms of such questioning are elicitions, which invite students to clarify and to reflect on their own thought process (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:628).

### 3.3.3.4 Standards-based assessment versus student-centred assessment

The transitional outcomes-based education system defines, focuses and organises all the instructional and credentialing components around clear demonstrations of learning that a system regards as essential for all of its students – not around the clock and calendar (Spady, 2005:4). It has clear purposes that reflect its philosophy.

This philosophy unequivocally emphasises “success for all students and faculty” and has no predefined limits on whom or how many students can be successful, nor on how much they can learn or how rapidly they can advance. The point of departure for teaching, learning and
assessment is the student and not the curriculum, Spady (2005:4) explains, leading to a student-centred learning approach.

Cretchley and Castle (2001:487) add that this student-centred learning approach means that the lecturer and student determine the learning outcomes; teaching and assessment strategies; content; and learning pace of the student collectively; and that both the lecturer and the student are accountable. Practices are grounded in a humanistic approach that sees the student as autonomous, holistic being whose accumulated life experience provides the foundation for learning.

Learning outcomes are discerned through clearly observable demonstrations of learning, at the end or upon conclusion of a real set of learning experiences. Spady (2005:1) argues that these demonstrations or performances often reflect the key elements of:

- student's knowledge;
- what the student can actually do with that knowledge; and
- student's confidence and motivation during the demonstration (Spady, 2005:1).

Assessment is not an add-on to instruction, but rather an integral part of the instructional process and source of information to both lecturer and learner.

### 3.3.4 Transitional outcomes-based assessment contested

Outcomes appear to have become part of a naturalised and largely uncontested discourse (Allais, 2007:13). When such circumstances are viewed collectively – the narrowness of the highly specified fragmented learning outcomes and the fact that educational knowledge has its own structure and value – it is clear that outcomes-based education will not work. Using outcomes-based education to lead educational transformation leads to policy undermining the work of educational institutions as well as the building of specialised knowledge areas and practices.

Outcomes-based education may appear to emphasise delivery, but the very act of reducing knowledge and skills to practices that can be delivered against discrete performance statements undermines the essence of education (Allais, 2007:13).

Meyer et al. (2010:1) agree with Allais (2007:13), warning that although alternative assessment is perceived as variances of assessment formats and processes seeking to assist students realise learning to its full effect, it is not a panacea for successful learning. Moreover, the argument that process-oriented assessment should predominate over product-oriented assessment is a fallacy. Smyth and Dow (2006:293) also question this and its timing. They
then contextualise their claims by exploring the logic of justification behind the embrace of outcomes approaches and suggest that the wider agenda is encased within a move to technologise teaching and learning.

Finally, they posit a number of possible explanations as to why an outcomes orientation appeals to harried educational administrators, struggling to insert a degree of predictability and control in an age of “manufactured uncertainty” (Smyth & Dow, 2006:293).

Morrow (2001:105), in contrast, argues that educational knowledge can include systematised practices and skills which are tacit. Craft knowledge is often tacit (not written or spoken), but similarly requires sustained and systematic study and isn’t easily disaggregated either. Such knowledge is in some ways less suited to outcome statements than disciplinary knowledge, precisely because it is tacit and learning statements cannot be verbalised.

Practical knowledge or workplace knowledge of any kind can in fact not easily be reduced to transparent verbal specification. Making judgements against performance statements is notoriously tricky in workplaces, even when these apply to observable material items. The higher the level of professional competence of the workplace, the more difficult it is for anyone outside the particular area to make judgements about competence. Morrow (2001:105) explains as follows:

Practices are sustained or corrupted to a considerable degree by the ways in which participants and significant others interpret, think about, and discuss, them. But those interpretations, thoughts and discussions do not float freely above the ‘reality’ of practice, they are part of reality.

This research study indeed investigates whether these interpretations, thoughts and discussions are true of the NWU in South Africa.

3.4 THIRD DECADE AND CURRENT TRENDS OF ASSESSMENT: 2000 -

3.4.1 Introduction – Rise of transformational outcomes-based education

This section reviews the dominant view of assessment in its third decade and analyses the trends in assessment in question. The analysis, as indicated in the first and second decade, also attends to the rationale for these developments. Tracing the trends of assessment deals with “how” lecturers assess and “why” they do whatever they do? Finding an answer to the “why they do whatever they do” necessitates attention to the internal and external factors that
Chapter 3: Evolution of assessment

influenced the assessment practices as illustrated in the previous decades. It is interesting to note that during the first decade it was mainly *external pressures* from government and industry that had the greatest impact. In the second decade it was *internal pressures*, such as contemporary modes of delivery that caused a substantial shift in higher education assessment practices. Transitional outcomes-based education, characteristic of the 1990s, is contested in the third decade of its existence.

One of the assumptions underlying educational reform process is that students and lecturers will be both willing and able to adapt their teaching and assessment practices accordingly. Yet, there is considerable evidence to suggest the contrary, as indicated in Vandeyar (2005:461). Boud and Falchikov (2007:14) point out that the trend towards more centralised control has led to the reduction in the autonomy of lecturers and an attempt to fragment and standardised the educational product.

The distance of most lecturers and all students from the process of determination of goals and norms increases the likelihood of separation of educational means from end, conception from implementation, and fosters a deskill ed and *instrumentalist approach* to teaching and is largely understood in terms of facts, sequences, techniques and skills (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:14). Values, ethics and morals have little currency in this scenario. As a result, assessment and learning have not been sufficiently well located within the dominant discourse.

Views of assessment have become so marginalised that it led to a decline of student-centred assessment in higher education and Boud and Falchikov (2007:14) argue cogently for its reinstatement.

Transforming the higher education curriculum and more specifically (re)conceptualising assessment requires taking into account recent developments in Scotland. Priestley and Humes (2010:345) point out that Scotland’s new *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) has been widely acknowledged as the most significant educational development in a generation to transform teaching and learning. Although the CfE is restricted to the age range of 3-18, some think that this new development and theory of the CfE in Scotland can strengthen aspirations to transform and reconceptualise assessment within the higher education curriculum.

The CfE seeks to re-engage lecturers with processes of curriculum development, to place learning at the heart of the curriculum and to change engrained practices. The CfE provides a coordinated approach to curriculum reform, building on earlier reforms, taking account of anticipated future needs deriving from economic, technological and social changes. The new curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from central prescriptions
of curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of communities (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345).

The enactment of such a major policy innovation inevitably raises a series of questions relating to its translation from policy to social practice. While learning-enhancing forms of assessment have not been commonplace in higher education previously and may encounter resistance even today, it is necessary to discuss the socio-political practice of assessment in a historical and social context.

Since the 2000s, discussions about social justice and its implications in and for higher education have featured increasingly in education discourses in different global contexts. There could be several reasons for this trend, including the growing diversity of higher education’s populations such as in Australia (James, 2006:1) and South Africa (Beets & Van Louw, 2011:303).

The increasing documentation of achievement and economic gaps between mainstream and minority students as well as the proliferation of analysis of social injustice played out in universities, including the injustice that may arise from the current policy environment of high-stakes assessment and accountability, may be some of the other reasons for the current debate. These reasons relate to *internal pressures*, such as the need for student support, as well as to *external pressure* due to the growing power of the community.

In South Africa, issues of social justice in the higher education context started to surface more frequently, especially with the adoption of the post-apartheid Constitution, which embodies the constitutional imperative to remedy South Africa’s apartheid past and to transform society into one of respect for human dignity, freedom and equality. The difference between South Africa and the rest of the world is that the problems South African universities are now encountering, with the increase in student population and the associated criticism of standards, already occurred thirty years ago for the other countries.

Up to 1993, i.e. during apartheid, the growth and constitution of higher education in South Africa could be described as elitist. Smit (2015:15) indicates that in 1960 90% of the student population was white. This has since fallen with 17,5%, while the black student population has increased from 40% to 70%. Coloured students remain underrepresented at 6%.

Jacobsz (2003:2) states that various researchers (Bainbridge, 1996; Brill & Worth, 1997) view the transformation of educational institutions as inevitable because of changes on the political, economic, technological and societal scene. Bellis (2001:21) refers in this regard to the crisis in South Africa during the late 1980s. A forum was formed to discuss and find ways out of the chaos in education, which includes higher education and specifically, in “black education”. The
National Education Forum (NEF) was brought into being as a result of great pressure by the business community, of which the outcome was an *Educational Renewal Strategy*. This had much to do with administrative structure and very little to do with real and urgent problems in the broad system of education and training.

The strong reaction this move evoked fuelled the fires of determination to bring change. South Africa opted for transformational outcomes-based education, where it’s easy to overlook the power of transformational outcomes-based assessment to shape the wider cultural and social purposes of learning and the nature of “higher” learning in universities.

Researchers such as Smyth and Dow (2006:292) point out that transformational outcomes-based education has rapidly become a new educational orthodoxy and its rhetoric subject to sociological interrogation. The thinking is that the relevance of education to individuals’ lives as well as to the needs of society and the economy would be ensured by involving all stakeholders in the design of outcomes-based qualifications.

In this regard, Allais (2007:2) asserts that applying learning outcomes to drive curriculum reform seems to be a useful method of transforming the authoritarian curriculum, since it would provide the different stakeholders with an opportunity to provide input into the creation of the outcome statements making up the qualifications.

In sharp contrast, Scotland’s new *Curriculum for Excellence* moves away from central prescription of a curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of the community (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345). With reference to South Africa, there are contradictions in the selection of content.

Firstly, according to the HEQC, outcomes are to be the mechanisms that would enable academic freedom by allowing lecturers to “interpret the meaning of specified learning outcomes in their classrooms in contextually sensitive ways” (HEQC, 2003:18).

Secondly, in direct contrast, “SAQA is responsible for the development of content of the level descriptors for each level of the NQF in agreement with the three Quality councils: The Council of Higher Education, Umalusi and the Council for Trades and Occupations (SAQA, 2011:4). This view seemed to provide a justification for a traditional content-based curriculum structured around “disciplines” or “subjects”. Criticism of the curriculum as content has a long history, as addressed in the first decade of assessment.

Having discussed the curriculum briefly and how it is linked with the prevailing trends in teaching, learning and assessment over the past decades, I now turn to a third integrative approach – curriculum as *praxis*.
3.4.2 Teaching and learning

3.4.2.1 Curriculum as praxis

The process model of curriculum development creates tension between the desire to assess objectively through formal examinations and the informal critical developmental learning. Continuing concern over both these issues is also evident in the Scottish curricular documents of the 1980s and 1990s, as indicated in Priestley and Humes (2010:350).

They acknowledge the importance of curriculum as content, product and process, simply suggesting there are better starting points for curriculum planning like clear attention to educational purposes, principles of inquiry and processes of learning. According to them the three archetypes co-exist in considerable tension, simultaneously taking a view of knowledge as being something constructed by students on the one hand and being a prespecified, essentialist body of knowledge to be acquired and tested on the other hand.

Spady and Marshall (1991:68), in reference to curriculum as praxis, define transformational outcomes-based education as a collaborative, flexible, cross-disciplinary, outcomes-based, open system and empowerment-oriented approach to learning, geared at equipping learners with the knowledge, competency and orientation required for a successful life.

Bellis (2001:190) adds that if praxis becomes the basis of an educational or curriculum credo, it would inform and direct the identification and formulation of standards, outcomes and competencies. It would also inform the way learning opportunities and learning experiences are designed; the way teaching modes and activities are selected; and the way in which practice, feedback and assessment are constructed and administered.

A praxis approach contains “content” and “action” and “process”, with “reflection” in the context of the students – i.e. the linking of content, product and process through the qualities of praxis of action and reflection. In the context of a review of the curricula, the term “praxis” has the following key aspects:

- The main aspects (constitutive elements) of praxis are action and reflection.
- Praxis takes place in the real/natural, not the imaginary or hypothetical, world.
- This reality, in which praxis takes part, is a world of interaction: the social or cultural world.
- The world of praxis is the constructed, not the “natural”, world.
- Praxis assumes a process of meaning-making, but it is recognised that the meaning is socially constructed not absolute (Bellis, 2001:189).
Within the context of curriculum as praxis, transformational outcomes-based assessment is based on an implicit assumption that knowledge is undifferentiated – outcomes are seen as able to drive education, because educational knowledge does need to be the starting point. Outcomes can, therefore, be prescribed outside of educational institutions and separately from educational programmes.

3.4.3 The nature of lecturers’ assessment practices

3.4.3.1 Summative assessment versus formative assessment

The internal and external pressures on higher education, in this decade, are threatening the use of formative assessment (Dreyer et al., 2010:138). Yorke (2003:484) underscores this argument by saying that the pressures on higher education (which are differently salient across the world) threatening the use of formative assessment, include:

- an increased concern with attainment standards, leading to greater emphasis on the (summative) assessment of outcomes;
- escalating student/lecturer ratios, decreasing the attention given to individuals;
- curricular structures veering in the direction of greater unitisation, resulting in more frequent assessment of outcomes and less opportunity for formative feedback; and
- the demands placed on academic staff, in addition to teaching, which include the need to be seen as “research active”, the generation of funding, public service and intra-institutional administration.

Throughout its history, the outcomes of mass (high-stakes) assessment have been economic and social rewards for some, according to Filer (2000:43), but reduced access to educational opportunities for many. She also argues that the functions of assessment extend beyond grading, selection, accountability or learning. It plays a role in legitimising the reproduction of social and educational disparities.

Beets and Van Louw (2011:303) warn that the social justice implications become even more salient when one keeps in mind that assessment is inextricably intertwined with both teaching and learning. Students with different abilities participate in these processes, bringing different socio-cultural capital to the process and respond differently to the different lecturers with which they interact. This complexity tests notions of social justice when assessment policy is implemented and in the way assessment practices unfold in higher education institutions. A more thorough (re)conceptualisation is required that enables a simplistic view of the concept of assessment to promote learning.
(a) **Broader notions of formative assessment**

The broader notion of formative assessment seeks to (re)engage lecturers in the development of teaching and learning, wherein the starting point for the implementation of effective formative assessment is the development of pedagogical self-awareness for moving towards a theory of formative assessment in higher education and considering some of the implications for pedagogic practice. The purpose of formative assessment, according to Yorke (2003:478), in this context has the triple intention to:

- give credit for what has been done to the expected standard;
- correct what is wrong; and
- to encourage emancipation by alerting the student to possibilities which he or she may not have hitherto discerned.

Yorke (2003:478) points out that the skill that the lecturer brings to bear on the students work is a critical determinant of the capacity of formative assessment to be *emancipatory* in character.

Neo-Vygotskian social constructivist approaches to learning provide a basis for analysing assessment practices, which might embody "scaffolding", and thus hold the potential for making feedback more formative in a way that matches lecturers’ espoused intentions. The fine-grained description and analysis of classroom interaction, on which Torrance and Pryor (2001:616) base their argument, is the result of close attention to linguistic structures.

These perspectives are important in demonstrating that in suitable social contexts forms of language arise that depart from the usual patterns of classroom discourse. Torrance’s and Pryor’s (2001:616) research suggest that this creates greater opportunity for enhanced student learning. The effect of feedback on students’ motivation and goals is important.

The findings of Torrance and Pryor (2001:616) indicate that the effectiveness of formative classroom assessment, to aid students to improve their work, cannot be assumed and that there will be marked differences between students in the same class, dependent on their perceptions of the implicit social rules of the classroom and their orientation to achievement goals. Their research as a whole concluded that attention to the social construction and accomplishment of classroom assessment is a prerequisite for any systematic attempts to improve the quality of interaction and the positive impact of formative assessment on learning (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).

The essence of formative assessment is captured well by Yorke (2003:478) who, in discussing a student’s maximum performance in the light of Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development”
(which – broadly stated – is the region between a student’s existing problems-solving ability and the ability to solve more complex problems given guidance and support from a more skilled person), puts forward the idea that the lecturer and the student collaborate actively to produce a best performance.

The implications of the collaboration role of the lecturer are noted at various points in the third decade of assessment, where assessment becomes an act of collaboration. Formal formative assessments are typically – but not exclusively – undertaken by lecturers within a collaborating organisation.

It is therefore, important for lecturers to move from a teaching and learning culture of individualism to a culture of collaboration. There has been, according to Yorke (2003:480), through exemplifications and discussions, a deliberate intention to maximise the intersubjectivity of understanding amongst staff at universities in the UK regarding course demands.

From the perspective of students learning, according to Yorke 2003:480), a case can be made that feedback received is formative if (and only if) it has contributed to learning. This tautological expression diverts attention away from the important aspects that influenced learning. Validity can be claimed for both the lectured-centred and student-centred perspectives.

This is a mixed collection of considerations, which are difficult to bring together in a coherent way. The prevailing educational community may well favour constructivist over behaviourist formative assessment, but formative assessment can be undertaken perfectly well within a behaviourist framework (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).

It can be concluded in reference to the above models that important theoretical constructs – such as the lecturer knowledge of the students’ developmental stages and the epistemology of the subject discipline – are not represented in the models. A theory of formative assessment has to be much broader, according to Yorke (2003:486), with suggestions to include:

- the epistemological structure of the relevant subject discipline(s);
- the ontology of students;
- theoretical constructs relating to learning and assessment;
- the professional knowledge of the lecturer (which will subsume not only his/her disciplinary knowledge, but also his/her knowledge of student development at the generic and specific levels, and – further- knowledge of assessment methodology and of psychology of giving and receiving feedback); and
theory relating to communication and interpretation.

The theory of interpretation relates to a focus on inferences, rather than assessment items. This “redefinition” of assessment places the accountability for valid and reliable assessments squarely on the shoulders of the lecturer (Killen, 2003:4).

No longer can a lecturer claim an assessment task valid and reliable simply because it is linked to the curriculum content or because another individual has deemed it valid or because it produces results similar to those obtained from other assessment tasks. Instead, the lecturer must question the validity and reliability of the inferences made as a result of having used the assessment task.

The lecturer’s challenge is no longer to develop valid and reliable assessment tasks, but to develop assessment tasks that will generate evidence from which inferences can be drawn about the learning of all students. The distinction between these two views of validity and reliability is not a trivial one and high-quality assessment tasks are necessary, but not sufficient, for making valid and reliable inferences about student learning.

Student learning is always tentatively understood as moments resulting from pedagogical episodes of lecturers observing students’ performances and inferences drawn about learning become an art of assembling momentary or emerging performances in a classroom. The inference gives meaning to the outcome and, in a sense, tentatively defines the outcome.

Even if the lecturer may start his/her curriculum planning with nationally defined outcomes, representations of these outcomes in policy documents are paramount. Instead, outcomes gain significance through student performances that are often unplanned and that might occur at unexpected times (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:118).

Rhizomatic assessment dissolves inferences “by making them temporary, partial (and) invested” (Lather, 1994:46). Lecturers, therefore, self-reflexively engage the inferences they seek to draw, i.e. lecturers acknowledge they have an autobiography marked by the significations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, etc. (Usher, 1996:38) that impact on the work they perform – in this case drawing (temporary) inferences. Furthermore, lecturers might view inferences as networks of seemingly unrelated concepts or performances.

These networks are assemblages of un(planned) manifestations of learning, ideas arising in different places and at (un)expected times (Usher, 1996:38). Inferences become a “rhizomatic journey among intersections, modes and regionalisations through a multi-centred complexity (Lather, 1994:46).
According to Yorke (2003:494), the pedagogic practice relating to assessment can be enhanced by reflection. Heightening lecturers’ awareness of what they are in fact doing can contribute to their development as *reflective lecturers*, for example, working reflectively on the provision of more effective feedback to students lead to improvements in lecturers’ ability to grade work.

An awareness of the potential consequences of comments and commentaries could help formative assessment become more of a supportive act, through intervention bearing on the students’ cognition regarding the outcomes of his or her work.

In this context, it is also important to heighten students’ awareness of what they can do to the development as *reflective students*. Boud and Falchikov (2007:3) deem it a serious problem that assessment focusses little on the process of learning and how the student will learn in situations in which the lecturer and examinations are not present to focus their attention. As a result students do not develop their own repertoire of assessment-related practices, necessary to prepare them for their lives as citizens.

Assessment as learning is when the students reflect on and monitor their progress to inform their future learning goals.

**(c) Assessment as learning**

Beets et al. (2015:50) point out that assessment as learning requires that the students take an active role in their own learning and assessment, adding that the underpinning principle of self-assessment is that students are more responsible for and involved in their own learning. They understand the learning (curriculum) aims and objectives involved independently (without the help of the lecturer) is a complex process, which requires students to ask themselves metacognitive questions as they actively reflect on their progress.

Asking meta-cognitive questions means that students have the ability to reflectively ask questions about their own learning (their own cognitive development). This is a self-monitoring process that serves as motivation for learning. These questions initiate metacognitive processes like individual reflection and self-regulation, which are social in nature and basically a conversation with oneself (Beets et al., 2015:50).

Assessment as learning centres on the role of the student in assessment, mainly directed towards the acquiring of metacognitive and self-regulated skills – primarily the result of critical self-assessment (Meyer et al., 2010:96). Herein, Boud and Falchikov (2007:125) argue that the most critical need for students to meet their own future needs is their capacity to determine
their own learning needs and how they can go about meeting them, making self-assessment essential for lifelong learning.

This assessment approach differs from the conventional or exclusive knowledge-driven quantitative summative way of assessment, which mostly disregards the multiple intelligence potential of students. Assessment as learning intercepts the qualitative aspect of students’ problems and shortcomings. The lecturer’s feedback makes the student an active participant in the process, whereby the student learns to make judgements (by applying already obtained pre-knowledge and skills) and set goals for self-improvement. As with assessment for learning, it can include authentic performance assessment.

Dann (2002:142) points out that assessment as learning recognises that the student is central to learning and that processes of self-direction and understanding are fundamental to learning. She writes:

Whereas much research and discussions have linked formative assessment to ways in which lecturers have tried to inform their own practice so that students’ needs are more specifically met, there has been little or sustained analysis of the ways in which students participate in this process...students are often incorporated into the discussion on assessment as users of assessment information – through processes of feedback. There is little account taken of the ways in which assessment processes (rather than outcomes) influence learning processes.

Important insights emerge from Dann’s (2002:142) discussion on understanding assessment as a technology and yet Dann (2002:142) fails to take the debate far enough, because her discussion remains framed within an individualistic paradigm. Le Grange and Beets (2005a:1197-1207) raise two points of criticism:

- It is not only students’ participation in assessment processes that is crucial, but also
- what they bring to such processes, i.e. their prior knowledge informed by their socio-cultural backgrounds.

Assessment as learning that invokes notions such as self-assessment and self-direction may be blind to the centrality of learning in relationship to another and others’ role in learning. Lived experiences are based on communalism and assessment of/for/as learning should crucially be informed by the socio-cultural background of the student.
### 3.4.3.2 Content-based assessment versus performance-based assessment

Content- and product-driven approaches to curriculum planning have been criticised on several grounds. Selection of content is quite problematic, since it is clearly not possible to teach the whole corpus of human knowledge. Who is to make this selection?

Despite epistemological attempts to define essential knowledge or to select from essential culture, such decisions remain fundamentally political and ideological. From what is the selection to be made? In a multi-cultural society any attempt to teach from the perspective of a dominant cultural system will raise questions of alienation and relevance. It has been documented for many years how curricula based on the selection of content tend to encourage the didactic teaching and passive study of fragmented and decontextualised facts (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345).

**(a) Broader notions of content-based assessment**

An alternative approach, Priestley and Humes (2010:347) explain, to rationalising choice of content derives from the concern to ensure that the curriculum reflects the culture of society and suggest that cultural analysis is the starting point for curriculum, rather than the analysis of knowledge. Scotland’s new *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) explicitly moves away from central prescriptions of curriculum.

They consider it necessary to sub-divide culture in a way that is manageable, yet meaningful, to achieve and posit a set of nine culture invariants – categories or systems deemed to be universal to all societies – viz. socio-political, economic, communications, rationality, technology, morality, belief, aesthetic and maturation systems (Priestley & Humes, 2010:348).

The central ideas of CfE are described in terms of *values, purposes and principles* instead of aims and objectives. The CfE is regarded as a broad framework document, designed to form the basis of subsequent policy development, rather than an extended rationale. The emphasis is on the importance of engagement by lecturers, the centrality of learning and teaching and the unification of the curriculum.

The use of the first-person in these statements gives centre stage to the student and emphasise the importance of personal engagement. The statements are less prescriptive in terms of content, but in this proposed model the content should be deliberately selected and organised to meet the demands of the intrinsic purposes (Priestley & Humes, 2010:355). The selection of content is made from a wide range of planned experiences that include the environmental, scientific, technological, historical, social, economic, political mathematical and linguistic context (Priestley & Humes, 2010:355).
The avoidance of an account of curriculum in terms of content is not without significance and contrasts with earlier approaches to educational reform. Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of the impact of new technologies on the pace of knowledge production and dissemination as well as on changing global patterns of employment.

The South African higher education curriculum can benefit from these developments, which has the potential to transform teaching and learning in universities - specifically the re-engagement of lecturers with processes of curriculum development, to place learning at the heart of the curriculum and to change engrained assessment practices. Ignoring these lessons universities will run the risk of undermining the potential for real change.

3.4.3.3 Norm-referenced assessment versus criterion-referenced assessment

Rethinking assessment practices inevitably leads to realising the structural as well as human constrains that hinder more innovative assessment (Beets, 2007:577).

As noted in the second decade of assessment, the higher education development community has been advocating for the powerful leverage that assessment has on student learning and curriculum improvement. Central to this improvement agenda is the advocacy for criterion-referenced assessment, i.e. the assessment of student performance against clearly specified “measures” or statements of expectations.

The increasing use of criteria-based approaches to assessment and grading in higher education is a consequence of its sound theoretical rationale and its educational effectiveness (Sadler, 2005:175). The analysis shows that there is no common understanding of the concept of criteria-based or its implications for practice. Assessment criteria are believed to play an important role with respect to quality assurance and enhancement, assisting courses, programmes and institutions to measure the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved.

Thus, one finds in South Africa and other parts of the world, at every level of the policy, the requirement for assessment criteria to be more explicit. There is little evidence, according to Shay (2008:603), however that criteria improves student learning or strengthens the overall reliability of assessment. Some have even argued that the current trend of making assessment more explicit may have a deleterious effect on learning. In contrast, Sadler (2005:175) suggests that lecturers must translate their understanding of criteria into their own context.
**Broader notions of criterion-referenced assessment**

A growing concern within the higher education development community is that assessment may be failing to fulfil its promised role as catalyst for improving student learning. Shay (2008:603) refers to recent studies in the UK on the use of criterion-referenced assessment that found that the assessment criteria discourse has no anchoring in the disciplinary forms of knowledge constituting higher education curricula.

Shay (2008:603) argues that although lecturers benefit significantly from insights of assessment as a social practice, the centring of knowers and knowing has been at the expense at knowledge. She adds that assessment criteria are manifestations of an instructional discourse that is embedded in a particular regulative discourse of constructivism, which has eclipsed disciplinary knowledge (Shay, 2008:603).

Centring knowledge, to give it identity distinct from the knowers and knowing, will require a realist theory on knowledge. While criterion-referenced assessment says something about procedural or practical kinds of knowledge required for a task, it is silent about the discursive or propositional knowledge.

This explains why criteria are similar across two disciplines in procedural terms, according to Shay (2008:603). She proposes that while important epistemological gains have been made from social constructivist perspectives, knowledge itself has been taken for granted. She adopts a more critical realistic approach to knowledge and of (re)conceptualisation of assessment criteria in particular (Shay, 2008:603).

Drawing from constructivist theories of learning, the social constructivist strand problematises the conceptualisation of the “object” as non-social. Constructs of interest, according to Shay (2008:599), are embodied in social beings who themselves are in relation with and responding to other social beings.

Knowledge is not “out there”, it is constructed and thus better conceptualised as “knowing”. Furthermore, knowing is not an individual cognitive activity, it is social. The emphasis of the new assessment paradigm is on communal acts of constructing knowledge. It is the shift from non-social constructs to socially situated knowers and their acts of knowing. A view of knowledge as objective (though always socially mediated) might illuminate significant distinctions between forms of knowledge.
(b) **Broader notions of self-directed learning**

Higher education has many overt and covert goals, contested or taken for granted in various contexts, as well as unintended consequences (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:491). Cretchley and Castle (2001:491) show that under the banner of “andragogy”, education focuses largely on self-directed learning, the needs arising from the social roles of adults and human resources development. It relates to the relationship between the student and the learning milieu, rather than with social issues of redress or equity (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:491).

Cretchley and Castle (2001:492) see the need for an alternative model to learning and developed the andragogical model, according to a set of assumptions about learning that focuses more on the relationship between student and lecturer than on outcomes.

Since students are capable of taking charge of their own learning and can draw on the resources of their prior experience and their social environment, Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) assert, lecturers are unnecessary. They argue that the role of the lecturer is not to teach, but to facilitate a process of self-directed enquiry by making the resources of tutors, fellow learners and materials available to the student. The andragogic model proposes that the lecturer prepares in advance a set of procedures for engaging students (and other relevant parties) in a process, by:

- establishing a climate conducive to learning;
- creating a mechanism for mutual planning;
- diagnosing the needs for learning;
- formulating programme objectives (which is content) that will satisfy such needs;
- designing a pattern, techniques and materials;
- evaluating the learning outcomes; and
- rediagnosing learning needs (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:493).

It is interesting to note that from “diagnosing the needs for learning” onwards, the andragogical model follows the principle of designing the curriculum on the basis of desired outcomes. There is an unstated suggestion that the learning outcomes or objectives in the content model derive from the concepts and structures of the particular discipline, rather than from the student’s needs and interests (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:492).
Students find it important to know the purpose of subject matter and are only willing to learn when such content will fulfil a real need in their lives, as Cretchley and Castle (2001:492) indicate. Students tend to be task-centred or problem-centred, instead of subject-centred. They perceive themselves as self-directed, averse to being told what to do and as such more likely to be motivated by internal pressures, such as self-esteem, than by external pressures such as marks.

Lecturers also emphasise co-operative planning and including the student in all steps of the learning process. Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) advocate the use of learning contracts, which allow individuals or groups to tailor their learning needs; specify learning objectives, resources and strategies; specify evidence of accomplishments and how such evidence would be validated; review the contract with consultants; carry out the contract (revising, if necessary); and have their learning evaluated. This learning contract assumes critical self-awareness on the part of students as well as a high level of academic literacy.

It further assumes that a wide range of learning experiences and assessment options is available for students to choose from and that guidance is available - a situation virtually unknown in South Africa (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:493); the implication of which is that curricula should be constructed through negotiation with each group of students. Yet, attempts to empower students in this way have often led to muddle, frustration and the waste of resources.

Moving towards a system based more on how students learn than on how lecturers teach, Deblois (2005:307) explains, gives students greater choice and responsibility for their learning. This would entail lecturers providing students with a clearer concept of the requirements for a specific module and also to first clearly establish their expectations. Then they would have to structure their time in a way that allows students to make reasonable decisions about the method and sequence of their learning.

This is a broader view of standards and how students can demonstrate their mastery of them. It may require lecturers to focus more on the strengths students can demonstrate, than on skills that standardised tests show they have or have not “learned”. Such actions may unleash the motivation for learning, dormant in many students, while being subjected to a curriculum that is packaged and then unwrapped by lecturers.

It may also quite quickly reveal what students perceive as most relevant in the curriculum and methods of instruction. Pedagogy could focus much more on groups of students involved in different tasks or lessons, than on whole-class instruction. Reliance on textbooks and a predetermined sequence of presenting material could be exchanged for more freedom.
regarding the how and when of learning. Greater attention could be given to students failing to meet expectations in specific areas and advanced students might have the option of graduating early or undertaking projects in other learning environments.

Until the vicelike grip that binds all students is broken, however, the system’s failure to explore the role of time in learning will continue to claim its victims and the potential of students will remain unrealised. It is time to seriously consider change and it is not that great of a risk to break away from the current state of affairs (Deblois, 2005:307).

3.3.4 Summary

A discourse on assessment in an educational environment is inconceivable without a reconnaissance of that particular environment. In pursuance of this, this chapter aspires to provide an overview of what assessment purports to be and its adoption by the higher education system.

This chapter highlights the symbiosis between assessment reform and educational change, providing an overview of teaching and learning trends in order to conceptualise assessment within the changed outcomes-based paradigm. Reference is also made to the (re)conceptualisation of assessment, to enable compatibility with current trends of educational thinking and to support the outcomes-based education rationale.

Higher education is considered to be a matter of the development of human qualities and dispositions; of modes of being; as well as of knowledge, understanding and skills. It is asserted that standards are inherent in the fields and practices in which students engage and there is no escaping those standards or being judged according to them. The tension between the journey towards “increasing authenticity” and adherence to standards; and between increasing singularity and increasing collectively, is pointed out.

Recent innovations in assessment to improve learning explored the involvement of students in assessment, presenting an account of the role the individual student has in promoting learning through the development of skills to conduct and assess learning, cultivating self-direction and taking responsibility for learning.
**CHAPTER 4:**

**ASSESSMENT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM CONTEXT**

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 analyses the evolution of assessment in higher education, over the past three decades. Chapter 4 attends to the current assessment discourse within the South African higher education context.

The assessment discourse, as set out in the previous chapter, highlights how universities around the world have struggled with assessment the past 30 years. Major changes in higher education assessment have been most obvious and significant in countries with an outcomes-based education or related systems (Dreyer et al., 2010:3), as was the case with the introduction of outcomes-based education in South Africa.

Education policy after 1994 attempted to reconceptualise and restructure the South African higher education system in an attempt to reduce historical inequalities. Outcomes-based education in South Africa has also been facilitated by trends in education studies (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2008:6) and the complexity of assessment in higher education is not confined to South Africa, but is a global challenge. South Africa is experiencing issues similar to those Knight and York (2003:190) raise about the UK and Australia, viz.:

- the changing nature of the student body and its engagement with the learning process;
- the significance of assessment requirements, when establishing expectations and guiding student learning;
- the prominence given to the development of generic skills;
- the need for staff to find assessment methods that are time and cost effective as well as applicable to cohorts of increasing size and diversity;
- the emergence of new technological possibilities for assessment; and
- the threat of plagiarism.

Relating to the external pressure mentioned in the previous chapter universities in South Africa also came under considerable pressure to demonstrate to the outside world the quality of their services. Eloff (2013:3) writes that the world is rapidly changing and universities will have to adapt or die. South African universities are under fire and can no longer remain ivory towers.
The global wave of technology, rapid change and growing complexity are realities. The writing is on the wall, according to him, when universities cannot keep up with the changes around them. Universities in South Africa are at risk of engineering their own demise, if the fortified walls of these centuries-old institutions become impenetrable.

In relation to falling standards Jordaan (2013:5) refers to South Africa as the country of pancake men, with a “seriously ill” education system that prizes achievement so highly that it spreads students too thin to allow for the depth required to critically judge intellectual matters, including their own. Universities have become like factories that manufacture “products”. Students simply seek the security of a job and don’t want to or can’t pose the kinds of questions that provide perspective. Knowledge must achieve immediate results.

The demands of incorporating theory, practice, mentorship and work experience into preparing students for their professions have become too great for the lecturer to shoulder alone. Eloff (2013:5) indicates that lecturers are no longer the axis around which success in study revolves. Neither can students merely be considered customers and need to actively learn how to share responsibility for the success of their studies.

Despite academic resistance, a balance needs to be established between the demand of the private sector for more professionally prepared graduates and the equally important need for educational development of “learning to think”. Eloff (2013:5) finds it unrealistic to expect universities to produce thousands of “industry soldiers” every year and yet students also need to be prepared for the world out there.

There is a rising concern in South Africa over the deterioration in the capabilities of students entering universities and the sense that the quality of education has generally been compromised. Eloff (2013:3) reports that one of the biggest challenges South African universities face is the decreasing level of preparedness of high school graduates to undertake tertiary studies.

Universities endeavour to bridge this gap in the first year of study, by means of remedial classes and extended courses, but if the public school system doesn’t pull itself together soon, universities are facing another decade of mediocrity (or worse).

As Jansen (2013:2) indicates, higher education institutions in South Africa are under pressure to deliver mass education and training programmes for the poor. Blade Nzimande (cited in Johnson, 2013:4) confirmed this, with his statement on how certain historically “white” universities use the excuse of Afrikaans for not transforming: It’s something we need to address. We don’t have Afrikaans, Zulu or Xhosa universities, we have South African
universities...Our institutions need to reflect our multi-cultural society...I don't think we can afford it. All universities need to be accessible to everybody.

Blade Nzimande added that the NWU needs to be open to all races and languages, regarding which Johnson (2013:4) adds that Africa is also making the shift from an elite system to a system for the masses, as Morgan et al. (2004:4) mention was the case in the USA and UK during the first decade of outcomes-based assessment in the 1980s.

Such expansion is politically popular, but short-sighted and it would be of greater benefit to Africa to produce fewer graduates of a higher calibre. Johnson (2013:4) contends that academic freedom and tertiary autonomy are now more confined than they were under apartheid; that affirmative action stretches across admission requirements, to faculty appointments and to marketing; and that universities come under pressure to admit semi-literate students produced in their masses by a dysfunctional school system, resulting in the decline of standards.

Johnson (2013:4) finds it imperative that South Africa carefully guards the quality of its universities for the sake of the continent, but this is becoming increasingly difficult with the government's relentless insistence on expansion.

### 4.2 RISE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa’s National Qualifications Framework was given a strong transformation mandate. Transformation of the education and training system is primarily the responsibility of government and requires the commitment of many role players, as Mukora (2007:2) states. Given the historical context of South Africa, transformational outcomes-based education involves the unmasking of ideologies that maintain the status quo, by denying individuals and groups’ access to knowledge or awareness on the material conditions that oppress or restrict them (Usher, 1996:22).

Referring to South Africa's historical context, it is against this back ground of injustices of the country’s as past, subsequent education policy-making attempt to capture issues relating to the establishment of social justice in society and how education is to contribute through its practices towards establishing such a society.

A central higher educational question, in an extremely unequal society such as South Africa, is whether higher education, through core functions such as assessment, can make a significant contribution towards inculcating social justice. Importantly, transformational
outcomes-based education is also concerned with the actions that can be taken to rectify oppressive conditions, but has been challenged for positing its emancipator philosophy as a universal value. Usher (1996:22) points out that transformational outcomes-based education has its own power-knowledge nexus, which may operate in oppressive and repressive ways in particular historical contexts and instances.

In relation to rectifying oppressive conditions, Jansen (2013:2) argues that South African universities are tempted to enhance their performance only in those areas that can be measured by ranking indicators and rankings, encouraging institutions to focus on numerical comparisons and not on educating students.

He describes the ranking of universities as misplaced vanity, a handful of South African universities tend to get swallowed up in these rankings without understanding where and why they are ranked. Jansen (2013:2) also questions universities’ chief purposes, whereby universities produce lots of research in science journals that is cited by the university peers in Norway and Boston or that the knowledge produced through research in the school of engineering solved the problems of annual flooding in the squatter housing of Khayelitsha and KwaMashu or that applied research, through the school of education, actually made an impact on turning around disadvantaged schools in Orange farm or Zwelitsha.

According to Jansen (2013:2), those universities that teach large classes of students mainly from disadvantaged communities and succeed should be ranked very highly in terms of what is important in a place of higher learning anywhere, but especially in South Africa.

Politicians, policymakers and administrators often opt for the transformative outcomes-based education approach to educational reform, as was the case with South Africa’s new government in 1994. Turning to overseas models of integrated education and training systems, South African policymakers selected transformational outcomes-based education in response to economic and political imperatives to develop a more skilled and flexible workforce (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:487). Transformational outcomes-based education seemed to be the most attractive choice for South Africa, where rapid social change is demanded.

Social reconstructivism relates to this aspect of schooling, according to Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:6), where higher education in South Africa is regarded as needed to develop and improve society. The socio-cultural perspective, mentioned as a philosophical principle of outcomes-based education, aims to establish this new kind of society and, as Reynecke (2008:28) confirms, requires a radical change in existing structures and methods. Jansen (2013) proposes, to develop and improve South African society, seven new indicators to rank universities in South Africa:
• The extent to which a university advances social cohesion and inclusion within the student body
• The extent to which the university provides access and ensures success for first-generation university students
• The extent to which a university creates a sense of civic-mindedness and public duty in every graduate
• The extent to which a university invests in teaching and deeply transforms student thinking
• The extent to which the university is open to and supports students from countries in the SADC region
• The extent to which a university’s curriculum broadly educates students, before training them in specific fields

South Africa decided on transformational outcomes-based education, the most radical and complex of the three approaches, deeming the previous education system inadequate for the development of a new society and for meeting the long-term life needs of learners (Spady & Marshall, 1991:68).

The desire and need to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is one of the greatest challenges facing South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa is confronted with this and a range of other socio-political-economic priorities, as set out in the preamble to the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996).

• Healing the divisions of the past and creating a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights
• Raising the quality of life of all citizens and unlocking the potential of every person
• Laying the foundation for a democratic and open society in which the government is established according to the will of the people and each citizen is equal before the law
• Building a united and democratic South Africa that can take its rightful place as sovereign state among the community of nations

The contribution of education in South Africa toward realising the ideals of the preamble is articulated in the twelve critical outcomes that not only stipulate the aim of learning for students, but especially the kind of pedagogy that should reign in the classroom. The guidance and support the lecturer offers students, to achieve the module outcomes, should thus occur by means of educational practice founded on pedagogy that provides students with the opportunity to:
identify and solve problems as well as apply critical and creative thinking to make decisions;
work effectively with other members of a team, group, organisation and community;
arrange and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and efficiently;
gather, organise, analyse and critically evaluate information;
communicate productively by means of visual, symbolic and/or language skills in different forms;
effectively and critically use science and technology to the benefit of the environment and the health of others;
understand the world as a set of interrelated systems, in which problems are not resolved in isolation;
consider a range of strategies for investigating more effective learning;
participate as responsible citizen in local, national and international community life;
be sensitive to the cultural and aesthetic of different social contexts;
explore training and career opportunities; and
develop entrepreneurial enterprises.

These twelve critical outcomes have been formulated to indicate the competencies a student must successfully demonstrate in terms of the different levels (of the national qualifications framework) of the education system. Both learning and especially teaching should, therefore, be centred on these critical outcomes.

Assessment, as integral component of the teaching-learning situation, is the mechanism through which information is generated on the nature of learning (level of the student) and the efficacy of the teaching that both the student and lecturer may apply it to promote quality learning and teaching.

The “new” SAQA level descriptors, of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2011), aim to transform learning and teaching in higher education institutions. These new level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) seek to re-engage lecturers with processes of curriculum development, to place learning at the heart of the curriculum and to change ingrained practices of teaching.

Similar systems, processes and structures have been introduced in countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Rim countries and parts of Africa and
were not initially successful (Bellis, 2001:24). Those systems have been criticised on a number of fronts, which can be summarised as:

- an inadequately considered understanding of the complex nature of learning and performance and its “educational” foundations; and
- a too narrow understanding and definition of outcomes and competence, which has seriously hindered the quality and depth of some learning and limited the transforming potential of this type of new approach.

The shift to specified discrete performance targets and the state’s focus on regulation do not provide an adequate basis for educational reform (Allais, 2007:16), which is particularly the case in the South African context with its higher educational institutions at varying levels of operational efficiency. An outcomes-based framework can in fact weaken the education system.

While it might appear that an outcomes-based framework will drive an increase in educational delivery, it does not provide a basis for the building and strengthening of educational institutions. Provision of quality education does not emerge from prescribed learning outcomes; provision of quality education requires specialised institutions, as Allais (2007:16) mentions.

### 4.2.1 Teaching and learning

#### 4.2.1.1 Curriculum as process

The level descriptors for the national qualifications framework (SAQA, 2011:5) suggest a process curriculum, although it cannot claim that the explicit reference to the process model underpinned the thinking of its authors. The ten applied competencies, which provide further detail, are clearly aspirational statements about the sort of student it envisages South Africa’s higher education institutions will develop.

For example, on level one: Scope of knowledge, “in respect of which a student is able to demonstrate a general knowledge of one or more areas or fields of study, in addition to the fundamental areas of study”; Knowledge literacy, which means “to understand that knowledge in a particular field develops over a period of time”; Method and procedure, whereby the “learner is able to use key common tools and instruments, and a capacity to apply him/herself to a well-defined task under direct supervision”; Problem solving, whereby “a successful learner is able to recognise and solve problems within a particular well defined context”, etc. (SAQA, 2011:7).
These competencies are, therefore, easy to construe as intrinsic principles of a process curriculum, articulating in a Deweyan sense a set of purposes of education for individual growth (Priestley & Humes, 2010:353).

The level descriptors (SAQA, 2011:7) fail to express clear purposes that might support a process curriculum and the ten applied competencies do not go beyond the set general principles. There is little attempt to unpack these further and delve into the deeper, underlying purposes of higher education.

Again this could be ascribed to SAQA's tendency to prefer a pragmatic approach, clearly exemplified in the term “applied competence” as the most appropriate means of effecting improvement. The contention is that the decision of policymakers to retain level descriptors, viz. outcomes and assessment criteria organised into sequential levels, has resulted in a structurally incoherent curriculum containing epistemological and pragmatic contradictions. This makes these level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) a mastery curriculum (an expression of vaguely defined level descriptors as applied competencies and outcomes) and not a process curriculum.

4.2.1.2 Content-based assessment versus performance-based assessment

At first glance, the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) appear to eschew the notion of a content-based curriculum. Little is said about the content and there is only reference to the first category of “Scope of knowledge” as well as the classification of knowledge (e.g. “analysis”, “synthesis” and “evaluation”), which includes information processing and problem solving (SAQA, 2011:4-5), out of the ten categories used in the level descriptors to describe applied competence.

This is again the narrow and outdated description of applied competence as well as the outdated classification of knowledge of Bloom’s taxonomy. Reference is made to a wide range of categories to describe applied competencies, across each of the ten levels of the national qualifications framework in the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011:4), but these broad categories are not fleshed out in any way. This may be ascribed to a desire to avoid the accusation of being over-prescriptive and provide lecturers with the scope to exercise their professional judgement.

The avoidance of an account of a curriculum, in terms of content, is not without significance and contrasts with earlier approaches to educational reform. (Priestley & Humes, 2010:356). The reasons for eschewing an explicit focus on the curriculum content can be deduced from the qualifications advanced in the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011).
It is, for example, stated that the purpose of the level descriptors is “to ensure coherence in learning achievement” (SAQA, 2011:4) and a curriculum should not be too fragmented or overcrowded with content. Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of the impact of new technologies on the pace of knowledge production and dissemination as well as on the changing global patterns of employment.

Priestley and Humes (2010:356) add that the need to go on learning throughout life means that conceptions of a curriculum confined to content will be inadequate to prepare students for life beyond university. The selection of content within the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) would seem to have little clear rationale in this sense. There appears to be an assumption that lecturers will select content to meet the demands of the outcomes and this allows flexibility (although one might cynically posit that it will allow the unreflexive continuation of existing courses in many classrooms).

Despite the lack of specificity in content within the level descriptors, however, the designation of the ten categories to describe the above applied competencies is most certainly in line with a content model of a curriculum. One is led to suspect that the definition of curriculum areas owes more to an unreflexive continuation of existing practice and that there is no conscious rationale for such choices.

The decision to express content as outcomes, even where the specification of content is not detailed, lies in opposition to the developmental thrust of the ten competencies incorporated in the level descriptors. The level descriptors (SAQA, 2011:5) are notable in that they combine learning outcomes with experiences, sometimes in a way that could be construed as quite prescriptive, as is evident in the following example from Level Two:

Accessing, processing and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to recall, collect and organise given information clearly and accurately, sound listening and speaking (receptive and productive language use), reading and writing skills, and basic numeracy skills including an understanding of symbolic systems. (SAQA, 2011:7)

4.2.1.3 Norm-referenced assessment versus criterion-referenced assessment

The South African National Qualifications Framework was as such developed to be an outcomes-led qualifications framework, based on the idea that educational standards could be nationally “set” by defining learning outcomes and assessment criteria. SAQA explains that “outcomes are the qualities...that are expected at the end of a process of learning. The
meaning of outcomes is similar to the concept of competence" (SAQA, 2004:6). Using terms such as "outcomes are the qualities…” is an attempt to avoid any form of norm-referencing in grading models. The outcomes-led qualifications framework can also legitimately claim to be criteria-based, since it employs criteria explicitly.

Apart from satisfying basic conditions, they have little in common operationally. Neither are these academic standards typically considered common professional property, within cognate disciplines in the higher education environment, and ultimately as common ground between lecturers and students.

The outcomes-led qualifications framework is characterised by shared aspirations for criteria-based assessment and grading, a multiplicity of interpretations of what they mean and imply for practice and a lack of coherent discourse.

A particular source of confusion is that the terms “criteria” and “standard” are often used interchangeably, as if they were equivalent. They are two distinct terms, according to Sadler (2005:193), and considerable benefits would accrue from using them consistently in their distinctive ways. Both criteria (as attributes or properties) and standards (as fixed referenced levels of attainment) lie at the heart of high-quality assessment and grading.

A "standard" is a clear and fixed statement of competence that a student achieves and serves as the building block for qualifications as well as the basis upon which programmes have been designed and the content (“inputs”) selected, as Allais (2007:2) explains. All levels of education, from primary to doctoral studies, and all types of education, from general academic programmes to highly specific focused workplace training programmes, are to be accounted for in terms of outcomes-based qualifications (Allais, 2007:4).

A major issue emerging from the outcomes-led qualifications framework is the importance of defining the relationships between approaches to student assessment and grading, quality assurance and academic standards (James, 2006:1).

4.2.1.4 Standards-based assessment versus student-centredness

In “pegging a qualification at an appropriate level on the NQF used together with the purpose statements, outcomes and assessment criteria”, gives the level descriptors for the (SAQA, 2011:6) a potentially assessment-driven nature that may restrict the development of the autonomy, critical thinking, problem solving, etc. implied by the ten competencies. It is difficult to see how these level descriptors will be employed differently to be primarily utilised for assessment purposes to assess “particular levels of learning achievements” as well as the "national and international comparability of the qualifications” (SAQA, 2011:6).
Despite the sincere avowals of SAQA that things will be different this time, in terms of the basic structure of quality improvement, the Council of Higher Education continue to place pressure on universities, via evaluative use of test data, and this in turn places pressure on lecturers to teach for the test (Priestley & Humes, 2010:357).

Moreover, these level descriptors articulate a linear and teleological view of learning and knowledge (“level means one of the series of levels of learning achievement arranged in ascending order from one to ten” and “are cumulative i.e. there is progression in the competencies from one level to the next” - SAQA, 2011:5). This is deeply problematic and works against the concept of higher education as “coming into presence”, Priestley and Humes (2010:357) explain.

Despite the intention of the qualifications framework to provide particular forms of assessment to encourage lecturers to adopt a more student-centred pedagogy, the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) specifications eventually take on the characteristics of “lecturer-proof” scripts.

4.2.1.5 Philosophical underpinnings of the South Africa higher education curriculum context

Although the national qualifications framework is to be outcomes-based, underpinned by a strong constructivist epistemology, the level descriptors (SAQA, 2011) hardly mention the important philosophical and sociological matters, except the reference that the philosophical underpinning of applied competence is in line with the outcomes-based theoretical framework adopted in the South African context.

The national qualifications framework fails to contribute to the understanding of epistemological questions that underpin the development of a qualifications framework, i.e. it does not articulate official and academic knowledge fields, with consequent misunderstandings about the relations between quality management and development; public transparent accountability of education and training system; and the autonomy of lecturers within the academic knowledge field.

In contrast, Priestley and Humes (2010:353) point out those philosophical and social paradigms are the necessary precursors to planning a curriculum. A reason for the avoidance of a fundamental philosophical stance is the dominant focus on coherence and transformation in learning achievement in the allocation of qualifications. Another possible reason for the avoidance of the fundamental underpinning may be the widely-held belief in South Africa’s commitment to transformation.
4.3 CONCLUSION

The operational end of the level descriptors of the outcomes-led framework is arguably inimical to the underlying purpose of the national curriculum framework, as expressed in the ten competencies.

Although considerable effort has been made to make the outcomes of the qualification framework less prescriptive, these outcomes will always have the potential to narrow down the educative process rather than broadening it, as implied by the ten competencies. The potentially assessment-driven nature of these outcomes may restrict the development of the autonomy, critical thinking, etc. that is implied by the ten competencies.

The South African government embraces the idea of a qualifications framework, because it provides a mechanism for accountability and control (Tuck, Keevy & Hart, 2004:5-29). The point here, in reference to Schuller (2006:4), is that the ability of the South African government to use the national qualifications framework as a "mechanism for accountability and control" hugely depends on an understanding of the framework as a social construct, since the more limited “jungle gym” interpretation of the national qualifications framework as merely a ladder-like framework for ordering qualifications, severely inhibits the extent to which it can be employed as a mechanism for accountability and control, if at all.
CHAPTER 5:
EVOLUTION OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN RESEARCH PARADIGMS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The role of assessment, at a certain juncture in time, is inextricably linked to the prevailing teaching and learning paradigm. The review of the background to the role of assessment on student learning in the previous chapters makes examining the knowledge base, on which assessment is built, worthwhile.

In reviewing how assessment relates to theoretical positioning, Yorke (2003:477) points out how the “philosophical” and “theoretical” contexts of assessment are often ignored. It is argued that there is a need for further theoretical development in respect of assessment that takes account of disciplinary epistemology; theories of intellectual and moral development; students’ stages of intellectual development; and the psychology of giving and receiving feedback (Yorke, 2003:477).

The pertinent paradigms have disparate knowledge-constitutive interests (ontologically, epistemologically and axiologically disparate) and so their criteria or standards for determining rigour may differ (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:117). Table 5.1 below categorises the evolution of assessment and grounds it theoretically within disparate paradigms.

However, like Le Grange and Beets (2005b:117), I acknowledge the potential risk that any classification scheme may lead to an overly narrow interpretation of the content, whereby assessment appears to be rigidly framed within defined paradigms. The boundaries between different paradigms (and assessment types framed within them) are often blurred and a term may be used to describe assessment, but differ in meaning within disparate paradigms. For example: Although a conventional understanding of assessment has positivist underpinnings, Lather (1986:67) (re)defines the term for the purposes of emancipator research.

Despite its limitations, I provide the classification framework as a conceptual tool for advancing arguments and for facilitating thinking/learning, i.e. for heuristic purposes. The assessment types mentioned are variously explored for a more nuanced understanding of assessment and for how they may be brought to bear on assessment theory and practice.
EVOLUTION OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Table 5.1: A summation of the paradigmatic and post-paradigmatic curriculum and assessment processes with reference to Grundy (1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURALISM</th>
<th>POST-STRUCTURALISM</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</strong></td>
<td><strong>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</strong></td>
<td><strong>THIRD DECADE 2000-</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
<td>SECOND DECADE 1990–</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum as a product</strong></td>
<td><strong>Curriculum as a process</strong></td>
<td><strong>Curriculum as praxis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of learning</td>
<td>Assessment for learning</td>
<td>Assessment as learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative assessment</td>
<td>Formative assessment</td>
<td><strong>Self-assessment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm-referenced assessment</td>
<td>Criterion-referenced assessment</td>
<td>Ipsative-referenced assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer-driven approach</td>
<td>Student-centred assessment</td>
<td>Student initiator of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent assessment</td>
<td>Divergent assessment</td>
<td>Balanced assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content-based assessment</td>
<td>Performance-based assessment</td>
<td><strong>Assessment for social justice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict demands pushing towards objectified quantitative outcomes</td>
<td>Demands pushing towards qualitative outcomes</td>
<td>Towards a new account of warranty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer-driven is accountable</td>
<td>Student-centred - Both lecturer and student are accountable - act of collaboration</td>
<td>Assessment as self-surveillance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: Evolution of assessment within research paradigms
These models reflect the close connection between a lecturer's approach to teaching and learning and the way in which assessment is integrated into the process. Most lecturers have very distinct ideas about learning, as Parkinson (2004:85) indicates, based on personal experiences and particular approaches that have appealed to them over the course of their career. This has a significant impact on the goal of assessment as well as the way in which it is integrated into teaching and learning.

The teaching and learning practices that lecturers subscribe to are also to a large extent embedded in personal experiences of teaching and learning as students themselves. The nature of such experiences, i.e. whether supportive or inhibitive of personal development, may be a determining factor in how they approach teaching and assessment. Bearing in mind the time in which lecturers underwent their own training, it could be assumed that teaching and learning approaches correspond to the different decades of assessment (Table 5.1).

Priestley and Humes (2010:346) highlight the importance of acknowledging the relevant planning model according to which a curriculum is being developed, which in turn raises an obligation to justify the choice of model and to be explicit about the underlying ideology.

The choice of model, according to Killen (2003:1), can be justified from at least three perspectives: the inputs to the system, the activities within the system and the outputs from the system.

Priestley and Humes (2010:346) go on to say that those interested in the inputs will focus their attention primarily on finances, resources, infrastructure, etc. and may substantiate their judgements about the quality or value of the system with economic rationalism.

Those interested in the activities within the system will focus their attention primarily on the processes employed to organise, control and deliver education and training. Those interested in outcomes will focus their attention primarily on the products or results of education.

It could be argued that all aspects of education are important and that quality should not be judged from any narrow perspective, but there have been increasing calls for greater attention to the outcomes of education since the 1980s to evaluate the return on investment in education. Such an approach is vital to ensure coherence and conceptual clarity about the purposes of higher education, according to Priestley and Humes (2010:346).

The three archetypal models of the curriculum, viz. content, product and process models, co-exist in considerable tension. Priestley and Humes (2010:358) describe it as simultaneously portraying
knowledge as something students construct as well as a prespecified, essentialist body of knowledge to be acquired and tested. This is a reflection of the strain between convergent and divergent modes of learning; between teleological and open-ended conceptions of education; and, therefore between standards-based and student-centred approaches.

This study addresses all of these models, but establishes the praxis model as the most appropriate approach in terms of the diverse constructions and multidimensional reality of assessment, as integral to teaching and learning.

Contemporary discourses aim to encourage “balanced assessment systems”, placing process (alternative) and product (traditional) assessments on an equal footing. It means a lecturer should be able to “employ assessment manoeuvrability” by making provision for both process and product assessment in their assessment practices (Meyer et al., 2010:2).

Different assessment practices relate different learning theories or perspectives. In more recent work, Beets (2007:87) contends that different type’s assessment practices seemed to be associated with lecturers’ differing views of learning and the relationship of assessment to the process of intervening to support learning, representing a continuum of possibilities for lecturers.

Convergent formative assessment conforms to the behaviouristic philosophy on learning, while divergent formative assessment aspires to the constructivist socio-cultural learning perspective that champions the context of assessment.

A comparison of the two approaches clearly shows that the lecturer’s teaching approach in divergent assessment is much more directed towards the promotion of learning and as such more formative in nature, whereas convergent assessment is almost solely focused on summative assessment. It would, therefore, be expected that a lecturer’s practices would alternate between convergent and divergent formative assessment.
5.2 DOMINANT VIEW OF ASSESSMENT IN THE FIRST DECADE: 1980-

5.2.1 A positivist and behaviourist perspective

The traditional outcomes-based model has a long and somewhat controversial history, according to Priestley and Humes (2010:345), particularly in the USA. It has its roots in scientific management and behaviourist psychology, finding its first expression in education through the work of Bobbit and maturing via Tyler’s *Rational Curriculum* and Bloom’s taxonomy.

In the UK, objectives were utilised in school council projects (Stenhouse, 1975) and later became a fundamental part of competency-based education and training (CBET). Competency-based education and training is arguably a strong behaviourist model, where the curriculum states specific outcomes that are designed for assessment purposes.

Priestley and Humes (2010:345) indicate that weaker versions of the objectives model have emerged in many national curriculum developments around the world, notably the National Curriculum in England and Wales (DES, 1989), the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (NZ, 1993) and Scotland’s Framework (Scottish Executive, 2000).

The conventional and positivist definition of assessment, “a test measures what it is supposed to measure”, is informed by measurement theories from the 1950s (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:115-119). A positivist view of assessment, therefore, according to Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116), employs technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined ends attained by following known rules and predefined means (e.g. the textbook version of the scientific method).

Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116) describe this kind of knowledge as being informed by technical interest and, as Usher (1996:22) confirms, a positivist view of assessment is associated with prediction and control. “Outcomes”, “verifiable statements of performance” and “performance indicators” appeared in the early 1980s as the outriders of the new technology of control within education (Smyth & Dow, 2006:292).

Assessment outcomes are singular, measurable, standardised and unequivocal second-order consequences of the management and pedagogy of institutions and systems; assessment is conducted from a perspective of knowledge that is largely fixed, supposedly objective, uncontested, ahistorical and unitary (Smyth & Dow, 2006:295). This positivist rationality on which
outcomes-based assessment is predicated produces a technical, instrumental debate about definitions of outcomes and the creation of structures and systems to support them.

Ecclestone (1999:44) asserts that a technical approach, separated from discussion of the underlying values and purposes of higher education, could increasingly tighten the epistemological stranglehold. This is compounded by increased political influence over processes of defining outcomes and systems to assure their quality. If lecturers should resist these moves, without coherent counterarguments, the temptation to make them more prescriptive will also increase.

The principles of behaviourism and its associated methods of behaviour manipulation go back as far as Ivan Parker (1849-1936) and John B. Watson (1878-1958), but it was Burrhus F. Skinner (1904-1990) that advocated it as “an educational method that is more practical and produces greater results than any other” (Ozman & Craver, 2003:212).

In contrast, Reynecke (2008:23) argues that although behaviouristic instruction techniques may well be useful in the classroom, issues around behaviour manipulation, control and autocratic methods are alarming. This behaviouristic teaching and learning approach robs the student of the right to reflect and make critical judgements on the knowledge and skills that he/she is to master. Distressing philosophical and humanistic questions are raised about the student being manipulated and controlled by his/her environment, since the living environment in which the student learns plays an important role in effective learning. Not only is the student dependent on stimulation from the environment, but the learning content also gains sense and meaning if it is placed within the context of the student’s life and worldview.

Ozman and Craver (2003:213-214) within the context of this behaviour manipulation explain that behaviourism is systematic and meaningful conditioning, to bolster desirable behaviour, by means of the extrinsic or intrinsic reward of the learner or, as Beets (2007:90) describes it, the basic principle that rewarding certain behaviour will make repetition of such behaviour, under similar conditions, likely.

Behaviouristic techniques in education are mainly aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it into more desirable directions. Beets (2007:90) points out that a learner’s behaviour is always controlled by external factors and lecturers must apply these spheres of external influence to facilitate learning.
Lecturers’ standards-based assessment practices correspond with their positivist and behaviouristic perspectives. The first decade of assessment gave voice to the justification for the scientific management of teaching and learning in a way that establishes a correspondence between positivism and teaching, learning and assessment.

A positivist perspective considers assessment as a procedure that is aimed to be as objective as possible, in which “the system of beliefs”, values and purposes in which the students and the lecturers participate are rarely discussed (Orr, 2007:647).

Within the context of assessment as a “procedure”, Smyth and Dow (2006:295) point out that assessment revolves around a set of processes and procedures to support lecturers. They refer to assessment as “scientific educational administration”, in which outcomes represent the goals or ends of the educational process and are characterised by a high degree of predictive reliability.

Standards-based assessment relates to the positivist perspective, in that the purpose of assessment is to focus on the accuracy of assessment and various strategies are applied to safeguard impartiality and neutrality. The inherent rationale is “the dream of the possibility of perfect control in a perfect rational and ordered universe”.

The goal of assessment is to enhance the effectiveness of assessment, striving for explicitness and clarity, yet positivist assessment research has not been subjected to any degree of contestation (Smyth & Dow, 2006:295).

The positivist rationality on which the traditional outcomes-based assessment is predicated produces a technical, instrumental debate about definitions of outcomes and the creation of structures to support them. A technical approach, separated from discussion of the underlying values and purpose of higher education, could increasingly exert the epistemological stronghold, seen in this decade. This is compounded by increased political influence over processes to define outcomes and systems to assure their quality. And if lecturers resist these moves without coherent counter-arguments, the temptation to make them more prescriptive will also increase.

It is apparent that the design and positivist assumptions of outcomes-based assessment can, even in the most imaginative lecturers hands reduce student-centredness to a technical choice about what to do and in what order. This is compounded by a drive for greater transparency which tends to produce elaborate specifications that are often incomprehensible to all but the groups who debate and create them. Programmes yield demonstrable, rigorously assessed outcomes.
but students gain no notion of deep understanding. It is argued that a more open-ended of ways of defining what should be learned; responding to students needs and interest. In the light of these difficulties, it is therefore important to consider other interpretations of student-centred learning.

5.3 DOMINANT VIEW OF ASSESSMENT IN THE SECOND DECADE: 1990-

5.3.1 Interpretative and constructivist perspective

The transitional assessment approaches of the second decade were characterised by patterns of change, such as contrasting the contemporary and the conventional. This also reflects the shift from a technical paradigm/interest to a practical paradigm/interest for assessment, i.e. from a positivist approach to an interpretivist approach to assessment. Positivist research is associated with prediction and control, and interpretive research with enlightenment, understanding and communication, Usher (1996:22) explains.

The interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employ "practical modes" of reasoning, Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116) point out, whereby appropriate discussions are conducted in the light of the circumstances of the situation and not on the basis of pre-defined objectives. This epistemological stance can be termed interpretivist. Constructivists aim for an interpretive understanding of assessment in a theory that has credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness relative to its historical movement.

The aim is to contextually understand assessment as a social phenomenon and to interpret it within a particular context, with due consideration of the influence of social agents on social phenomena. In terms of the contextual nature of assessment as a social phenomenon, Parkinson (2004:86) explains that learning is considered to be a complex and diverse process in which the student makes sense and meaning of the world through his/her life and worldview. Constructivism, according to Beets (2007:92), emphasises this learning diversity and sensitivity. Such diversity of student needs and styles will enable the lecturer to move away from the one-size-fits-all approach to one that employs alternative teaching, learning and assessment opportunities. The lecturer must, therefore, construct the learning environment in such a way that it offers the student the optimum of learning opportunities.
In contrast to the previous traditional and positivist one-size-fits-all approach, Killen (2000:5) illustrates the strong similarities between constructivism and transitional outcomes-based education by explaining that lecturers and administrators have a degree of control over the outcomes of education and at the same time lecturers also possess a high degree of freedom to select the content and methods with which to assist students in achieving the outcomes. The control aspect relates to the specification of the outcomes and freedom comes through the choices (about content, teaching, methods and assessment) left up to individual lecturers.

Theories of teaching and learning focusing on student activity are based on the two main theories of phenomenography and constructivism, Morgan et al. (2004:9) explain and yet they urge that while there are different traditions, the main concern should be to determine the aspects aiding the improvement of teaching and learning outcomes.

The fundamental principle of both schools of thought is not so much about how the lecturers' actions influence learning outcomes, but rather how the involvement of the student influences learning outcomes. Morgan et al. (2004:9) argue that learning involves doing and is performative – meaning it is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction, but is created by the students’ learning activities – their approaches to learning.

*Pragmatism* advocates the active participation of students in the learning process, by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve problems related to real-world situations. The problem-based approach to enhance teaching, learning and assessment reflects the pragmatist roots of outcomes-based education (Meyer et al., 2010:19).

Pragmatism focuses on the practical implementation of teaching, learning and assessment (Meyer et al., 2010:18) and should go beyond the formal curriculum, since a student's experiences and interests are cardinal for preparing the student for life’s affairs and the future. This approach is based on the premise that all things are related. The curriculum cannot be compartmentalised, necessitating the creation of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary curricula.

The most important dimensions of change of assessment include:

- an increased emphasis on the learning-enhancement function of assessment, rather than on accountability;
- increased attention to formative, rather than summative, assessment;
greater emphasis on a standards model for assessment, including criterion-referenced assessment, and less on a measurement model, involving norm-referenced assessment;

more frequent provision of descriptive comment and constructive feedback and less restriction of the response/feedback to marks, grades and summary labels;

a move from dependence on one main method of assessment (end-of-course assessment) to deploying a variety of methods (within-course assessment);

less reliance on assessment by teaching staff alone and greater involvement of self- and peer assessment; and

increased focus on assessment as integral to teaching, rather than as a separate activity occurring upon conclusion of instruction.

This binary, according to Orr (2007:637), relates to positivist and interpretivist perspectives (among others). Le Grange and Beets (2005a:1199) agree with this and also point out that changes in approach to assessment are not an event, but rather a process aimed at achieving more authentic ways of assessing. Changes in approach to assessment should not be represented in binary terms of summative/formative, single-measure/multiple-measure etc., but rather seen as occupying a continuum of change from traditional to more authentic forms of assessment (Le Grange & Beets, 2005a:1199).

According to the constructivist perspective, assessment aims to determine the student’s progress in achieving his/her maximum potential in a module. Since the information obtained from assessment will serve to drive future progress, Joffe (1993:230) explains, assessment must be considered an integrated element of the teaching and learning process as well as an intrinsic part of the curriculum.

A student-centred approach would, however, emphasise divergent formative assessment and should form part of a lecturer’s repertoire of assessment strategies. As Torrance and Pryor (2004:147) put it, rather than having to implement something completely new, the concept of divergent assessment becomes a sort of aide-memoire, as the lecturers seek to expand the boundaries of their classroom practice. Transitional outcomes-based education is often described as “student-centred practices”, meaning that learning goals, teaching and assessment processes, content and pace of learning are mutually determined by the lecturer and the student. Such
practices are grounded in a humanistic approach to higher education, which places the emphasis on the individual as a holistic being and allows for the considerable differences that characterise adult students.

Assessment that supports learning is fit for purpose (Dreyer et al., 2010:108), which means that paradigms promoting the belief that students learn by repetition have largely been discredited and would never have had much applicability to university education and higher-order thinking skills anyway.

More current theories hold that students construct knowledge through active engagement, in social interaction and in specific, realistic contexts. Theories of adult learning also point to the fact that as adults, students like to have a sense of ownership and a voice, flexibility, a realisation of the immediate relevance of the learning, engagement in activities, multiple perspectives on issues, etc. All of the above accord well with a constructivist view of learning.

Texts on assessment in higher education deal predominantly with summative assessment and vary considerably in the extent to which the problems – reflecting threats to validity and reliability – are acknowledged (Yorke, 2003:484).

The problems with summative assessment extend, by definition, to the accumulation of such assessments for awards. Formative assessment – whilst suffering from conceptual and technical difficulties similar to those of summative assessment – differs in that it is dialogical. Whilst the validity of assessment has to reach an acceptable level, its reliability is less important because the fundamental purpose of the activity is developmental rather than related to measurement.

The exchanges between the lecturer and student are – in an ideal world – mutually hermeneutic, in that each seeks to interpret and understand the communications of the other to better equip the student to deal with future challenges of varying kinds and depict formative assessment as potentially richer in terms of theorising, Yorke (2003:485) explains, than summative assessment.

Yorke (2003:484) argues that whilst approaches to learning have moved in the direction of constructivism, approaches to assessment have remained inappropriately focused on testing and have made the situation all the more difficult. In refuting the argument that outcomes lead inexorably to the bland and instrumental, it is common to propose that critical, creative, ethical and abstract dimensions of learning and professional practice can be built into specifications of outcomes and their associated assessment regime. Yet, this merely creates a situation where the
The positivist conviction that everything can be defined and measured leads to “spiralling specifications” or, as Wolf (1995:307) puts it, “a bottomless pit of absolute precision where verbal distinctions proliferate without end”.

The problem from an interpretive perspective, where reality is contextually bound and influenced by social agents, is that a standards-based approach disregards the importance of the context of the assessment. This simplified approach also overlooks the fact that determining the requirements of assessment entails more than just considering content relevance and representativeness (Killen, 2003:8). Lecturers have to interpret the impact of students’ personal characteristics on their responses and also interpret the assessment results in valid and reliable ways.

The design and positivist assumptions of outcomes-based assessment can, even in the most imaginative lecturer’s hands, reduce a student-centred approach to a technical choice about what to do and in what order (McNair, 1995:226). This is compounded by a drive for greater transparency, which tends to produce elaborate specifications that are often incomprehensible to all but the groups who debate and create them.

McNair (1995:226) warns that although talking about outcomes does widen the community debating the selection of outcomes, there are also “dangers of over formalising and over-dependence on written language to handle things which can only be understood through discussion”.

Overcoming this problem necessitates thinking of assessment as the process of determining how well students are able to demonstrate their acquired learning, Killen (2003:10) states, rather than trying to determine in some categorical and positivist sense what learners have or have not learned. If this approach is coupled with acceptance of the idea that outcomes can legitimately be expressed in terms of understanding and not just in the behavioural terms recommended by Spady (1994:1), the foundation is set for assessment inferences to be drawn about students’ learning. It changes our focus from asking:

- how many questions can the student answer?; or
- which skills can the student demonstrate?; to
- how well does the student answer questions?; and
- how expertly can the student demonstrate particular skills?
Understanding (rather than memorisation), creativity (rather than reproduction), diversity (rather than conformity), initiative (rather than compliance) and challenge (rather than blind acceptance) become the yardsticks in the endeavour to measure, describe and report student learning (Killen, 2003:11).

When proceeding beyond trivial behavioural outcomes, it becomes obvious that there is not a clear distinction between achieving/not achieving the outcome. Inferring whether or not a student has achieved a particular outcome is then no longer the problem; instead, the challenge becomes making valid inferences about how well each outcome has been achieved.

Essentially this comes down to a need to be able to describe (in words, rather than numbers) the difference between low-quality and high-quality achievement of the outcome. Until this can be done, it is not possible to devise an assessment task allowing students to demonstrate the quality of their learning and, therefore, it is not possible to draw valid inferences about their learning.

5.4 POSTMODERN VIEW OF ASSESSMENT IN THE THIRD DECADE: 2000-

5.4.1 Post-modern perspectives of assessment

Post-modern approaches do not summarily embrace the interpretive tradition and view it as still implicitly operating within the terms and discourses of positivist traditions. In other words, “the emphasis on the ‘subjective’ instead of the ‘objective’ is merely a reversal which still works within the framework of the ‘objective–subjective’ as polar opposites” (Usher, 1996:26). Post-modernism seeks to subvert this dichotomy and suggest alternatives, which wholly challenge dominant epistemological discourses in all their different forms (Usher, 1996:26).

A post-structuralist approach to assessment implies that systems (paradigms), such as suggested by the structuralist approach, should be reconsidered. Any endeavour, according to Killen (2003:9), to distinguish between the different types of assessment (assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning) still leads to the conclusion of how inappropriate it is simply to label assessments as absolute in any way (Killen, 2003:9).

Assessment becomes “an ideological tool” within a post-structuralist view (Delanty and Strydom (2003:214)) and a post-structuralist lecturer has an awareness of assessment as a social-political practice. The post-structuralist approach to assessment originated in the school sector, where
critical approaches were precipitated by a research focus on *assessment for learning*. Lecturers adopting a post-structuralist perspective position themselves in their research:

“Given the role that knowledge and its assessment takes in establishing relationships of power in the society, it seems critical to articulate the beliefs we hold and the assumptions we make…with regards to the nature and purpose of assessment.” (Delandshere, 2001:113)

Referring to the dominant epistemological discourses, Delanty and Strydom (2003:214) point out that positivist and interpretive traditions of assessment do not subsume knowledge that steers the student in the direction of freedom, justice and democracy. Delanty and Strydom (2003:214), therefore, isolate a third type of “knowledge-constitutive interest”, which links with critical theory, i.e. an *emancipatory interest*.

*Emancipatory interest* implies an intention to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge, Yorke (2003:477) explains that this school of thought believes that education can improve the well-being of society-centred education, whereby lecturers and students should act as *change agents* by analysing and addressing societal needs. This means that learning is a constructive process in which students are *constructing knowledge* or *making meaning*, according to their perception of society.

Meyer et al. (2010:19) indicate that a critical theorist aims for rationality, justice and freedom. Exemplified by diversity, the era following 1960s is distinctly referred to as the postmodern era (with its vast array of interpretations). During this era universality, traditionalism and certainties came under scrutiny and critical analysis as well as the (re-)evaluation of existing *truths* emerged.

Usher (1996:22) points out that critical theory has its own power-knowledge nexus, which may operate in oppressive and repressive ways in particular historical contexts and instances and this knowledge interest, according to Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116), involves the unmasking of ideologies that maintain the status quo by denying individuals and groups access to knowledge or awareness on the material conditions that oppress or restrict them. Usher (1996:22) adds out that it is not only about access or awareness but, importantly, is the critical theory also concerned with the actions that can be taken to rectify oppressive conditions, but has been challenged for positing its emancipatory project as a universal value.

Graham-Jolly (2009:249) defines this as a paradigm where the curriculum incorporates “a selection from the culture of society” to develop a more critical interpretation. Graham-Jolly’s
critical analysis reveals the bankruptcy of an approach to curriculum that ignores the interrelationship between the organisation of knowledge and the distribution of power in society. Taking a narrow “philosophical stance” and ignoring the important sociological dimensions of the curriculum process effectively depoliticises education and treats curriculum as if it were the product not of a social, economic, political, and ideological history, but based on a set of universally valid realms of meaning or selection of subjects.

Stenhouse (1975:118) indicates, in reference to lecturers’ “philosophical stance”, a philosophical critique is an important element for an adequate evaluation of a curriculum. It serves, Vandeyar (2005:464) says, as a foundation for a theoretical framework describing how lecturers deal with the conflicting demands made on their assessment practices. A critical overview of assessment in higher education reveals that it is questionable whether assessment practices comply with the set expectations within the new paradigm.

Outcomes-based assessment has been challenged on a number of grounds, albeit in a very general terms and often saddling it with unfounded characteristics. Cretchley and Castle, (2001:488) relate that this criticism has focused inter alia on its behaviourist roots; the inhibition of learner autonomy; difficulties in defining competence; the difficulty of defining core and sub-components; a disregard of the role of classroom inputs; oversimplification of grading categories; and the doubtful status of generic competencies.

There are also problems with attempting to establish equivalency between epistemologically distinct forms of learning – the personal unspoken, unformalised knowledge gained from the workplace and community, and the more theoretical rigorous and systematic knowledge of a university classroom.

Assessment reviews of this decade signalled a serious attempt to provide a coordinated approach to curriculum reform, building on earlier reforms and taking account of anticipated future needs deriving from economic, technological and social changes (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345). The transformational outcomes-based curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from centralised prescriptions of a curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt the guidance provided by a curriculum.

Adopting a post-modern position involves denying the existence of foundational knowledge on the grounds that no knowable social reality exists beyond the signs of language, image and discourse (Hargreaves, Whitford, & Jones, 2001:39). This implies that assessment approaches
are deconstructed to reveal the marginalised or suppressed practices. Patti Lather (1994:89-90) introduces a fourth category: *deconstruction*.

*Deconstruction* is a feature of post-structuralism that aims to break up the established structures of thought or discourse. The rationale of post-structuralism is to: deconstruct, problematise, question and interrupt (Merriam, 2002:11). Delanty and Strydom (2003:328) explain how deconstruction aims to show the multiple and indeterminate levels of meaning in a text. Multiple levels of meaning, Ozman and Craver (2003:351-355) indicate, give rise to diversity and different realities of life confront human beings with a variety of styles and views. Nothing seems to be universal or certain anymore and any definition of stable (universal) frameworks for human thought seems to be no longer possible.

### 5.4.2 Lecturers’ assessment practices correspond to their post-modern perspectives

From a post-structuralist perspective assessment is co-constructed in communities of practice and standards are socially constructed - relative, provisional and contested - and for the post-structuralist the quest for clarity is replaced with a focus on attempting to understand the contextualised power relations of assessment. The post-structuralist view of assessment can in itself never enhance or inhibit learning: It is the assessment-based inferences made that have the potential to promote learning (Killen, 2003:9).

This distinction is important, because it addresses one of the fundamental challenges of outcomes-based education, viz. the challenge of developing assessment instruments that allow lecturers to draw valid inferences about the extent to which students have achieved curriculum outcomes. The message here is simple, but frequently overlooked by lecturers. The focus of assessment is not on the designing of an appropriate assessment task only, but on the inferences drawn from students’ results in the assessments.

Lecturers view assessment as a unitary concept that refers to the “degree to which a certain inference from an assessment is appropriate and meaningful” (Killen, 2003:9). Viewing outcomes as rhizomes illustrates how they are in constant movement, i.e. without fixity. Rhizomatic assessment disturbs the notion that outcomes or inferences drawn about learning can be defined in any absolute sense, Le Grange and Beets (2005b:118) assert.
Dreyer et al. (2010:138) argue that post-modern assessment culture is defined by characteristics such as:

- active participation in authentic, real-life tasks that require the application of existing knowledge and skills;
- participation in a dialogue and conversation between learners and lecturers;
- engagement with and development of criteria and self-regulation of one’s own work;
- employment of a range of diverse assessment modes and methods as well as methods adapted from different subject disciplines;
- opportunity to develop and apply attributes such as reflection, resilience, resourcefulness and professional judgement and conduct in relation to problems; and
- acceptance of the limitations of judgements and the value of dialogue in developing new ways of working.

The above new assessment culture clearly reflects how integral assessment is to teaching and learning, both student-centred and criterion-referenced assessment, as it engages students in applying knowledge and reflecting on their actions. The word “dialogue” is mentioned twice in the above list, which underlines its importance in this new assessment culture (Dreyer et al., 2010:138).

During this decade assessment has been heralded for its key role in the improvement of teaching and learning. There, however have been expressions of uncertainty about whether assessment is in fact delivering on its promised potential. There appears to be within some quarters of the education development community less certainty about assessments’ leverage on the curriculum, a quite scepticism about its role in quality assurance and in general a greater awareness of its limited role in educational reform.

The central argument is that while social constructivist perspective has significantly illuminated understanding of assessment in this decade, inadvertently the very object of assessment knowledge has been eclipse. According to Shay (2008:595) lecturers’ ability to assessment complex performances in increasingly meaningful ways requires a more sophisticated understanding of the forms of knowledge inherent in the disciplines and the requisite
performances. According to Shay (2008:596) for a better understanding, lecturers need to move beyond social constructivism.

Torrance and Pryor (2001:616) explain that lecturers with social constructivist approaches:

- analyse assessment practices, which might embody scaffolding and as such have the potential for making feedback more formative in a way that match espoused intentions;
- realise that the fine-grained description and the analysis of classroom interaction, are effected by paying close attention to linguistic structures;
- demonstrate that in suitable social contexts forms of language arise that depart from the usual patterns of classroom discourse;
- realise the effect of feedback on students’ motivation and goals also forms an important aspect of the work and insights derived from it; and
- realise that assessment practices aid students to improve their work, cannot be assumed and that there are significant differences between students in the same class, depending on their perceptions of implicit social rules of the classroom and their orientation to achievement goals.

Lecturers’ assessment practices reinforce the rejection of a disciplinary base to education and a privileged role for educational institutions, while also encouraging scepticism about the role of the state. The primary negative effect of a social constructionist view featured in a stakeholder model of standards generation - but this model withered away years ago (Mukora, 2007:6). Mukora (2007:6) shares Allais’ (2007) concern that current economic and political forces threaten the achievement of the key objectives of access, portability and progression - widening inequalities between the educated and the uneducated.

These ideas provide an educational justification for the neo-liberal approach, which relies on performance specifications to create and regulate a market of educational provision. Lecturers with a neo-liberal approach to assessment offer students a clear sense of the set expectations, inform society on the education offered to students and indicate to lecturers the content against which to design programmes (Allais, 2007:15).

Hereby, lecturers with a socio-cultural perspective to assessment focus strongly on the context in which the student learns; this learning, according to Beets (2007:93), transpires within the community, an interaction between the student and his/her social environment. Gipps (2002:73) shares this view and adds that both the student and lecturer function within a cultural, social,
material and technological environment that has its problems as well as the resources to solve such problems. Seen in this way, methods of assessment are simply practices which develop patterns of participation that subsequently contribute to students’ identities as students and “knowers”.

Students, therefore, have an active role in assessment as people who can “negotiate”, shape and reflect on their participation and non-participation. This aspect also extends to the element of power in self-directed learning, whereby the student has power over and control of his/her learning and assessment (although, there the student also has a part to play), as Boud and Falchikov (2007:38) point out. Yorke (2003:477) divides this intention of assessment into three underlying dimensions, viz.:

- to give credit for what has been done to the expected standard;
- to correct what is wrong; and
- to encourage emancipation, by making the student aware of unexplored possibilities.

The skill which the lecturer brings to bear on a student’s work is a critical determinant of the capacity of assessment to be emancipatory in character (Yorke, 2003:477).

Kanjee and Sayed (2013:442) readily advocate the use assessment for emancipation and transformation and deem the greatest undertaking that still impacts on the South African higher education system, after 21 years, is the implementation of a new assessment approach that addresses student-centred learning and the development of lecturer capacity and skills to provide high quality education to all students to enable them to become active participants in the new society. A key aspect of this transformation process remains the development of alternative student-centred assessment (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442).
CHAPTER 6:
ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research on assessment practices within the faculties of the North-West University (NWU - Potchefstroom campus) followed a case study approach. The qualitative analysis conducted within the eight faculties of the Potchefstroom campus served to:

- uncover the manifest interaction of significant factors characteristic of assessment on the campus;
- capture various nuances, patterns and additional latent elements; and
- focus on a holistic description and explanation of the assessment practices at these faculties (Berg, 2007:284).

The case study research was conducted by means of a multi-method approach. The approach was initially explorative and then became more descriptive and explanatory in nature. The descriptive approach aided in identifying the appropriate explanation (Yin, 2014:140) and portraying the complexity of assessment within the cases, while the exploratory approach served to pinpoint the pattern of complexity of assessment within a higher education curriculum context.

Arraying a whole set of categories or features of assessment practices and perspectives, as set out in the tables, effectively profiled each case. This array permitted the analysis to probe whether different cases appear to share similar profiles and deserve to be considered instances (replications) of the same “type” of general case (Yin, 2014:166). Generalisations about lecturer’s assessment practices and perspectives were derived by means of replication logic, given that all of the analysis showed positive results. A qualitative analysis of the entire collection of tables then enabled the study to draw cross-case conclusions about the eight individual faculties. Sharing the conclusions from the multiple case studies brings its results and findings to closure (Yin, 2014:1810).
6.2 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 1

6.2.1 Informal formative assessment

The focus group interviews showed that just like the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), most of the lecturers do not draw a distinction between informal and formal formative assessment. They consider formative assessment to be a continuous process throughout the semester and summative assessment as assessment conducted at the end of the semester. The marks obtained from formative assessment are calculated towards a participation mark and the result of summative assessment is represented by the examination mark. Although the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) does not make mention of informal formative assessment, a participant did mention his/her use of informal formative assessment.

L1: I have also started with informal formative assessment this year. I give them multiple-choice tests. They don’t count, but is an aid to prepare for class.

L3: My subject is simply one of those where, if you don’t keep up, you won’t make it to next week. So they voluntarily agreed to a weekly five-minute class test on the week’s work, because if they don’t make progress – it’s a losing battle.

L4: The fourth mark is made up of pop quizzes. You have twenty minutes, write a summary of the following. I don’t mark it, I just look through them. The student gets 100% or 0. It’s about whether he was present and whether he did it properly, did he think about it, not about what he actually wrote or about insight. So, it’s two-fold, class attendance and... Because they don’t need to prepare and it’s also a way for them to show whether they know what’s going on or not.

Informal formative assessment takes the form of multiple-choice class tests, preparatory tests at the start of class, pop quizzes that, for example, require summarising content, and voluntary class tests. Assignments are voluntary aids to prepare students for class throughout the semester. It also affords the student the opportunity to measure his/her progress, according to one participant. Informal formative assessment is viewed as “practice”, although lecturers did indicate that the marks of these tests are indeed incorporated into the participation mark – which effectively makes it formal summative assessment. Whenever marks and percentages contribute to the overall grade, it becomes summative (Yorke, 2003:479).
The aim of informal formative assessment, as implemented, relates to the baseline purpose of assessment of providing evidence of the current state of each student’s learning (Hodnett, 2001:3). Multiple-choice class tests serve as “aid”, which is in line with the diagnostic value of formative assessment.

_L4:_ *Those exercises also give rise to very specific questions from students, which shows me which aspects of the work need attention.*

_L5:_ *We discuss all questions in class, welcoming input from anyone in the class. It makes up 10% of the participation mark, so everything counts.*

The assessment technique of questioning, as described by the participant, is applied (informally) formatively to guide teaching and learning activities. The information obtained assists the lecturer in determining the students’ entry levels – e.g. their knowledge on a lesson topic. The function of informal formative assessment to support the teaching and learning process is not fully realised and is more about awarding a certain value to the student’s performance for participants.

_L1:_ *It can take any form. It could be small assignments they do at home in groups or it could be small tests they write in class and mark amongst themselves. It could basically take any form.*

The smaller class tests can take any form, including group assignments, and students are allowed to assess each other. The goal of this informal formative assessment is to force students to participate in learning events, take greater responsibility, attend class and learn discipline. Informal formative assessment is thus applied for accountability purposes, rather than to promote teaching and learning. A participant motivated this practice by stating the real influence of responsibility and discipline on the performance of students. The lecturer thus makes use of a variety of wide-ranging informal formative assessment activities to call students to account.

_L3:_ *I also have five smaller evaluations throughout the semester, in which I warn them to go read a section of the textbook for a ten-point test the following week, or I may have them answer a few questions at the end of a lecture or give them a small assignment and so on…*

These informal formative exercises or, as the participant called them, “five smaller evaluations” include preparation of a section in the textbook for a 10-point test or questions at the end of a lecture. This wide-ranging informal formative assessment predominantly monitors class attendance and active participation. The participants may well consider class tests, pop quizzes
and small assignments to be informal formative assessment, but these activities are conducted according to a specific curricular assessment framework in a systematic and structured function, which makes it formal formative assessment (Yorke, 2003:479). It would seem that informal formative assessment serves as method to motivate students to work for marks.

**L4:** I find it works rather well and it also helps students to up their marks. Just that little bit more incentive to pass the exam.

Informal formative assessment is also a way to ensure class attendance and active participation. It conforms to the prevailing culture among students to only work when marks are involved.

**L5:** I can tell you now, it would be disastrous. Students aren't used to working that way.

**L3:** Man, they write books full of nonsense that I have to mark.

Participants consider the greatest stumbling blocks to effective implementation of informal formative assessment: students’ lack of motivation and of academic responsibility and trustworthiness. These deficiencies necessitate lecturers to institute measures that will ensure students complete assignments and the reason they employ marks to motivate and, in some cases, manipulate students.

Formal formative assessment occurs mainly in the form of scheduled semester tests, class tests and assignments. The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) does prescribe the number of formal formative assessments for the different modules, but implementation of the policy varies from lecturer to lecturer in this faculty. It seems that the traditional pen-and-paper test is especially popular.

**L5:** We have three, maximum six. The three are generally scheduled tests, but in one or two cases the guys give an assignment.

**L4:** Two tests are scheduled, this is just for my section, with a third opportunity and then I add a fourth opportunity or a fourth mark.

**L1:** They are big class tests of which one is usually written during the test week and then I use smaller assessment marks.

According to participants, between one to a maximum of six tests are scheduled per semester. The set traditional pen-and-paper tests are given throughout the semester, usually during class
or contact sessions. These class tests provide marks, measure progress and prepare students for the exam.

L5: Tests are given throughout the semester to prepare students for the exam and for them to measure their progress and determine what they know or not. Then you can award a mark or mark it or give him the memorandum for him to mark it, so he can see what he knows. If you then want to give a mark for the participation mark, you can, but I don’t think it’s really necessary.

The above formative assessment is not focused on marks, but on providing the student with a way to monitor his/her progress, and secondly, as preparation for the exam. Allowing students to mark their own work involves them to a certain degree in the assessment process. This method of determining progress conforms to the summative purpose of assessment.

The lecturers of this faculty employ a variety of assessment methods, viz. lecturer assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment and group assessment. The latter entails giving assignments that are facilitated during group discussions.

L3: Class assignments are usually given in groups, because you want them to help each other. Should one struggle with some part of the work, then the other may suggest a different way of looking at a problem and in this way they help each other.

L2: I think it depends on the subject. The big assignment poses a complex factual problem, which they must solve, but the smaller marks that collectively make up one of the bigger marks consist of smaller assignments done in class. Not a test, but a kind of group discussion where they have to write down the results.

Group assessment offers students a legitimate way to support each other. The group is confronted with a problem statement, which they have to solve through discussion and collective exploration of the problem. The group records the results and a mark is awarded. Participants also indicated that they have assistants that aid them in assessing formative assessment assignments.

L3: They are usually postgraduate students, but also very sharp final-year students. Their records are reviewed and if they performed well…

The assistants may well be carefully selected and deemed to be sufficiently competent to perform the task, but chances are slim that the feedback given would add any formative and constructive
value to the teaching and learning process. The lecturer is not directly involved in the assessment of these formative assessment assignments and thus not able to provide the student with the necessary guidance. It is, furthermore, doubtful that any information could be obtained from the assessment process to improve the quality of teaching. Greater input by the student in the assessment process by means of group, peer and self-assessment should counteract this problem.

The abovementioned participation of students could be expanded through alternative assessment techniques such as debates, case studies, orals and practical class presentations. The importance of a variety of assessment techniques, in conjunction with a range of assessment methods, was also mentioned.

L2: ...that the student is subjected to different forms of assessment.

L2: The student also needs to learn and I consider it an important personality shaping thing, where the student learns to adapt to circumstances. You must use your talents and abilities in specific circumstances. So, they have to learn that ability to judge.

The above responses emphasise the flexibility and adaptability needed in assessment. It is argued that the highly contextualised nature and circumstances of the industry not only challenge the student’s intellectual abilities, but also his/her emotional intelligence. This challenge requires that the student be exposed to a variety of assessment techniques in different contexts. It would enable the student to develop the skills to adapt effectively in a diverse and contextualised labour environment. These alternative assessment techniques also serve to address the emotional and psychological development of the student. Creating a favourable classroom environment, according to the participants, further promotes effective teaching and learning.

L4: I talk to them, we discuss the work. I do this especially with my really weak students, who seek assistance.

L3: I would say let’s see where the problem lies with you not knowing how to write, reason or think to get from this to that point. Now I have already helped a number of people with, I would say, learning problems to put their thoughts on paper.

The lecturers hereby displayed their greater concern over students with learning problems, where the lecturer acts as mentor and highlights the importance of positive and constructive interaction between lecturer and student. Participants furthermore demonstrate a close and devoted
connection to their students, in which the lecturer provides careful guidance through the learning process. The lecturer approaches assessment from the student’s perspective and does not merely attend to the student’s intellectual development, but also his/her emotional processes. Additional alternative assessment techniques include debates and practical presentations/demonstrations in class.

L5:  I usually have them do an assignment, together with a presentation in class...and then we have debates on Thursday afternoons at which students speak for five minutes or do a presentation, which counts as one mark.

Students receive the opportunity to give a five-minute presentation in class and participate in debates. Both of these activities occur in groups, enabling peer support. A further demonstration of a student-centred approach is offering the student the option of an oral to make up for a missed test.

L1:  I don’t let any test fall away and when a student was ill, he can arrange for an oral with me.

L3:  If he was ill, he can bring his excuse or proof and I will give him his oral, whether it is for test one, two or three it doesn’t make a difference. The other benefit is that you identify problems that you wouldn’t pick up in a test. You identify the things they’re too scared to ask in class much quicker in an oral, which you can then explain afterwards in class.

Should a student miss a test for a legitimate reason, he/she receives the option of an oral test. As the participant indicated, it enables the lecturer to identify issues that would not normally become apparent in a traditional pen-and-paper test. The information obtained from such an oral is then formatively applied when it is explained in class. It strengthens teaching and reflects that assessment is integrated into the teaching and learning process. This student-centred assessment approach, which is more flexible and accommodating in nature, is further depicted in the following lecturer’s assessment approach:

L2:  I personally think that it has nothing to do with standardisation. I mean broad frameworks need to be standardised and conform to a certain level, but I don’t think one can go so far as to say that that is the way it should happen. I also think that the way you assess largely depends on yourself. Your personality influences the way you teach and many of us choose subjects that engage us.
The above participant suggests establishing a broad standardised framework for assessment. Such a framework needs to be accommodating of lecturers’ different approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. This idea of a framework corresponds to O’Donoghue’s (2007:27) definition of perspectives as “frameworks through which people make sense of the world”. He asserts that the perspective offers a conceptual framework, comprising interrelated sets of responses, which the lecturer can employ to make sense of the physical reality.

The above description indicates lecturers’ implementation of a range of formative assessment methods and techniques. This assessment, which includes case studies and practical class presentations, is graded in percentages.

_L4:_ The class average is usually about 23% or 25%, but we give them a number of opportunities. Part of my assessment is two scheduled tests, only for my section, with a third opportunity and then I add a fourth opportunity or a fourth mark.

The above reference to averages indicates that student performance is measured against an average percentage to determine whether the outcomes were mastered. Although informal formative assessment offers proof of qualitative feedback, no evidence of qualitative or criterion-referenced assessment could be found in the formal formative assessment and makes the faculty’s formative assessment predominantly a quantitative and norm-referenced process.

This approach is in conflict with the principles of outcomes-based assessment. The form that performance-based assessment (case studies, demonstrations and presentations) takes in this faculty speaks of qualitative assessment and should be subject to criterion-referenced assessment. Constructive formative feedback is thus confined to a numerical mark that adds little value to teaching and learning. The norm-referenced approach isolates assessment from the teaching and learning process, since it does not include qualitative assessment (feedback).

Norm-referenced and content-based assessment by implication localise formative assessment within the convergent formative assessment approach. Formative assessment thus serves to determine if the student knows, understands or is capable of a predetermined concept (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).

Determining the reasons behind lecturers’ assessment approaches also necessitated exploring the contributing sociological, cultural and political factors. In this regard the following responses clearly show that the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) is under immense political, cultural and social pressure.
It’s the political situation we find ourselves in...we cannot afford it and must have a flow-through rate. It is not our problem, it is not our problem that so many students must pass, there is so much pressure, not only on the faculty or the institutional office. There is so much pressure on government level that the PUK wouldn’t survive.

According to this participant, the problems they encounter relate to the current pressure on the NWU’s institutional management and by extension the faculty. The government expects a certain flow-through rate, and lecturers consequently go to great lengths to increase the flow-through rate. Certain measures and regulations make it impossible for the lecturer to sidestep this obligation and, according to the participant, it is not the lecturer who decides whether a student can progress to the next study year. The pressure is described to be so intense that the NWU’s survival is at stake, an attitude which spirals down to lecturers having to “see how they can put through students within the current system”.

We try to help them pass, because of the enormous focus on putting through from above. We can’t get around it, there are these regulations and measures from the authorities, not the university, forced on us from the top, so we try to see how we can achieve it within the system.

This political pressure, lecturers encounter within the current political and socio-economic dispensation, can be ascribed to the mass intake of students as well as the lower calibre of student entering the university. One participant even contended that the calibre of student South African schools produces is lower than in Europe.

I think the problem is the quality of student we get is worse. Europe doesn’t have the same problem, because the school system is better.

You see I’m busy with a very interesting experiment, but I think you have to keep in mind that the students sitting in front of you can’t read and deal with large volumes of reading material like you. Once again not because they’re lazy or bad, but because of the system they come from…There are very few students who truly have the passion.

According to participants, the decrease in quality of student can be ascribed to an ineffective school system. One of the core problems mentioned is the basic reading ability of students and their struggle to deal with large volumes of information. In conjunction with this issue (that may possibly be related to it) of an increasingly inferior student body, the tendency of the university is to keep the student dependent.
L2: There is a real culture of keeping students dependent at the PUK and deter them from thinking too big. Those guys struggle to work independently, to function...it is a cultural problem starting with the first-years having to march in rows and wear little hats that type of thing.

The reference to first-year students is somewhat sensitive, given the government investigation into hazing practices, during the research period in 2014, and a number of students and staff were expelled. There were complaints about the militaristic treatment of first-year students during the orientation programme at the university. The issue of the dependency of the student could possibly be attributed to the low quality of student, as a result of a worsening school system, necessitating a certain teaching and learning culture at the NWU.

It is, however, doubtful that the treatment of first-year students entering residences truly has an impact on teaching, learning and assessment. The participants do, at least, demonstrate a deep realisation of the changing nature of assessment (as described in Chapters 2-4).

L2: These days assessment is totally different. I think times have changed. We didn’t do the work to prepare for a test, we prepared because we wanted to learn the work.

The participant’s response suggests the difference in students currently enrolled at the university. Participants consider students with a passion for their chosen subject to be the exceptions.

6.2.2 Summative assessment

Participants attach different levels of value to the importance of the exam as summative assessment. The basic purpose of the exam is to obtain an overall impression of the student’s understanding of the subject content.

L2: I take them through the whole course, because it is the fine detail that needs to be addressed for an overall picture and to ensure that they understand the big picture.

P3: Until then they haven’t dealt with the module as a whole and students don’t learn properly these days.

Exam papers cover the whole semester’s work and deal with the module as a whole. These are generally three-hour exams that count 100 marks, consisting of both short and essay questions that test the student’s understanding of both the individual components and the content as a whole. This summative form of assessment is prized for giving a global overview and impression of the
content, by summarising the semester’s work. It would, however, appear from the following response that in awarding greater weight to the exam, the lecturer is more concerned with lecturer responsibility than with student learning.

L4: This year my third-year exam counted 60% and participation 40%. It is just a move toward giving them a bit more responsibility. They won't do as well in the exam, but that’s just how it works.

The above participant views summative assessment of greater value and accordingly awards a greater percentage of the module mark to the exam paper. This response reflects the exam-driven approach of the faculty, wherein the formative practices of assignments and class tests also serve to prepare students for the exam.

L3: It is the only way to make students exam fit.

L4: Then I constantly have to stop through the semester for important stuff: Oops, I still have to address this because it’s in the exam and then worry a week before the exam whether I got through it all. It’s bad.

Focusing teaching on aspects considered to be important for the exam speaks of exam coaching and teaching towards the exam. In this approach assessment “drives” both teaching and the curriculum, instead of supporting teaching and learning, further reflected in the corresponding questioning technique of tests and exams. Standard procedure requires exam papers to be drawn up at the start of the semester, which results in lecturer’s mainly teaching work that is “important for the exam”.

L1: Then it’s to the detriment of the students, because you don’t present all the work; you only attend to the work you know they’ll get in the exam and that’s not right. Our tests are also drawn up in such a way that they learn what questions to expect in the exam.

The excessive emphasis on the exam and the pressure placed on lecturers (which is addressed further on in the chapter) lead to an exclusive focus on those sections that will be tested in the exam. This exam-driven approach has a direct impact on the teaching process in that it forces the lecturer to “teach towards the exam”.

In contrast to this, another participant advocated the value of formative assessment to the learning process and the need for it to be awarded greater weight.
L2: I personally prefer continuous assessment and even reducing the percentage given to the exam. If you do in-depth continuous assessment, even if it’s on just a little bit of work, and you know the students who wrote the test understand the work and have mastered the concept, then it’s all that is needed…these aren’t subjects where the modules build on each other, they use it in the second year and never again.

The above participant motivates the merit of formative assessment over the exam with the argument that continuous assessment throughout the semester allows for an extensive dissemination of the work, which then makes it unnecessary to rehash knowledge and skills students have already mastered in the exam. The composition of this particular module is not chronological in nature, like many others, and is presented only once during a student’s studies.

The value (or lack thereof) of the exam for summative assessment also came to the fore in the discussion on promotion, which serves to motivate students to participate and work.

L4: Well, I think it would be great to have that option, because it absolutely motivates the student to work hard.

L3: Administratively it would also... Look, I don’t expect that more than half the students will be promoted, but it would lighten the administrative load. If you take, for example, the masses of students Francois have and the stacks of exam papers, together with the pressure to mark it all so that the input process can begin and then have it all ready before the second exam opportunity. It has happened that students have written the second opportunity before even getting feedback on the input. If one could just lower the numbers of students who write.

The practice of exemption from the exam, through marks and promotion, robs the student of the exam’s summative value. The benefits of promotion motivating students and lightening administrative workload do not compare to the contribution summative assessment could make to a student’s learning (Hodnett, 2001:4). This approach is in conflict with the goal of assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning, making assessment a goal in itself.

This devaluing of summative assessment is further confirmed in the following participant’s distinction between formative and summative assessment as separate processes:
L4: The exam has up to now always counted 10%, it’s just another test, just another opportunity, but it means you’re willing to work hard through the course, but having the exam count 40%, no 50%. That’s not continuous evaluation. So, I am absolutely in favour thereof.

The above portrayal of the exam as just another test or opportunity contradicts earlier assertions over the value of the exam providing the lecturer and student with an overall impression of the student’s progress. Such inconsistency extends to the haphazard use of the terms continuous evaluation and continuous assessment.

The participants of this faculty thus treat formative and summative assessment as two separate processes, instead of integrating them into a single approach (Beets, 2007:64). As Beets (2007:45) indicates, evaluation is inherent to value judgements. It is not the assessment process(es) the student underwent or are subject to that are considered important in evaluation, but rather measuring a product of teaching (lecturer). Evaluation implies an activity, removed from the creating process, to render a concise judgement on the success of the creation. Continuous assessment thus aids the lecturer’s evaluation of information from informal as well as formal formative assessment.

The following participant’s cumulative structuring of learning and assessment emphasises the value of integrating these two components into a single process.

L4: It is a cumulative subject. You only come to understand the work at the end of the semester, and then it all falls into place. You have this scenario where even the good students do badly in the beginning, but by the time the exam comes around they do pretty well.

The majority of participants employ the traditional pen-and-paper exam for summative assessment.

L5: Other subjects are about factual knowledge.

L2: ...also a 100-mark exam paper of three hours. Ours is a bit more abstract, a bit more about reasoning. There are short questions, but it often contains more essay questions.

L3: If you try and cover as much work as possible throughout the semester, then the student has gained so much more knowledge already and it doesn’t make sense to force them to study and write about work they have already worked through and written about. It is about memorisation, the exam just tests short-term memory. Can you remember what you memorised the previous day or week?
The above response speaks of “rote learning”, in which content is simply memorised, and is a direct contradiction of the intent to offer an overview of the module as a whole by means of a summative assessment opportunity. It is a strongly content-based and lower-order thinking approach, which contrasts sharply with modules that assess student learning through the debate of prescribed articles.

This faculty’s exam papers simply test factual knowledge, limiting assessment to measuring short-term memory, which is the definition of a syllabus-driven approach subject to a set time framework. The content thus becomes both the starting and end point, largely the result of the faculty policy that requires lecturers to compile their summative assessment at the start of the semester.

L3:  *When you have to draw up an exam paper that early it tends to be very theoretical, you could call it kind of generic.*

L4:  *Now I have to draw up an exam paper at the start of the semester, because it has to undergo three moderations.*

Quality-assurance procedures that require lecturers to submit exam papers for moderation at the start of the semester tend to make them rather theoretical in nature. Teaching, learning and assessment are thus subject to quality-assurance procedures similar to that of standards-based assessment. Such an approach separates assessment from teaching and learning, putting students in the adverse position of becoming just another statistic.

L2:  *The statistics go from bad to worse if you don’t have that kind of thing. One year 480 wrote my subject and not even half the class passed even the second opportunity. Those students went on to the next year and didn’t make it then either. Now I sit with class of 600 students, well more, of which a third still won’t pass. They didn’t make it the previous year and then actually go and fail it again. I now have students who took the subject for the first time three, no four years ago and with students who started that year. They are still in my class.*

According to lecturers, students struggle to meet the academic challenges. This struggle could well be the result of learning barriers such as the fragmented nature of assessment practices, in which formative and summative assessment are not aligned and theory has not been integrated into practice; large classes; and quantitative assessment, which leaves students without the support they need to succeed.
Students failing to pass, despite an exam admission percentage of 40%, and the multiple repetitions of a module, shows that there is something seriously wrong with the teaching, learning and assessment of students. This problem is then exacerbated by the virtual doubling of student numbers, according to a participant, and could have far-reaching implications for the quality of teaching and learning.

Participants furthermore have a quite narrow and fragmented perspective on knowledge and skills, in which skills are addressed in a vacuum.

*L3: It depends on the year level, but in my subject 40% is theory and 60% of the mark is insight, with case studies...*

Case studies enable lecturers to contextualise the content of study units to ensure value and relevance. According to one participant, case studies also serve to establish an overall view.

Case studies are especially beneficial in that they integrate theory and practice, preventing the separate and fragmented application and weighting of these two components of assessment.

A fragmented view on knowledge and skills can be further entrenched when lecturers also view themselves in isolation, as reflected in the following response:

*L1: It will be difficult...we don’t communicate...every subject functions in isolation at this stage. You decide and that’s the way it is. It contributes to the chaos. The student is used to the way things are done in one subject and then in the next one everything is different. They don’t understand why and then it becomes the worst subject in the world to them.*

The isolated functioning of lecturers within this faculty results in a myriad of interpretations and applications of the NWU’s assessment policy to the great confusion of the students. A uniform application of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy may well enable students to better understand academic expectations, but an accurate grasp of learning outcomes should rather be the priority. Clear and explicit formulation of outcomes will give students the focus they need. It became quite apparent from the focus group interview that this faculty does not do criterion-referenced assessment justice, with one participant even mentioning “thumb sucking”.

*L4: My problem about the exam is that I now have to do a bit of thumb sucking at the beginning of the semester on what I should ask the students.*

The above response confirms an earlier revelation that learning is not structured according to the proximal zone of development. Learning does not articulate chronologically with the relevant
learning outcomes and assessment. Should the lecturer account in his planning of summative assessment for the chronological progression of formative assessment (scaffolding) toward summative assessment, the lecturer would know exactly what students need to achieve upon conclusion of the learning process.

One of the key principles of outcomes-based education, as described in Chapter 2, is clarity of focus and designing back. Designing the teaching, learning and assessment strategy back from the set learning outcomes and assessment criteria should enable the lecturer to draw up an exam paper at the beginning of the year that is clearly focused on the learning outcomes of the module.

Some participants have already moved away from the traditional content-based approach to more innovative performance-based assessment. Such alternative assessment entails case studies in open-book exams, a work-integrated module as well as the option of an oral for the third exam opportunity.

The traditional pen-and-paper exam mainly tests short-term memory, according to the participants, while a case study in an open-book exam is more practice oriented.

L3: They thrive on case studies during the semester, then the exam comes along and many bite the dust because it’s so theoretical...while a case study you approach like any lawyer would do in the profession.

L4: I’m in favour of an open-book exam, an open-book Internet exam...you can either do the work or you can’t.

L5: Certain principles within the curriculum you simply have to memorise, the basic principles of...the study material for this year is for example an article by Janssen and one by Du Toit, where their opinions are discussed and critiqued. Next year we take an article of another writer. So the point is not to know the specific content, but to know how to judge and formulate an argument. I guess it depends on the subject.

This participant adapts his/her module every year according to knowledge and skill developments in the industry. The participant’s assertion that students “thrive” on case studies contradicts that of other lecturers who portray students as unmotivated and needing to learn responsibility and discipline. Unlike content-based assessment, this summative assessment approach is intended to integrate theory into true-to-life assessment practice. Open-book exams teach students to glean all possible information from a large volume of sources for practical application. The student
not only learns the theory, but also develops the skill of critical thinking and its assessment. This higher-order skill is assessed in the degree of competence they demonstrate to critique opinions offered in the practical contexts of industry articles.

*L4:* *Every year's content changes according to events within the profession, the media, what the student finds interesting and trouble spots.*

The participant’s yearly revision of content, according to developments in the profession, ensures that his/her module remains relevant and meaningful.

Participants do not, however, share the same views on the contextualisation of content within the industry. The following comment demonstrates the varied perspectives on learning:

*L1:* *It's logic and very practical, so I give a lot of practical examples. You have to understand the concept, not search for the concept and then argue it. I don’t think, I wouldn’t be in favour of an open-book exam for criminal law. Perhaps other subjects.*

This participant deems his/her module as “practical” in nature and, therefore, provides a large number of practical examples. Ironically, he/she is not partial to an open-book exam and considers it unsuitable for the module. In his/her module concepts merely need to be understood and students are not required to develop or apply critical insight to formulate an argument.

The separation of theory from learning, i.e. “learning the basic principles” and “practical sections”, critique and formulating your own argument”, reveals participants’ lack of knowledge on how learning is structured, viz. new learning builds on existent learning; any phase of learning builds on existent, general phases; and systems within ever-expanding systems. Theoretical learning is viewed as being fragmented from application, with the implication that assessment becomes an “add-on” and not an integrated part of teaching and learning.

According to the participants, a case study affords the student the opportunity to explore a problem statement by means of role play or simulation, which they then have to research and resolve the way any lawyer would. Students need access to information and how to apply it in practice, according to another participant in favour of open-book exams. The faculty encourages the practical application of knowledge by offering a practice-oriented/work-integrated module, which is based in a true-to-life professional context.
L1: I know I can’t go into too much detail, I’m not a hundred percent sure how they do it. As far as I know, they divide into groups to assist a real client, conduct an interview and open a file. Then senior staff resume control of the matter.

Participants were unsure of how the work-integrated module is presented and could not offer any detail. Law practice is a compulsory module in which students are divided into groups to form a “firm”. During the first semester cases are explored and in the second semester criminal law is presented. According to the participant, the “firms” then conduct interviews and open files on clients, after which senior staff take over.

Together with the above integration of theory and practice as well as the demonstration of practical skills, participants also mentioned the problems encountered with assessing work-integrated learning.

L4: One of the assignments I give is for them to conduct an interview with a practitioner, but I think the practitioners in Potch might start to rebuff them. It’s only one subject and one assignment per year, but they are inundated and there are only a few practitioners…members of the profession in students’ home towns…moan and groan about the students’ lack of skills and are reluctant to help students.

Work-integrated learning supposedly entails the student working in the relevant profession for a period of time, to then be assessed on their performance in the workplace. Participants indicated the problems encountered with this kind of initiative (in comparison with faculties, in areas that possess the necessary facilities). According to them, the Potchefstroom area does not have the facilities to accommodate all the students to undergo work-integrated learning and assessment.

Even the simple assignment of conducting an interview with a member of the profession was described as “problematic”. The reference to the industry’s reluctance to assist students reflects the negative relationship between the faculty and workplace. Work-based training is considered a problem, which led to the suggestion of a practical year.

L4: I think it could be handy…I have always said that we need something like the Zuma year in medicine, where instead of articles students are used as cheap labour. The State pays them a suitable salary and they are thrown in at the deep end for a year of two in the courts, where they can apply and hone their skills before entering the profession.
L2: I think we have such a limited time to do an enormous amount of work and if it’s not something similar to a dissertation or a community year, those students won’t learn a thing. Another concern I have with students being sent out to work somewhere is that they will come into contact with strange people. It’s a nightmare out there...

Participants suggested a practical year, in which students can develop their skills, before entering the profession. The response that students are exploited for “cheap labour” confirms the lack of positive collaboration between the faculty and the industry. It is also felt that work-integrated learning should be “initiated by the industry” (D4).

It is clear to the participant that unless work-integrated learning is presented in the form of a dissertation or community service year, given the limited time and volume of work, students are not likely to learn anything. Considering the workplace a nightmare conveys the mistrust within the profession for which lecturers must prepare students.

One of the participants described the modules in this faculty as “synthetically” structured and that the knowledge gained through tertiary study cannot be applied during the study period, as required in work-integrated learning.

L4: All our subjects are synthetically divided. Criminal law, civil law, thousands of things at once and you have only gained that knowledge after about four years, so it isn’t something we can do while their still studying.

The synthetic division of modules indicates the continued strong content-based assessment in the faculty, despite the use of case studies and open-book tests. The above responses clearly reflect the participants’ distinction between work-integrated learning and tertiary education, reaffirming the vacuum created between theory and practice.

Aside from the alternative assessment methods of open-book exams and a work-integrated module, some lecturers also offer students a third exam opportunity in the form of an oral – an option that is also offered during formative assessment.

L5: ...the third opportunity of an oral doesn’t need to be marked, because it’s an essay question, an argument that has to be written out.

According to the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), the third exam opportunity is offered to students who only require one module to graduate. The participant contends that trends show that if the student failed the first and second opportunities, he/she is unlikely to pass the third one.
In this case the lecturer decided on an alternative (“something different”) form of summative assessment, viz. an oral exam. Some participants are not in favour of the alternative method of an oral exam, describing it as intimidating.

L3: I always fear that the oral perhaps places a bit more pressure or stress on the student. It could in a sense be adverse, because in a written exam the student can calmly sit down and think. There’s no one waiting on a response…where the more he struggles to come up with the answer, the more stressed he becomes, because he knows you’re becoming impatient or you think he’s stupid and then he strikes a blank. I usually look away, I don’t sit and stare at him.

It is reasoned that the student does not receive the same opportunity to think about an answer, as is the case with a pen-and-paper exam. The student may find the face-to-face scenario with the lecturer and/or panel intimidating and stressful, which could inhibit his/her demonstration of his/her knowledge and skills.

One participant explained that although an oral exam may place pressure on the student, it delivers better results than the traditional pen-and-paper exam.

L4: I chat with them, we talk about the work. I do this especially with my really weak students that come to me for help. Then you realise that it’s a small little problem and they actually know the work, but there’s just something about the oral that enables you to help the student and then they do much better in the written exam. Statistics have shown how at Stellenbosch, where they did orals in every subject every year, students consistently achieved better marks in orals. Yes, it is very stressful for them, but...you don’t expect a student to give a well-reasoned answer on which he could draw up a 20-minute flow chart. So, I think it helps them.

This participant is in favour of the open-book exam and indicated that the problem of stress can be overcome by putting the student at ease by conducting the oral exam in a conversational manner. It is also apparently the weak students that have the most to gain from an oral exam, since the lecturer can offer more individual support. This is a more student-centred approach that takes into account the specific needs of the student, such as dyslexia.

L3: I think he has dyslexia is all, but he is so smart he gets away with it. He teaches everyone around him, but he can’t…
This student is able to verbalise his knowledge and skills, according to the lecturer, but he struggles to record it in writing. The participant found that it is not only students that qualify for the third opportunity or have specific learning problems that benefit from an oral exam; all students can attain better results with this assessment method. The response also expresses the necessity of an assessment environment conducive to a student optimally demonstrating his/her knowledge.

Aside from investigating whether the faculties follow a criterion-referenced and norm-referenced, or content- or performance-based approach, the research also explored lecturers’ view on students. The consideration below of the student’s personal circumstances is a further indication of a more student-centred relationship:

L1: I don’t know if it’s really fair, because maybe he was only going through a bad and hectic time with the first opportunity and all is better with the second opportunity, which he then passes. Miracles do happen...

Taking into account the student’s personal and particular needs and circumstances conforms to the principle of fairness of outcomes-based assessment.

In contrast to such a student-centred and accommodating assessment approach, there are also those participants who follow a strongly prescriptive and standards-based approach.

L2: My lectures go as follows: Every full stop, comma, footnote, space in the study guide and textbook and whatever I say is prescribed. This is the last time we talk about it.

L4: I really feel strongly about this. Students often complain. They say that tests are not on the same standard as the exam, but with good reason. In our subject each test is on the same standard as the exam. It is a cumulative subject; you only understand the work at the end of the semester. Then it all falls into place. So you have a scenario in which even the good students do badly at the beginning, but when they get to the exam they do quite well.

The response of the first participant speaks of a strongly prescriptive approach and the reference to “This is the last time we talk about it” speaks of the “one-size-fits-all” nature of the standards-based methodology, which largely excludes the student from providing input into the teaching and learning process. This approach leaves little room for the student to be innovative and requires the slavish following of prescriptions.

Standards-based education could indeed lead to the excessive student dependence mentioned above that reduces the student to an object within the teaching and learning process. The
standards-based approach creates a cold and clinical relationship between the lecturer and student, reflected in the following response of a lecturer who likes to “shock” the students at the beginning of the year:

L2: *I think you would get the students to the level you want much easier than now. I know there are many lecturers who go to a lot of trouble to make their tests progressively more difficult and I don’t have a problem with that, but I just like to shock them…*

L4: *That’s why they want to kill themselves at the beginning of the semester, because they get 20%. They studied for days, because it’s the same standard as the exam.*

Employing assessment to not only motivates, but to even “shock” students shows that assessment in this case is a process independent of teaching and learning. No wonder students despair and, as the participant states, “want to kill themselves”. Assessment is thus not only far removed from the teaching and learning process, but may also estrange the student from the lecturer as mentor.

Contributing to this tension is lecturers’ practice of quantitatively assessing the information obtained from performance-based assessment (case studies and practical demonstrations). Lecturers employ norm-referenced assessment, which is quantitative in nature, to assess applied competence, which is qualitative in nature.

L5: *I’m not saying it’s the norm, but there are many modules with a pass rate of 35% for the first opportunity and it is the second opportunity that pulls the class through. But the average is around 50, 55% for the first opportunity.*

The quantitative approach measures student performance against the average performance or results of the rest of the class. This way the lecturer quantitatively determines whether the student achieved the predetermined learning outcomes. Lecturers may well claim to use alternative true-to-life performance-based assessment, such as open-book exams and case studies, but they continue to use norm-referenced assessment to determine whether the student achieved the outcomes. This reflects an excessive dependence on marks and percentages, in the form of promotion marks, to motivate and manipulate students.

L3: *I think in that way you’ll also deal with those who only aim for a participation mark of 50 for admission to the exam. If you can motivate them by saying if you just get a little bit more, then you don’t even have to write the exam, then you’ll get their cooperation. You will have*
those who shine in class tests, because they have this carrot dangling in front of them and something to work toward.

The above summative assessment approach contradicts participants’ argument for a greater percentage weight to the exam. According to participants, promotion serves as incentive for exemption from writing the final exam. The motivation and cooperation of students seem to be more important than the value of summative assessment to provide a complete overview of the work, previously advocated. Students are so focused on marks that as soon as they achieve that exemption mark, they no longer attend class.

L2: ...class attendance also falls. If you, for example, attended 80% of the session and achieved the 80 throughout the semester for promotion…we can’t do it, our classes are running empty that way.

It clearly illustrates the negative effects of using marks to motivate students to complete assignments or attend class. The opposite is also true. Without the implication of a loss of marks, students don’t complete assignments or attend class. It must be mentioned that the practice of “promotion” does not form part of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012). This preoccupation with marks and norm-referenced assessment not only has an adverse effect on teaching and learning, but also on self-regulated and life-long learning.

The above inability of the participants to differentiate between formative and summative objectives, norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment as well as content-based and performance-based assessment seems to reveal their need for training. They also indicated the lack of adequate training for the implementation of outcomes-based assessment and were unaware of the training that is indeed available.

L3: What is that, why don’t I know about it? Did you receive a special invitation?

L4: I just want to say something about staff training. Many of the forms, I can’t remember if it’s on our appointment contract or somewhere else, but at some point it asks whether you’ve done any short courses or training at another institution. So whatever training we get on campus doesn’t count, which I think is a problem.

Although a lecturer’s employment contract refers to in-service training, in the form of short courses, participants were unaware of any courses. This lack of training is one of the main causes for the problems lecturers (and students) experience with assessment.
6.3 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 2

6.3.1 Formative assessment

The faculty does not distinguish between informal and formal formative assessment. Only practical assignments, described as “simply activities in class” are considered to be informal formative assessment.

*T3: The practical is simply activities in class. I don’t know whether I’m going to assess it, since it isn’t really part of the syllabus, so I just do it informally in class.*

These activities are deemed informal, according to the participant, since they do not form part of the “syllabus” and student performance is thus not recorded.

Formal formative assessment takes the form of written assignments, tasks, electronic assignments on eFundi and class tests. Semester tests are considered formative assessment, because the test scores contribute to the student’s participation mark. As with Faculty 1, it is generally believed that an assignment or test mark that contributes to the participation mark makes the test or assignment “formative”. A closer look at assessment practices reveals them to be an endeavour to determine learning, i.e. summative assessment for an overall impression of the student’s progress.

*T1: I have a weekly class test on text they haven’t yet seen to see how much they can do.*

*T3: I have them write a class test once a week, on the work covered that week, and then they have homework for each day. I’m still considering how often I’ll have them submit it, because it’s more about reviewing the exercise in class than making it part of their mark.*

Class tests are written on a weekly basis to review the work of that week. Assessment thus occurs at the end of every week and by implication at the end of every study unit. The information obtained from such so-called formative assessment serves to assess student performance. Despite the lack of a true understanding and application of informal formative assessment in this faculty, learning is nonetheless seen as a continuous process and described as a chain reaction.

*T4: I find it’s like mathematics, if you don’t understand something, it’s like a chain reaction, then you’re not going to understand what comes next either. So, the lecturer needs to keep up with students’ progress, because if you work too fast and they fall behind, then you’re going to lose them.*
Viewing learning as cumulative and articulated through assessment speaks of integrated assessment, in which feedback is aimed at guiding the student on how to proceed to the next level or how to solve the problem. A participant also mentioned the history society meeting, held every Wednesday evening, at which students present their projects.

**T1:** *We have an ancient history society that meets on Wednesday evenings once a month. If the quality of the tasks is good enough, then I will hopefully have them present it. The main objective is to be able to read and write Latin.*

This diverse formative assessment approach centres on discovering the student’s knowledge, comprehension and capability, rather than the intentions of the lecturer. This aim is further demonstrated in participants’ suggestion that summative assessment (exam) should bear less importance.

**T2:** *See, we only have one outcome and that is for the student to, for example, read the Vulgate – the Latin Bible – and is the topic of one of the tests or he has them read the Vulgate every week anyway and that is the objective…so if they can do that, why should they write an exam?*

The formative assessment approach leans so much towards formative assessment in terms of weighting that it makes the exam as summative assessment technique unnecessary. This strongly formative approach is just the opposite to that of Faculty 1, which greatly favours summative assessment in the form of an exam at the end of the semester.

The participant finds it senseless to require a student who has already achieved an outcome to undergo another assessment. The value of the exam as summative assessment opportunity is further reflected in the division of percentage weight between the participation and exam mark.

**T4:** *In my subject the participation mark also counts 70% and the examination 30%...*

**T2:** *I just find it a bit difficult to incorporate because we don’t have a proper computer programme that can sort all those tests and give the best 10.*

The weighting ratio between the participation and exam mark conforms to the framework provided in the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012). The policy states that the participation mark may bear a maximum weight of 70% and the exam mark a minimum of 30%, which reflects norm-referenced assessment. Student performance is not only measured against the average (norm)
of the class, but also in terms of rank (e.g. “the 10 best students”). The norm-referenced and quantitative approach focuses predominantly on content.

*T2:* It’s more about content.

*T2:* Structure, you know the way you would mark any assignment....Then just the vocabulary and conjunctions and processing and that also counts 50, makes up the participation mark and my examination paper is 50.

Assessment following the content-based approach awards marks for factuality (e.g. vocabulary, conjunctions, processing and structure). It was indeed indicated that assignments are assessments according to an established structure, but the criteria against which student performance is measured are not clear and neither are the criteria for practical work, where assessment chiefly relates to the grading of competence. The intent of the formative assessment will remain, as indicated below, to provide an “overall picture” of completed work or progress.

*T4:* I have them write two big tests, the conventional semester test that provides an overall picture of the work. It’s a bit atomistic to the class, but I really want them to gain an overall view and so I also give them two big semester tests.

*T1:* …then I have a weekly class test on text they haven’t yet seen to see how much they can do.

All assignments, class tests and conventional semester tests form part of the student's participation mark and are thus deemed formative assessment. These “formative assessment opportunities” are, however, offered to create an overall impression of the student’s progress. Not only is formative assessment applied for summative purposes, but it also serves to address student behaviour (as in Faculty 1) by means of class tests.

*T1:* Each week I give a task, every period they submit translations like homework translations and it’s just scored according to the effort they put in and on how right it is.

*T2:* Yes, I use small tests to check attendance…

*T1:* We do it that they are at least prepared for class because it’s of course done in class…

*T2:* I’ve started to think that maybe I should just make it a group assignment, so they can work together, because some simply give their answers to others and then the exercise is pointless.
Last year’s assignments were of no use, because they all did well having worked together and it didn’t reflect their own abilities and that is why I think tests are simply better...they work together and inevitably it’s only the good students who do the work…Copying to get the mark.

This faculty has the same issues with class attendance, diligence and responsibility as Faculty 1. Assessment is adjusted accordingly and the traditional pen-and-paper class test also serves, just as in Faculty 1, to compel students to attend class and complete assignments. Similarly, this faculty also displays an excessive focus on marks, which are used to motivate and manipulate students. There are, however, some participants who seek more innovative methods to assess. One example is the novel way of dealing with students copying each other’s work with group work.

T3: Yes, it’s not so much copying as collaboration.

T2: They become very indignant and say “but we always work together, we are a study group”.

T2: Yes, I thought of setting aside an afternoon for this kind of group work.

T4: I carry out. One is on e-Fundi, where they have to do and submit a particular assignment, which I then mark and on which I also give feedback on e-Fundi. Sometimes they bring the article, if I gave an assignment on an article, to class and then they assess each other’s work in groups, just to initiate a bit of discussion on perspectives to the work other than your own. I usually also provide them with a scheme…

Some students’ habit of copying work or “working together” is consciously and effectively turned around into group work. Cooperative teaching and learning occur through the discussion of an article, wherein group work is employed as a teaching method that is more geared to investigating different perspectives and not so much focused on assessment, a technique also described in Faculty 1. It involves the students in the assessment process in the form of peer assessment according to guidelines provided by the lecturer.

This assessment approach to “initiate a bit of discussion on perspectives to work other that on your own” correlates more with the divergent formative assessment approach. Assessment is hereby jointly accomplished by the lecturer and the student to produce the best performance (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

Although these guidelines are adequate for peer or self-assessment, the lack of clear assessment criteria will inhibit the validity and reliability of the assessment. In contrast to the above diverse
approach to assessment, which even includes self- and peer assessment, the following participant explained why he/she prefers to do the assessment personally.

*T3: I considered it for the presentation in class, but if it’s a whole video they can do it at home as well...in the end it’s just easier and quicker if I do it myself. Then I also form a good idea of what they understand and don’t understand and what they find difficult.*

The lecturer simply finds it easier and more efficient to conduct the assessment personally. It is also implied that the lecturer determines students’ knowledge by means of baseline and diagnostic assessment. It is, however, expected that the use of assistants/honours students to teach and assess in their stead will not make it possible to review their progress or as the lecturer put it “form a good idea of what they understand and don’t understand”.

*T2: Classes are often presented by honours students and I think they’re making the grade at the moment, because they’re simply following the example of how their professor or honours student taught them.*

The participant’s mention that these honours students are “making the grade...simply following...how their professor or honours student taught them” speaks of a lecturer-centred approach, where the student mimics the lecturer. Self-, peer and group assessment may well produce valuable information on a student’s progress, but it is doubtful that an honours student who is lecturing on an ad hoc basis could convey any information on a student’s actual level of progress.

6.3.2 Summative assessment

The participants strongly advocate formative assessment and yet the following responses show the ratio between formative and summative assessment – i.e. participation and exam mark – to be 70:30.

*T4: Yes, I do. It doesn’t need to count 50%; I could lower it to 20%.*

*T1: 50%*

*T3: 30%*

*T2: 50%*

They generally agree that summative assessment should form a smaller percentage of the module mark, yet they continue to draw up three-hour 200-mark exam papers.
T4: It's the usual three-hour paper, of 200 marks, which I compile in such a way that a prepared student will be finished about 30 minutes ahead of time and the remaining time is for the slow thinkers.

The time given for a 200-mark exam paper is three hours, a well-prepared student will apparently complete the exam with 30 minutes to spare and it is only the “slow thinkers” that require the entire exam session. The stated goal of this summative assessment is (as with formative assessment…!) to “review all the work”.

T4: It's actually just a final assessment in which the student reviews all the work and it, together with the small and two big semester examinations, gives me a rather good impression of a student’s ability…. It is basic an overview of the work during the quarter.

The exam is intended to provide a complete picture of the student’s ability. Lecturers do not as yet exploit the formative value of the summative assessment and this may well be the reason a weighting of even less than 50% is sought. The lecturers of this faculty thus employ mainly formative and summative assessment to “review all the work”, which is basically repetitive assessment. This repetitive assessment could be a consequence of students’ lack of language and technical skills.

T2: I include a bit of history and expressions which is pure memorisation, providing those who struggle with the intricacy of the grammar…they do gain, I believe, a great deal during the year by way of improved analytical skills, vocabulary, etc.

T1: You give them a text to translate

The preference for the pen-and-paper exam is not only concerned with the memorisation of historical facts and expressions, but also with developing analytical skills. Practical application of language skills occurs through translation exercises and is the traditional content-based method, which conforms to the norm-referenced approach in which content is quantitatively assessed in terms of marks and percentages.

In contrast to the content-based approach, in which the content is the goal in itself, a participant explained that in the design of the exam paper the student’s developmental level – the student’s already acquired knowledge and skills – is taken into account.

T1: I also find that every student has his strong and weak points and it’s easy to see, so when formulating a question you know which students will master it and which won’t. I try to draw
up the paper that all students’ weak points are addressed equally…rather difficult because not all 12 individuals progress at the same rate.

The lecturer allows for the difference in working pace among students in the design of the exam paper. Unlike Faculty 1, Faculty 2 has no difficulty in placing students in the workplace and work-integrated learning is an established practice, as the following responses indicate:

T4: *Currently they go work in a congregation and some of the credits awarded relate to work-integrated learning.*

T4: *Yes, the minister is supposed to write a report, but it’s all part of quality assurance since every minister writes it his own way.*

Assessment of the student entails the minister, of the congregation where the student is placed, writing a report on the student’s progress as part of quality-assurance procedures. This report is not, however, an integrated part of the academic teaching and learning process, since no standardised assessment format has been established.

Currently the faculty explores innovative methods of implementation of work-integrated learning through community and research projects. These projects include teaching Latin to children in Ikageng and other schools in Potchefstroom, excavation in Israel, etc. These projects are not aimed at student education or academic assessment, according to the participants, but to serve the community.

T2: *We’re only now starting with it in the teaching committee. We have drawn up a document and we’re planning to meet with the programme leaders for their suggestions on how to incorporate it into their modules, e.g. the counselling lecturer sitting in with…. He has them sit in and when they have progressed a bit, he allows them to counsel children, etc. themselves. We have a project in which we teach Latin to children in Ikageng and other schools in Potch, so we are involved. It is, however, more of a community and research project, because it provides us with data.*

Students also serve in community projects in less-affluent areas, like Ikageng, and by teaching Latin to learners in Potchefstroom schools. Practical experience is gained through placement in congregations. No formal assessment structure has been established, according to participants, for assessing work-integrated learning according to a performance-based assessment approach.

T2: *We have concepts, but don’t have ways of implementing them.*
Aside from the mentioned assessment document, planning is underway for the assessment of work-integrated learning – for incorporation into all modules – including assessment procedure for the programme leader on the different activities.

Work-integrated learning is also deemed an opportunity to conduct research. This faculty is, similar to Faculty 1, intensely focused on research to the point that some participants feel excluded.

*T4: See, we’re a top research faculty and to me who leans toward teaching it’s quite strange. I feel a bit neglected…only the teaching committee really ascribe to the importance of teaching and should there be a meeting that I can’t attend because of my class schedule, then I get a kind of unconcerned “so?” in response.*

According to the participants, the faculty is a “top research faculty” and teaching is neglected. One participant stated that lecturer’ research efforts are over-emphasised, which has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The teaching community seems to be the only body that takes the value and interests of teaching to heart. The particular participant feels excluded and denied adequate support.

### 6.4 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 3

Participants distinguish between informal formative and formal formative assessment, whereby formative assessment consists of assignments and tests as well as semester tests that are formal in nature. It is deemed to be continuous assessment, contributing to the participation mark for exam admission. Although formative assessment is emphasised, the information obtained from informal and formative assessment is applied for summative purposes.

#### 6.4.1 Formative assessment

Informal formative assessments are considered “informal”, because the activities do not contribute marks towards the participation mark.

*E1: I have 15 assessment opportunities; a 16-credit subject, but 11 of those opportunities collectively only make up 10% of the module. It’s informal, like playing poker with matches and five cent coins.*
E2: *We can assess informally, the students can evaluate themselves and see where they stand. The responsibility then shifts to them, but you still have to...I mean, the goal is still to determine where. The aim of assessment is not only to get students to learn. You want him on a certain level, but that student must measure his own progress.*

The above participant offers 15 assessment opportunities that contribute 10% toward the participation mark and thus considered informal formative assessment. Similar to Faculty 1 and 2, this faculty conducts formative assessment for summative purposes and do not utilise the assessment information obtained from informal formative to strengthen the teaching and learning process.

As advocated by Yorke (2003:479), one of the participants gives a “pretest” to determine students’ level of knowledge and skills.

E2: *What I have done...on eFundi and which takes a bit of time, is give a pretest for the practical...like, for example, doing three sums. There are 25 of them, of which 11 are exactly the same and only the values differ and then of course the answers. So, it is basically either right or wrong, but it only counts five marks...*

The aim of “informal formative assessment” is to promote participation in learning events and also to ensure that the student reaches a certain level. Baseline and diagnostic assessment serve to determine the student’s existing knowledge and skills, conducted prior to any form of instruction (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:182; Hodnett, 2001:3) by the lecturer.

E2: *We don’t test metacognition at all, but we don’t get to that constructivist and cognitive, high-level cognitive, learning. We don’t give marks for the method someone writes down; he has to do the sum and then we check whether the answer is right, but he must be marked on the method he follows.*

All that seems to be important during assessment is the accuracy of answers (the product), not the methodology followed. The development and assessment of metacognition is not a priority. This is a convergent formative assessment approach aimed at discovering *if* the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. The questioning and tasks are closed or pseudo-open tick lists (“yes” and “no”) and can-do statements. The lecturer views the curriculum as a product rather than a process. The participant’s response characterises the convergent formative assessment approach as judgemental or quantitative evaluation (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).
In contrast with the convergent formative assessment, in which the student is only the recipient of assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617), a participant described the student as being central to all teaching and learning events.

*E3: The student is more important to me than how much the lecturer struggles to mark. I want to give the student as many chances as possible to give the best answer he can by not overloading him with all this stuff…or hurt his efforts. Or they help me present the class, but that’s just one part…the test is not really assessment, it just forces them to prepare because if he doesn’t prepare, then he doesn’t know what to ask. Now he goes through the work, draws up a test and gets someone else’s test.*

The above lecturer involves the student in the teaching, learning and assessment process, turning assessment into an “act of collaboration” (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617). Assessment is integrated into the teaching process and serves as preparation for the learning event. Students are afforded the opportunity, in preparation for class, to draw up an open-book class test and conduct peer assessment. This promotes the learning process, according to the participant, in that the student assumes responsibility for assessment. It furthermore reduces the anxiety normally felt with a traditional test drawn up by the lecturer.

The above multi-dimensional approach, (including knowledge, abilities, thought processes, meta-cognition and emotional factors) to assessment differs from the current conventional or exclusive knowledge-driven quantitative summative way of assessment, which mostly disregards the multiple intelligence potential of students (Mothata et al. 2005:87), as reflected in the following response:

*E: Someone with a participation mark of 20% goes to the lecturer and the lecturer says: fine, you can write, but you have to get 80. Then he writes out 80.*

Student performance is reported in terms of percentage and class position, denoting the evaluation of the student’s progress in terms of “pass” or “fail”. Hodnett (2001:5) explains that the aim of this kind of assessment is for students’ scores to be “normal” against an average or median, within a predetermined range. Student performance is spread against the normal distribution curve, to award a certain value to that performance (Meyer et al., 2010:53).

As with Faculty 1 and 2, the practical that supposes performance-based assessment is assessed quantitatively rather than qualitatively. The participant’s perspectives on the application of
quantitative and qualitative assessment are fraught with contradictions, as the following response indicates:

E1: Make the passing grade 80 percent, then you can eliminate the participation mark. Then assessment drives learning. You have to decide what’s best for your students to learn and then structure your assessment system in such a way that it will encourage them to learn that way, if you want them to learn systematically…

This response is contradictory in the sense that reference is made to a standards-based and norm-referenced system, where a standard is set for a particular passing grade that could also serve as incentive for promotion. The view that “assessment drives learning”, rather than “assessment to serve learning”, is typical of standards-based assessment. On the other hand, the participant refers to an assessment system in which the lecturer acts and assesses in the interest of the student, where assessment is adapted to the needs of the student. A student-centred assessment system advocates continuous and formative assessment that centres on growth, development and progress.

Formal formative assessment occurs by means of assignments, class tests and semester tests. According to participants, the nature of the module determines the assessment technique.

E2: You have to distinguish between the types of modules presented. Some are projects, some are design, some are pure classic teaching according to the textbook…but textbook teaching is the norm. You know three tests, 50-50, three practicals. I think we could perhaps do a bit more project-based learning…or rather problem-based learning – move away from the project – problem-based teaching and learning must be introduced, but it’s a process and takes time so we’re not ready for that yet…the young lecturers are still being shaped, there is no time to spend too much energy on that. You must first gain experience in the field, before you start the module.

E1: If your exam paper tests whether he studied and memorised it, then it’s pointless. If the paper is problem-based, however, and he can solve the problem, then he should pass.

Participants consider certain modules more appropriate for performance-based assessment, like projects and design. Textbook teaching, reflecting traditional content-based assessment, is appropriate for other modules. A problem-based approach is suggested as a means to move away from project-based learning that is aimed at teaching, learning and assessment that is more relevant to the profession.
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E3: It is about a few fundamental principles that need to be learned. They must then be taught how to use those fundamentals to identify, formulate and solve problems as well as looking at how we resolve the problem and all the varying examples, but instead to focus on a few that exemplify the principles better…

The student is presented with a problem, requiring a specific activity, and must then gather and apply information/knowledge to solve the problem in a particular context. Problem-based assessment is considered time consuming and young lecturers are as yet unprepared for this alternative approach. Although the integration of theory and practice is mentioned, assessment consists of conventional tests and three practical tests in a 50:50 ratio. This practice of assessing theory and application separately matches the isolation of content discovered in the fragmented views and implementation of Faculty 1 and 2. One participant also then emphasised that the knowledge obtained must be relevant.

E2: I think that for the knowledge you obtain at university to be of value you have to…even after five years in the profession, you still need to retain some of it. In other words, the longer you can recall what you learned, the better the chance of it being of value when it comes to actually doing it. So the further the guy can stretch it, the more confident he feels.

The value of the education that students acquire at the university is only realised once they have applied it for a number of years in their chosen profession. This requires, it is argued, long-term retention of knowledge and the longer the student is able to recall the instruction he/she receives at university, the greater the value of the learning. In other words, the education received at university is only truly worthwhile when it is applied in the workplace or a true-life context. This faculty finds it very difficult, however, to implement this premise and the student's ability to apply acquired knowledge in a work environment is not considered a priority for the NWU.

E1: There is holiday work in a subject that requires reporting on having performed certain activities, but it's very controversial.

Application of knowledge and skills is not realised in practice, however, and work-integrated learning is limited to holiday work and assessment to the submission of a report. As in the case of Faculty 1, the implementation of such learning is hampered by a lack of both facilities and an adequate practitioner pool, which reflects the same poor cooperation with the industry found in Faculty 1. This circumstance is evidenced in the following response:
E2:  *We cannot force the industry to have students do certain stuff. I know at other universities they decided to make this holiday work subject a priority and lecturers take responsibility by promising to help the industry. They choose a number of places and help to identify certain problems students must take on. They make sure there are enough resources to enable the student to do so and they also help with assessment at the end. But at this stage, I don’t think I would be able to sell this kind of thing to my colleagues.*

E1:  *...then you need the right companies that are willing to cooperate, then you can...*

E3:  *There won’t be uniformity, but at least it would be a good opportunity instead of what we have now.*

These participants cite the successful enterprises of other universities, lacking at the NWU, to promote work-integrated learning. The responses highlight how other universities assume the responsibility of collaborating with the industry to ensure adequate resources and identify the activities that students can perform during their practical period. These universities are also involved in the assessment process, upon conclusion of this practical component.

It could be concluded that work-integrated learning and professional cooperation at the NWU are impeded by the dearth of resources and facilities. As the participant indicated, “the right companies” that are willing to collaborate are needed.

This is a finding that once again highlights the absence of quality professionals in the rural town of Potchefstroom (as discovered with Faculty 1).

A further deterrent to work-based learning is lecturers’ reluctance to take ownership of such experiential learning and assessment practices, as the above participant indicated. One of the main objections related to the conventional educational approach is that it fails to prepare students for functioning effectively in the workplace (Huysamen, 2002:84)

### 6.4.2 Summative assessment

It has already been mentioned that lecturers obtain assessment information from informal and formal formative assessment applied for summative purposes. Therefore it is unusual when a participant does not offer a summative assessment opportunity, as in the following case:

E2:  *I do not have an exam opportunity in my module. The group work builds up towards an individual assignment that they have to submit the day the exam begins. Group work is
formative after all, they form each other. I feel you can test it throughout, without having to test it at the end of the year in the exam. You know, it depends on what you ask in semester tests.

Tests and assignments serve as both formative and summative assessment. The summative exam assessment opportunity becomes redundant, according to the participant, when semester tests and assignments can perform the summative function just as well. This formative assessment approach employs group work (which is a teaching method), towards an eventual individual assignment that will be submitted for the exam as assessment method and the student thus assumes responsibility for informal formative assessment.

The individual assignment that eventuates in an individual assignment is then the summative overview of the student’s performance at the end of the semester or year and in this way summative assessment is applied formatively. The section on formative assessment revealed the participants’ great advocacy for formative assessment and abolishment of the exam.

As is the case with the problem-based approach and work-integrated learning, this student-centred approach is not realised in practice. Practices remain centred on the exam, with but one exception, reflected in the weighting ratio of 70% to 30% between the exam and participation mark respectively as well as the importance participants attach to summative assessment for obtaining an overview of student progress.

E1: The tests themselves make up 50% of the mark, of the participation mark, assignments count 30% and the practical counts 20% and then in the exam the participant counts 30% and the exam 70%.

E2: There is no overview and that is why a summative exam at the end of the year...or at the end of a period is important to get an integrated overview and insight and to see whether students...the questions in these specific tests, exam paper, etc. are of course very important to show whether you are testing bits and pieces or integrated knowledge as well.

The goal of the exam is to obtain an integrated overview at the end of the semester, which makes the type of questions posed of great importance. Such an integrated approach requires the student to apply subject-specific knowledge and skills within a real-world context, which is why the following participant offers students the opportunity to write the international exam:
E1: Yes, they write exams. Last year I started giving them the option of writing an international exam...that everyone can write and carries the same percentage. So if they pass it, they don’t have to write my exam.

The international exam, similar to the usual exam, is a three-hour paper that is written during the semester and, if passed, exempts the student from writing the university’s semester exam. The emphasis is on the credible use of testing knowledge in a true-to-life and meaningful context or as indicated earlier within the professional milieu.

As previously mentioned, students are not prepared for problem-based assessment yet and, as argued above, this is the reason for a return to the conventional content-based approach of memorisation.

E2: Yes well, only two percent of them can do it and the problem is that some people have a better long-term memory, while some have a better short-term memory. The guy with the good short-term memory will be able to do it, while the one with the long-term memory won’t...

E3: Not only memory. Some guys are really smart and if you test smartness, then you’ll pass on that guy, because he’ll manage it easily...but sometimes in-depth learning is absent...our passing mark is not high enough to support it.

E3: Yes, you can’t get a higher mark from the same exam paper, you need a paper that tests insight...to me an engineer that has 100% recall ability, but no insight is useless; I mean he isn’t an engineer. The system favours good recall...60% of the exam can be passed purely on recall ability, with the other 40% testing insight. So the guy who has a photographic memory can pass, literally without understanding anything he learned just by cramming the previous evening.

E2: That’s the problem with maths; 50% of the questions are formulas, which they can learn by heart.

The low pass rate (and flow-through numbers) prevent lecturers from including “in-depth” and higher-cognitive questions in the exam. Participants emphasising memory, both short- and long-term, highlights the focus on the memorisation of content. Students simply assimilate content and reproduce content, in pen-and-paper exams, without being able to demonstrate the desired skills in practice.
This form of summative assessment harks back to the conventional assessment approach where the body of information (also often referred to as the body of knowledge) of a particular field is of great importance and this importance justifies its incorporation into the learning programmes, as Bellis (2001:184) states.

The participants do indeed recognise the need for summative assessment to test insight, as the comments above show, and yet the predominant use of the pen-and-paper exam remains limited to memorisation and comprehension of content (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:183).

The acquisition of content is uppermost and intellectual demands are limited to memory (either short- or long-term) and comprehension of the cognitive levels, leaving little opportunity for the development of students higher-order skills or what the one participant referred to as “in-depth” learning. The content-based approach, just described, naturally gives rise to norm-referenced assessment.

None of the participants consider the training they received adequate for successful implementation of outcomes-based assessment and are, for example, not able to assess group work, problem-based teaching or work-integrated learning for which continuous training was requested.

E1:  It needs to be continuous training, not only at the start, and not only for young lecturers, but also for senior lecturers. Things change and the way students think and learn change and then you stubbornly resist...I'm barely 10 years older than my students and for the first time I'm experiencing the generation gap, where I don't understand their thinking. So much the more for my older colleagues.

E2:  I think that aside from needing continuous training, we should also be continuously assessed and not necessarily by the students, but by our peers. Because I know of a colleague who wrote out a transparency 15 years ago that he still recites today. He won't present any other subject, because then he might have to put together a slideshow and so a projector needs to be carried into that awful class...for him to present his class.

Participants consider their initial training inadequate and suggested that both new and senior lecturers need continuous training to keep them abreast of developments in the education field. This would prevent cases like the use of 15-year old information, the participant mentioned. It is truly worrisome to learn that lecturers could be unaware of recent developments in pedagogy as
well as the constant change in student culture. The state of the introduction and assessment training of newly appointed lecturers is especially of concern.

**E1:** Phase one for the ICNL courses was held over three days...It could have been presented in half a day and then taken further by a mentor. Someone talking about how they assess in the arts doesn’t mean much to me, but if it’s a mentor in the same subject field, it would be much better...

**E2:** Yes, I have to say that the times I acted as mentor, I made sure to do that stuff right. It just depends...question is...how devoted is the mentor...

**E3:** There are conditions. If they are trained, then that mentor must needs to work it, because...the abstraction with which newly appointed lecturers are taught. It’s too much, it’s abstract...you have to point-for-point implement it in your environment.

The initial training offered to new lecturers is deemed generic and abstract, according to participants, who don’t consider it either relevant or adequate. The structuring of the courses also seems to leave much to be desired, with the suggestion that the three-day presentation be reduced to half a day and lecturers undergo further subject-specific training from a devoted mentor that would continue to offer guidance and support. Participants also expressed the need for such training to include insight into and strategies for teaching to a “new generation” of students.

**E2:** ...how to be a better lecturer to this generation – you need to know and not just say the previous generation was so much better or they more respect or they had more whatever. If you know how they are different, then you know how to deal with them.

The above reference to a different approach to a new generation ties in with the phenomenon raised with regard to Faculty 1 and 2 about the deterioration in the quality of the student and school sectors. It is a state of affairs that has led to the desire for guidance on how to approach this change in attitude and culture. Just like the lecturers of Faculty 1 and 2, the participants in this faculty also lamented the negative attitude to education and the fall in calibre of student.

**E3:** The same thing in the exam. I once gave my exam word for word...I only changed the date and gave the same exam again. They still didn’t pass it.

**E1:** It then becomes a culture. If they get in the habit of copying in the exam, it becomes part of the culture. They become comfortable with it.
E2: The greatest threat to assessment and teaching is research on this campus...I’m just saying...(all agree)

It speaks of a culture, also found in other faculties, where students have become quite nonchalant about copying other students’ work and where there is so little interest in learning that students even fail exams they have already written. It is another example of how the calibre of student (as observed in Faculty 1 and 2) is seen to be falling and as such influences the assessment approach.

6.5 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 4

6.5.1 Informal formative assessment

This faculty considers informal formative assessment as all assessment conducted in class.

H3: ...the assignment they do in class, it is usually preparation for each class test. They sometimes write pop-quizzes on work already done that they have to look at again. They often do class work stuff in groups in class.

Informal formative assessment is conducted by means of assignments (varying in size), pop-quizzes and class tests, which also serve as preparation for class. Assignments are followed by pop-quizzes on recently done work. Although the information obtained from informal formative assessment does not contribute to the participation or module mark, it is primarily applied for summative purposes. Precisely because it does not affect students’ marks, as in Faculty 1-3, it is deemed informal formative assessment.

H4: Then they quickly write a revision test. I’ll often mark it myself, but some I hold back for my assistant to mark. It is a small part of the participation mark.

H1: Well, I do a lot of informal formative, like testing whether they listened to a lecture...

H5: I do a lot of informal assessment in groups. I’ll address their problems in groups and they present it for the whole class to evaluate. It doesn’t always count.

Conducting informal formative assessment to measure progress in class, as indicated above, makes it summative assessment. Revision tests, at the end of a lecture, determine whether students paid attention or, as the participant put it, “whether they listened”. It is predominantly peer assessment, although the lecturer or assistant also mark some of the activities, and makes
up only a small percentage of the participation mark. The practical activities involved here make it quantitative and norm-referenced assessment.

The underlying motivation for class tests is, as in Faculty 1-3, to ensure class attendance and cooperation in class. According to one participant, it is especially first-year students who do not have the capacity or maturity for the informal nature of such assessment and it is thus kept to a minimum, given the questionable results.

**G3:**  *Informal assessment, the first year I really keep it to a minimum, but it’s truly class tests...*

The lecturers, like those of Faculty 1-3, complain about the dishonesty of students. Students copying fellow students’ work is such a problem that one participant no longer conducts portfolio assessment. Despite the inhibiting effect of large classes and the irresponsibility of students in relation to informal formative assessment and the verification of results, one of the participants did concede that it is indeed possible to devise innovative techniques to engage the student in informal formative assessment.

**H3:**  *...monitoring 160 students is a bit difficult...so I ask questions in class...but I try to make it enjoyable by using things like “Who wants to be a Millionaire”...If one doesn’t know the answer, then see who does and this leads to group discussions.*

A good example of informal formative assessment, for monitoring the progress of students, is staging a game like “Who wants to be a millionaire”. Questions are posed for all the students to answer. Some students may find this method intimidating, but it is a convivial and humorous way to assess. Students explore and solve a question collectively, which leads to great discussions and participation in class. Unlike Faculty 1-3, work-integrated learning finds it place in informal formative activities.

**H5:**  *It’s more of an informal thing with the fourth years...it’s all practical. They’re at a hospital for the entire period. So, it’s all presentations...practical skills they have to do. In a hospital, so...there are virtually no tests. It’s only practical evaluations, stuff they have to do and patients.*

Sections of the practical work are assessed be means of informal formative assessment during students’ internships. It is reasoned that observation is the assessment technique appropriate to judge a student’s demonstration of knowledge and skills in the true-life environment of the workplace.
6.5.2 Formal formative assessment

The participants of this faculty do not clearly distinguish between informal and formal formative assessment, demonstrated by their interchangeable use of these terms and also (as in Faculty 2 and 3) the terms evaluate and assessment (which will be referred to later), which reflects lecturers’ lack of understanding of outcomes-based assessment.

Formal formative assessment is conducted by means of the traditional pen-and-paper tests, more extensive assignments, class tests and semester tests as well as performance-based assignments like demonstrations, computer assignments and portfolio assignments. The latter are conducted electronically on eFundi.

H2: ...one submitted a portfolio assignment...electronically...on eFundi...it’s difficult...I tell my students what to do and then you have two of them whose portfolios...are exactly the same, saying they worked together, but it’s not...the one did the one half and the other the other half...I had to explain that they can work together, but must...do it in their own words.

Assignments are completed on eFundi, as part of portfolio assessment. The portfolio is a collection of the student’s assignments (projects, case studies, group assignments, PowerPoint presentations, posters and practical reports) in evidence of outcomes achieved (an assessment technique also followed in Faculty 4). The participants, however, cite the questionable reliability of portfolio assessment, given students’ regular copying of each other’s work.

H1: ...formal formative...we have lots of practical reports and stuff they must do that I may see if they know how...to solve things and assess nutrients.

H6: ...one group assignment and is usually a PowerPoint, like a presentation or a poster that they do in groups.

H7: ...two rather big assignments that are formal...they count a substantial part of participation and are usually application of a section of the work already completed. It’s a bit of practical application...

Practical assignments entail practical reports, group assignments, PowerPoint presentations and posters completed in groups for assessment of application of knowledge and skills. Further practical application occurs in the form of work-integrated learning.
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H1: They do an internship during the honours year. The internship is two years…but they work in the field when they don’t have class and are assessed in terms of whether they can do the evaluations themselves. They have to like learn practical competence...

Work-integrated learning occurs over different periods, from three months up to a two-year internship during the honours year. Students are mainly placed in facilities in the Potchefstroom area, with the aim of achieving practical competence and to undergo certain evaluations. Work-integrated learning is, unlike Faculty 1-3, an established part of studies in this faculty and students receive a great deal more practical assessment than in other faculties. The oral exam is another technique regularly used to assess specific sections of the course content.

H1: Then I just take the...EKG machine and the old machine to see if they can put the stickers in the right places. Then of course the oral exam on that EKG section, where they have to explain how to use specific stuff.

H1: Usually a whole panel does the evaluation. If the lecturers don’t have the time, then they decide the two people perhaps won’t evaluate all of them and then take average and so on.

H1: Then they have their own governing body to see whether they did the right number of evaluations.

Resources, such as medical equipment, are employed to assess practical application of knowledge and skills. Oral exams are assessed by a panel, who observe students’ demonstration of skills. As Faculty 3 has a professional body, to monitor quality assurance, this faculty has a governing body that regulates the number of assessments required. A shortage of staff at times necessitates making do with an average of the evaluations. The lack of staff and/or facilities, also observed in the difficulties Faculty 1 and 3, experienced with placement of students for work-integrated learning has a real impact on assessment.

H2: ...it’s difficult, I have a big group of students, to even place 50 somewhere…to work. So at this stage not yet undergraduate. With our new recurruculating there will be a new subject that is a service learning module...an eight-credit service learning module. We are still working on it...so that it will have an academic theory foundation...precisely for them to go do a project somewhere for that eight credits and then he is evaluated.

The above response indicates how lecturers are (planning) introducing performance-based assessment through work-integrated learning. Work-integrated learning is confined to post-
graduate study and undergraduates do not as yet receive adequate exposure to the workplace, due to the large number of students to be accommodated in an area lacking the commensurate facilities. The development of the eight-credit service learning module is similar to the practical module Faculty 1 offers and planning is underway for students to become involved in community projects, as is the case in Faculty 2. In this faculty students will, however, be assessed on this work. The intention of integrated assessment is also then confirmed in the following response:

H 2: I first do certain study units before I can do practical, in order for them to understand. So once I have explained anatomy to them...they have a theoretical background before they do the practical. Otherwise they won’t know what we’re talking about anyway.

The necessity of having a theoretical foundation for effective application demonstrates the practical value of knowledge. Here knowledge is applied for practical purposes and practical modes of reasoning are employed to solve problems. Learning is seen as a constructive process in which students are “constructing knowledge” or “making meaning”, according to their perception of society.

H2: It will be developed and be part of our regulation programme. The idea being that they go to a community, like Mosaic, where they have to work and achieve certain outcomes. Mosaic’s staff then evaluates the assessment. They will still have a theory component that they have to write and pass as part of it, but it’s...

H4: They’re expanding on existing legislation on work-integrated learning...that document defines work-integrated learning in terms of problem resolution...work-integrated learning intends to solve community problems or contribute to solving such problems.

The faculty purports to follow a problem-centred approach, in which the faculty spoke of the exposure students receive to community service and the resolution of problems in underdeveloped communities. These community projects and the service learning module are supplemented by performance-based assessment in the form of seminars; a computer programme, presentations in the workplace, practical preparation tests and reports.

H3: The students also have to present an assignment based on the outcomes of the seminar, for which they receive a mark that is formal…I think it is formal because it is formative, but I also have the students assess each other.
H2: The third-years have a practical, but it’s a computer programme they have to learn. I see whether they have mastered the programme and they get marks on the degree to which they have mastered it.

H3: …with an entirely practical preparation test that is written, to make sure they understand the experiment they are going to do and then there are reports they submit that are marked by the demonstrators.

The assessment of work-integrated learning in the workplace speaks of criteria-referenced assessment, in which student performance is measured against the relevant outcomes, and is considered formal formative assessment. Peer assessment regularly forms part of classroom activities, as does continuous assessment of the mastery of a computer programme.

As Faculty 1 gives a preparatory “pretest”, this faculty determines students’ understanding and ability to perform experiments by means of preparatory tests and reporting on them is marked by the relevant “demonstrators”. The discrepancies in quantitative and qualitative assessment observed in this faculty are brought to a head with a participant’s difficulties in assessing outcomes:

H2: I find it very difficult, for me it is an outcome a student must be able to do. Whether you can do it. Right or not and to give it a percentage, a mark…because I don’t do all the evaluations. The dieticians at hospitals do many of my evaluations and then they tell me…they don’t think the student is ready…to go into the real world. But then she got 55 for her…which is passing. I always feel like my hands are tied…you know you have that gut feeling that she’s not ready yet, but looking at her marks and the exam then they’ll pass. But it’s that practical part…

H2: They can either do it or not. I don’t know how…it’s something I struggle with and I don’t know how to deal with it. Either a higher percentage to pass or another type of assessment that you know it. Either they can meet all these things and if they can’t do it, then they have to repeat it...

H1: I have a suggestion…when they write the most absurd things in the exam and which is a critical outcome for that module, I think a distinction must be made between critical outcomes. If your student, regardless of whether he gets 80, but if he doesn’t manage some of those critical outcomes…like if he would murder a patient in some way…they sometimes write stuff, which would be murder…
The participant questions the soundness of an assessment where achieving the passing percentage does not mean that all outcomes have been achieved. A further challenge is the reliability and validity of the assessment.

The reliability of a portfolio is also questioned, given the regular occurrence of students copying work, which results in the majority of formative assignments taking a traditional content-based and norm-referenced approach (e.g. the traditional pen-and-paper test) to counteract the problems experienced with performance-based and authentic assessment.

**H2:** *I like that theory test.*

**H6:** *I try making my class tests semester assignments. It's very short, they just write about two pages…it's application, not factual knowledge. Then I also give a lot of pop-quizzes.*

**H4:** *I really like the assessment week tests, because it’s a biggish test you can give over a large section of the work.*

Further formal formative assessment is conducted by means of pop-quizzes, class tests and the scheduled semester tests during the assessment week. The aim of the assignments and class tests is the application of knowledge and the mastery of factual knowledge, a separation between “factual knowledge” and “practice” that mirrors the fragmented view found in Faculty 1-3. The pop-quiz is an especially favoured method of preparing students for the exam and semester test. The ultimate goal of formal formative assessment is to provide an overall impression of the progress made up to that stage, in which the feedback is summative in nature.

The assessment speaks of an exam-driven and summative approach and yet the weighting allocation reflects the opposite. Among the advocates of formative assessment the weighting allocation ranges from 70:30, 60:40 to 50:50. The majority of the participants are unaware of the regulations of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) regarding the weighting of participation and exam marks. Such allocation is, however, more directed at ensuring student accountability than the formative or summative benefit of assessment.

The maturity of students is doubted, as observed in Faculties 1-3, of which the copying of work is but one example. Students are not deemed to possess the self-discipline for what the following participant called “preceding evaluation”.

**H1:** *I don't think that self-discipline is there at first-year level to properly conduct that “preceding evaluation”. So I would be wary of using it for something that counts more for admission.*
Lecturers are concerned over the reliability of formative assessment, such as practical assignments, given that it is not always conducted under the most regulated conditions. This makes them reluctant to award more weight to the participation mark, which represents formative assessment. The weighting ratio between formative and summative assessment thus depends on personal factors outside the learning milieu and not any that directly relate to the student's learning process. A further stumbling block to formative assessment is the very high number of students in classes.

**H3:** I have the good fortune of having a large group of first-year students, of about 300 students. I share this module with a colleague and one of the things that happened the past year is that I think we over-assessed students and have really cut back on the formative assessment, in terms of the number of class tests written, but we continue to make use of the formative assessment week for a big test. It's something we cannot do without. About the class test assessment I feel that because of the size of the group, the classic class test is about as reliable as it's going to get.

The above response illustrates the impact of large classes on the reliability of formative assessment. The excessive use of class tests to ensure class attendance leads to over-assessment and with the growth in student numbers lecturers are forced to “cut back”. This participant prefers the more formal semester test or so-called “classic test”, given the controlled conditions under which it is written.

Reliability or accountability, in conjunction with student volumes, thus results in content-based and summative assessment as opposed to formative assessment. The participant may well claim to have reduced formative assessment, but over-assessment is still the reality. The faculty's formative assessment, including class tests (which are assignments), exceeds the prescribed number of assignments per module credits stipulated in the NWU's teaching and learning policy (2012) and students regularly complain.

**H4:** My students have complained about so many pop-quizzes, but then when they get to the semester or exam they thank me...otherwise they wouldn't get through all the work. It's a lot of work.

**H8:** My class tests are a bit bigger...my class tests usually count 90 marks, but they have the entire two hours of class.
Class test evaluation is a way of forcing students to work continuously throughout the year. The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) cites two to three opportunities for an eight-credit module and three to four for a sixteen-credit module. The scope of the formative assessment not only exceeds the prescribed number of assessment opportunities per module, but is clearly over-assessment.

The participant justifies the latter by characterising it as motivation for the student to “get through all the work” and good preparation for the exam. The implication is, however, that assessment drives the curriculum and also encroaches on class time. This confirms that assessment takes priority over teaching and learning, at the cost of teaching and learning.

6.5.3 Summative assessment

The preceding section clearly reflects the emphasis this faculty places on formative assessment, although the information it provides is applied summatively.

Less weight is given to the summative pen-and-paper exam, since assessment centres on the application of knowledge and skills. As is the case with Faculty 1-3, marks serve as motivation for assessment and promotion (which is not part of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy) and offered as incentive for continuous work.

H4: My first-year exam paper is I think 100 marks for two hours and my third-year paper is 150 marks, three hours. Because I do a lot more application…

H5: Promotion I think is the motivation for a student to really work throughout the semester and...only do the most important stuff for participation, I’ll study it all on my own just before the exam. But to come to class and really make an effort, when I don’t understand something in class…then to mark stricter in the exam, see you were there so you attended class and you listened for your mark. So to mark stricter, but to say if you can really show me through the semester you know what’s going on in the work I will promote, but I don’t think I would take the summative away entirely. I would give them a type of final assignment, application, just an assignment and say…you don’t have to study for it, because you will in the end…my stuff is not knowledge that you have to memorise...

H5: I feel there is certain theory you need to remember; you have to know certain definitions, but I can if you with a semester test…still there needs to be a test opportunity and give it to
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me with class tests, then I can see you get it. I don’t need a final exam… I have already tested it, I don’t need to test it again.

Promotion is a further indication of the value participants attach to the exam as summative assessment opportunity. Participants reason that if students have already mastered the outcomes, the summative exam opportunity is unnecessary. The work has already been assessed and does not need to be tested yet again. Students are thus, as with Faculty 1-3, robbed of the opportunity to gain an overall concept of the study unit.

Promotion serves to motivate class attendance as well as greater attention and participation, which together with stricter assessment improves quality of work. Rewarding the student thus becomes the incentive for hard work and class attendance, and is in some cases a means of manipulation. Students work for marks and are then rewarded with marks.

H5: ...to me it seems that if you worked hard throughout the year, why can’t we rather reward it than four days of hard studying? I mean any student can cram for four days…because my one subject is very theoretical and they can do really well, but the rest of the year they didn’t lift a finger.

The theoretical and content-based nature of the above participant’s module enables students that possess good memorisation skills to do well, without “lifting a finger” the rest of the time. Promotion is a way to encourage continuous hard work and denotes a norm-referenced and quantitative approach. The student’s performance is calculated into an average, according to which it is determined whether the outcome has been “achieved” or not.

Despite the above content-based and norm-referenced approach, participants consider the traditional paradigm ineffective and advocate for an increase in work-integrated learning.

H3: We need a new paradigm for work-integrated learning.... The traditional paradigm is not working… we want to bring in work-integrated learning in more faculties...If that’s difficult to assess we have to rethink... a distinction should be made in terms of the critical outcomes… regardless of whether the student gets 80, if he doesn’t achieve the critical outcomes...

H1: I think our curriculum is in the process of changing completely, where one of my subjects is about practical components; it’s about skills; what you can show me. If I can see that you
have those skills, I don't think it's necessary for you to go explain it to me in the exam in a 20-page case study.

Participants expressed the desire for the formal incorporation of work-integrated learning. Assessment needs to offer reliable results on students’ mastery of the critical outcomes, regardless of the percentage achieved, since norm-referenced assessment does not produce valid results and criterion-referenced will indicate whether the critical outcomes have been achieved.

One participant also mentioned the revision of the curriculum that is underway (as indicated in Faculty 1-3). This change relates to the current shift in higher education. The desire for a new paradigm is discussed in detail in the next chapter. The need for up-to-date assessment information is further strengthened by the general lack of knowledge on the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012).

H3: I don’t know. I think I know it reasonable well. I wouldn’t be able to tell you where to find it, I’ve never tried to find it.

H2: I know there is one. Clearly I don’t know what it contains exactly, since I didn’t know that I could set my exam and participation mark’s percentage…

H5: Me too, but I don’t know where to find it.

Participants clearly do not have in-depth knowledge of the NWU's teaching and learning policy (2012), which offers a framework to support assessment practices, and could explain the over-assessment prevalent in this faculty. As previously mentioned, promotion does not form part of the policy and exempting students from the exam is against the rules and regulations of the NWU.

Similar to Faculty 1-3, the participants consider the training (short course) offered by the university inadequate and further training would be greatly welcomed.

H5: Did it help you at all to assess afterwards? No. We are too sport oriented. I think it improved my awareness and understanding of certain terms and concepts and stuff. Do I assess differently this year having done the course? No.

H5: It’s all good and well, but I still don’t know precisely…and then I get back to my office and I still haven’t applied it, I don’t have time. I have a file full of plans and ideas, but it’s still not part of my module. So I think with assessment you should do a kind of workshop that you can physically incorporate it into your module…
H3: When I did the ICNL course it felt like you learn all these concepts and good ways to teach, but it doesn't seem possible in such a big class. Maybe with the new curriculum and if we have less students it may work. I don't know, it doesn't feel like I can say let's have a group discussion on this, because I know it won't work.

The participant explained that the training they received is not tailored to the subjects or modules of the faculty, although the course does clarify certain terms and concepts, and is woefully inadequate for newly appointed lecturers (as with Faculty 1-3). Its application is considered unfeasible for large classes and group work is described as impossible in a class of 150 students. Participants would like the training to be moulded and contextualised to a subject or module, suggesting a workshop in which lecturers are practically trained in the assessment of their subjects.

6.6 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 5

Informal formative assessment occurs by means of a variety of assessment methods and techniques. Lecturers conduct both informal and formal formative assessment in class.

Ed3: I do stuff like let's work on your research study title in class. I don't give marks for it, but I help them in class or they help each other…I will spontaneously say right, you had to prepare for class, so draw me a mind map on the main ideas of what happened, then I'll give 5 marks if they did it and if they didn't, zero. So it's also not quantitative, because if you were there you would have gotten 5 marks.

Ed2: Yes, tests on what she prepared or merely researched, even if it's not in the study guide and then he has to talk about it and talk to each other and say what he now finds. I have found that once they have done the research, they can't write it down.

Group work is one of the ways in which students’ complete assignments and informal formative assessment serves to prepare students for class, e.g. a mind map on content already covered. Such assignments are given to promote student interaction and learning, unlike in Faculty 1-4, not for marks. Additional classes are scheduled to assist students with possible problems.

Similar to Faculty 1-4, class tests indicate whether students have prepared for class or test their knowledge on research. The information obtained aids the lecturer in determining the students' entry levels – e.g. their knowledge related to a lesson topic. Since marks are quantitatively
awarded for attendance at and participation in class, it is norm-referenced assessment (marks do not reflect student performance in terms of the assignment, but purely participation). According to a participant, students mainly consider formative assessment as a means to achieve a participation mark for admission to the exam.

*Ed1: I stand by my generalisation that formative assessment is mainly used to get a participation mark and not so much to improve teaching/learning practices.*

This is a quantitative and norm-referenced approach, external to the teaching and learning process.

Formative assessment is conducted by means of class tests, assignments and semester tests. Participants endeavour to encourage self-regulating learning in this way.

*Ed3: ...I make sure to create enough opportunities to be able to give more feedback and include group work, but also individual and that whole continuous process…*

*Ed2: I try to promote learning. A student cannot come to my class if he hasn't prepared. Every lecture I give the student has to master somewhat beforehand and look at it and then through various methods like e.g. I use tasks...but group tasks where I move among the groups because I got a few extra periods on the timetable to help groups with problems and...then I take those tasks and give it to another group to talk about and offer commentary. It is often “this is the case which we are looking at again” and is why I easily do 7 to 8 formative assessments to calculate participation.*

*Ed2: Look, I try to bring in self-regulated learning into my assessment...I try to do self-regulating learning in a way that it supports formative assessment to a degree, because he can go look at the content himself...I combine the self-regulated learning with formative assessment, because if you don’t there’s no learning. But problems come up, like the big classes and the physical layout of the classes...we don’t have round tables to work around, etc. because it is too big…*

Participants strive, by means of alternative and formative assessment, to create adequate opportunity for feedback. Formative assessment is intended to promote self-regulated learning and is considered a continuous process. Group work engages students in the work and provides the additional feedback of fellow students. This practice is, however, hampered by the layout of the classroom, which is not conducive to interaction.
In correspondence to the informal formative approach, participants indicated that they don’t make use of the scheduled test week like other faculties.

*Ed2: I don’t think our faculty makes use of it...because of practical teaching we don’t have the time.*

Lecturers inform the faculty’s administrator of the intended semester test, which is usually scheduled on Friday afternoons when there is no class. Alternatively, the lecturer arranges with the students when such testing will occur. Similar to Faculty 4, the lecturers have little knowledge about the number of assignments the NWU’s teaching and learning policy stipulates for modules.

*Ed3: ...they’ve said many things, but...in our faculty I think the rule of thumb for formative assessment is a minimum of three assessment opportunities...*

*Ed2: It varies according to the size of the assignment I give. Usually there are two major assignments of 80 marks, their group assignments and then the individual mark makes up the rest of the 300 marks, so half is the individual mark and the other half the group work mark.*

According to the above response, the “rule of thumb” applies to the size and scheduling of assignments. It denotes a lecturer-centred approach, similar to the autocratic disregard of students’ needs in Faculty 1-4 when it comes to assignment and test scheduling as well as excessive over-assessment.

Students often write tests very close together, leaving little time to prepare for a test or assignment. The participation mark is made up of individual and group assignments, of which the former counts 80%. The participant may well deny any over-assessment, but 300 marks for participation exceed the prescribed two assignments for an eight-credit module. This is justified, as it is in Faculty 1-4, by students’ failure to submit assignments or write tests where marks are not at stake.

*Ed3: ...if I say it doesn’t count marks, not one comes with an idea. Out of a group of 400 I maybe have 10 students and because their title counts a lot in the summative assessment...I want to help them, it is formative assessment after all. It’s about promoting learning. It doesn’t count so I don’t prepare for class. They just sit there and I tell them, what are you doing here? Leave, you are not prepared for class to which they respond: yes, but it doesn’t count. It’s that kind of mentality, so I tell lecturers to do it this way otherwise students simply don’t prepare or just don’t show up.*
The above response reflects the prevailing culture in the faculty (and, as indicated, in Faculty 1-4) of the absolute focus on marks. Measuring student performance and motivating participation with marks leads to a dependency on marks, evidenced by students' refusal to attend or prepare for class when work is formative in nature and not awarded any marks.

The reference to the students' mentality mirrors statements made in Faculty 1 and 3 in regard to the lack of a culture of learning on the campus.

Ed2: The point is to answer a question with a question: how else will you create a culture of learning, I ask you? Because we don’t have a culture of learning on this campus.

As in Faculty 1-4, the participation mark is a way to force the student to work. Without giving an assignment or class test, students don’t attend class. This quantitative and norm-referenced approach to formative assessment results directly in over-assessment. The participant adds that the only feasible option is quantitative assessment.

Ed2: You work quantitatively, because it’s achievable, you have to have a mark. In terms of the promotion mark, I personally think that if you tell them to work for 75 or 80%, it will just place that more emphasis on the qualitative because it’s about the mark…students get very upset when you don’t give them a good mark and call you unreasonable. It’s not about the quality of the work to him, he only cares about the mark. What also bothers me with not giving an exam we will have to accept that the flow-through rate of 86% given by the vice-chancellor will sink to 76 or 70%, because we don’t have a culture of learning on this campus! I stand by that point.

Ed2: I try to support her by e.g. saying this morning we’re looking at the information processing theory, go see what need inference means, 2nd years, it isn’t mentioned in the study guide…then they’ll write a test and if he merely says it means to forget, then I give him 15 out of 15. So he took part, he gave the meaning, in one short sentence, then I know he tried, then I can’t give him 2 out of 15…so that way he builds his marks, he creates a culture of learning…

Using marks to force students to attend class and/or complete assignments creates a culture of learning that creates a dependency on marks, as is the case in Faculty 1-4, where they don’t attend class or complete assignments if there are no marks on the table. Promotion, although not part of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), serves to “motivate” students. This practice, one participant stated, places even greater emphasis on quantitative assessment. The
dependency on marks is further illustrated by the reference to students’ anger when they don’t receive good marks.

Regardless of lecturers’ sentiment on the exam, the inevitable decrease in the flow-through rate necessitates offering students this kind of summative assessment opportunity. This is a reality also mentioned in Faculty 1-4.

Ed2: Then our flow-through rate will be low. You don’t force him to hit the books, he thinks he’ll take care of it at the end of the year. That’s what I think, because there is stuff where you simply have to explain why this builds on the next, he needs to know that...so I don’t know...

Without the formative assessment marks that enable admission to the exam, the flow-through rate will fall considerably and, as explained in Faculty 1, the NWU is obliged to produce a certain number of graduates every year. In addition to this pressure to deliver, the vast student population further impedes creating a culture of learning.

Ed3: ...for example, I have 10 students in my honours class and I can clearly see their progress, where are they struggling, 1-on-1 attention is possible...but in my other modules, where I have 600 students, I can’t do that! I don’t even know their names, I don’t even know their student numbers. So they’re not a number or a name to me and I’m ashamed to say it, but that’s the way it is. You are only one of 600…and we know it’s all about money and the faculty does give us marking assistance and they do put all those things in place, but I can’t make those qualitative decisions...there are a lot of aspects that I have to take into account and it takes more time, perhaps because I have more students.

The size of classes, the lack of a culture of learning and pressure for a high flow-through rate necessitate the lecturer to take a quantitative, norm-referenced and mark-driven approach. It is a reality that estranges the lecturer from the student, evidenced by the limited interaction possible in a class of 600 students. The student becomes merely a number and prevents the lecturer from making worthwhile judgements over his/her progress.

Ed1: ...if we want to use assessment for the reason it’s there, to promote learning, it is a process...moving more and more to the qualitative...it doesn’t help to have study guides, outcomes and assessment criteria, but our assessment tasks and activities are criterion-referenced. The only way you can promote learning is by giving feedback about the level of progress he has made with the criteria...and to further promote learning, I can’t see how it’s realistic in the current context of a lot of students...
Ed1: *We talked about credits. We will have to go see on which NQF we are with the module, what are our outcomes and are those outcomes in line with that NQF level. We will have to take a good look at the learning outcomes and relevant assessment criteria to build progressively through the year to reach that level...I think it’s a very complex, intricate process.*

The participant indicates the discrepancies between the assessment approach in study guides and outcomes-based assessment, speaking of the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria against which student performance is measured. Assessment, which should be aligned with the learning outcomes and assessment criteria (including performance-based assessment), is conducted quantitatively against learning outcomes and also against particular levels.

**Ed2:** *It is the ideal, but I would like to know how you’ll do it practically, like bringing in qualitative. I would like to see someone do it differently than I did it, especially with 600 students.*

Qualitative assessment, which has the potential to promote learning, is considered the ideal – especially given the large classes. This discrepancy of employing quantitative and norm-referenced assessment as well as performance-based assessment that entails qualitative assessment is also found in Faculty 1-4. Feedback is given in numerical form and is thus summative in nature.

Work-integrated learning occurs in the form of bi-annual (at the beginning of the second semester and third semester) practical teaching in schools.

**Ed1:** *Work-integrated learning needs to have some direction, which is why there is stuff like mentorship and training so that teachers at schools can play a bigger role in the assessment of students. Look, we see them once or twice and that’s it.*

The student presents lessons in the classroom, while the teacher supervises, and is assessed by a lecturer twice during each practical period by means of a qualitative assessment instrument and criteria. The faculty initiated a mentorship training programme that teachers may play a greater role in workplace training and assessment.

In an effort to effectively manage the assessment of work-integrated learning of large class groups, the faculty experiments with innovative assessment projects.

**EdR:** *No, his students record their lessons or presentations...so he doesn’t physically go there...they then send it electronically to him, then he can evaluate every second of that*
lesson, offer input and send it back to the student. So the student has a report of his lesson...he can also see himself teaching...we’ll see if it works.

This project entails recording practical teaching sessions and sending them to the lecturer for assessment and input. The student is then able to improve his/her lessons and presentation by viewing the recording in terms of the criteria and feedback.

The usual pen-and-paper exam at the end of the semester is the general method of summative assessment, only with varying perspectives on the weight allocation between the participation and exam marks. According to one participant, weight allocation should correlate with the time and credits accorded the module.

Ed1: It depends. If you work on a 50-50 basis, then it is only the weight awarded to a participation mark and that percentage should show the time the student has to put in to achieve that participation mark and also additional time and time spent on the exam...I don’t know whether the time the student spends is equal to 50-50...I don’t know any students who spend 50% of their semester time on the exam.

If formative assessment and the exam each demands 50% of the student, then the weighting division would be 50:50, as the participant stated, but it is unlikely that any student spends 50% of his/her academic time on preparation for the exam. The time spent on academics should reflect the credits representing the weight awarded. This participant added that formative assessment is intended to promote and shape learning.

Ed1: If you really want to conduct assessment properly, we have to use qualitative assessment and build up your qualitative participation mark toward your summative assessment. The summative assessment has an important place in the assessment procedures, in the sense that it gives you a summary of your progress, an overview...

The above response affirms formative and summative assessment as complementary components and, as the participant explained, the exam is the application of the formative assessment.

Ed3: I think they have to apply everything they’ve learned throughout the semester in the exam...if the module allows it, then I find the 50-50 thing fine because the other formative methods are much smaller. It builds and shapes learning that when it comes to the big exam, then you have to apply all that stuff and that is not easy.
This participant also deems formative assessment of formative value and summative assessment the application of the formative assessment. Application is considered complex and the weight accorded summative assessment must reflect that complexity. The participant also pointed out the conflict between the quantitative and norm-referenced practices in the faculty and the quantitative approach that improves learning.

_Ed1:_  *...if we revise the policy and take a look at things like how much the participation mark should count, the exam mark must count, we work with averages, etc., then we’re still not near where we should be in terms of assessment._

This desire for the revision of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy mirrors Faculty 4’s search for a new assessment paradigm and as with Faculty 1-4, training that addresses subject-related difficulties would be welcomed.

_Ed3:_  *You identify your problems within the subject group and approach academic support services. Then if other subject groups have the same problem, academic support services can create a course for that specific problem._

_Ed2:_  *...about workshops...if you have as many classes as we do, then you’re so busy with classes that you don’t always have the time and then you miss the whole point of the issue._

Lecturers suggested a needs analysis be conducted within each subject group, to identify the specific difficulties encountered with assessment and then academic support services can develop a “tailor made“ training course.

### 6.7 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 6

#### 6.7.1 Formative assessment

The lecturers in this faculty employ both informal and formative assessment to measure progress and, just like Faculty 1-5, do not differentiate between the two.

Informal formative assessment, which occurs during teaching and learning in the class that elicits instantaneous and spontaneous feedback, is not considered a part of formative assessment. Formal formative assessment consists of formal assignments, projects and class tests.

_A1:_  _I have an assessment model that lends itself thereto. I see e.g. with the first-years that when I give them an assignment in which they have to do a typical literature study, it’s the first_
time they do it and it’s awful. They don’t understand the Harvard Style, they don’t yet know where everything is, so they do it once, take the punishment and then the second attempt is much better. I use group assignments and my assessment model is such that there is no sick test. I have one opportunity that could fall away, so the worst mark falls away and that way I can see that the formative mark improves as the year and the assignments progress.

A2: The rule in our school is that there must be at least three formative assessments, the nature thereof isn’t really indicated. I know it varies, because with Sociology e.g. they give an assignment almost every week…public management uses a lot of group work, a task and then a variety of tests. So there’s a great deal of discretion and if there is any policy at all, then it’s just to make sure there are three and that is as much I know of procedure.

The above participant’s assessment model includes an assignment in which the student is given a second opportunity. Even though this participant is well aware that the student does not possess the necessary knowledge, he/she still gives a class test. It could be viewed as a kind of baseline assessment, but only serves to demonstrate to the student just how little he/she knows.

Baseline assessment is actually supposed to determine the student’s level of knowledge and skill (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:182; Hodnett, 2001:3); formative assessment then serves to develop that already attained learning (Hodnett, 2001:3). Group work is one of these participants’ tools to encourage participation in the learning events.

Assignments and a range of class tests provide the marks that make up the participation mark, of which the lowest may fall away. It is a mark-driven approach also found in Faculty 1-5, which centres on motivating students to achieve the highest possible marks. Reference was made to the adherence to the NWU’s stipulation of three formative assessments per module, but application is at lecturers’ own discretion. Class tests are considered formative assessment and produce information on the student’s progress, as with Faculty 1-5, they are not deemed to be “assignments”. All these tests and weekly assignments lead to over-assessment and are then also followed by summative assessment.

A3: After the formative process comes the summative process, where if a student didn’t do well in his first and second year, he can improve on it and that mark is then used in the summative assessment. So we give them the opportunity to improve on a project, as a summative assessment mark, but the formative mark…doesn’t change.
Formative and summative assessment are not separated but applied collectively. As with Faculty 5, the summative assessment provides the student with the means to apply his/her learning in a project and together with formative assessment centre on progress in the learning outcomes.

A1:  ...I don't follow a strictly formative approach...that’s the problem. It is not the assignment itself that they hand in and get back to improve. It is more the specific outcomes or skills that they must get out of it, the outcome product must be improved. I can’t take one theme and do it repeatedly, there is no time. Our guideline is 4-6 assessments for a 12- or 16-credit subject and you move on too fast, so you hope to develop critical insight, rather than improve specific knowledge on a specific theme, there just isn’t time.

It is unclear from the above response whether the participant truly understands the concept of formative assessment. First it is indicated that a strictly formative approach is not followed and yet the focus of assessment is described as the promotion of learning rather than obtaining a certain result, i.e. it is not about the improvement of an assignment, but of the outcomes or product. Striving to encourage progress, growth and development makes the assessment formative. Unlike in Faculty 1-5, the assessment aims to measure student performance and progress against certain learning outcomes.

The modules in this faculty are practical in nature, according to the following response:

A3:  We work in terms of the number of hours, because we are more practically oriented. Projects are measured and assessed in terms of the outcomes they are expected to achieve. In your junior years it is measured by achieving outcomes given to you, in the senior years they have to achieve the outcomes and also personal development, process development, rendering of knowledge, etc. It is also then assessed with process documentation. So there is policy in graphic design, the subject group, about how many projects are doable within the number of years of study and then the projects also build on each other and all of them count for the final project mark.

Projects are employed as performance-based assessment, given the practical nature of the modules, to guide students toward the achievement of the learning outcomes. The following participant’s view is in line with the transitional outcomes-based approach that marks are not necessarily the only means of motivation.

A3:  Not always necessarily...we have seen that you often get much better results from something that is not connected to marks...if you don’t talk about it and just look at the
dynamic cooperation agreements, they can actually carry out the task, etc. and should the question of marks arise, then the answer is only it may be or may not be...So if you want to see whether it would work and I know there isn't always time, but that has been my experience.

Contrary to the lecturers of Faculty 1-5, a participant stated that marks should not be the motivation for learning. A dynamic cooperation agreement should be made with the student, an initiative Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) advocate (discussed further in the next chapter). The following responses reveal the conflict in the collaboration between the student and lecturer:

A1: People who don’t do their part in group work, people who would rather work on their own, but I want them to do it in groups, because it reflects reality.

A2: The problems we experience have a lot to do with the students. As Ed1 said, they don’t know how to reference, they can’t write. We sit with large groups, about 280 first years, so group work is difficult because they don’t know each other.

A2: ...the subject is used as a “plug” subject for many grades...so we sit with a student who doesn’t want to be there and if you don’t make it count for marks, you won’t ever see him. So often the passion for the subject is not there and...that often makes it more difficult, because they look at “the bottom line” and getting on with their field. So it has an impact on how effective formative assessment is and what you truly want to accomplish with it. You could have the best of intentions and achieve the best with the student, but that’s not always how it works.

A2: ...a lot of emphasis is placed on teaching learning, which isn’t a problem in itself, but we are promoted as a research-directed university and if you look at how much time it takes to do 1-on-1 sessions with 10 students, assessment, planning, etc., then it’s difficult to balance teaching and research.

The efficacy of formative assessment is influenced by a variety of factors, according to lecturers, many of which relate to the student. Group work can be impeded when students refuse to cooperate or due to the lack of interaction between students in large classes.

Students who struggle with academic writing and referencing often only endeavour to pass and return to their own study field; thus they are purely driven by marks. The lecturer may have the best of intentions, but cannot create enthusiasm for the subject if it isn’t there.
In addition to the lack of time, large student numbers and prevailing learning culture, research is another factor contributing to the difficulties participants of this faculty encounter with assessment (as is the case in Faculty 1, 3 and 4). The pressure to produce such studies encroaches on lecturers’ teaching duties and threatens the quality of assessment. This finding is evidenced by the following contradictory responses:

A1: *See with big groups it’s difficult…you have to give a mark. You see it with postgraduate students where you often meet with them 4 to 5 times just about the research proposal and there is no mark there, but it’s 1-on-1 time.*

A3: *It’s different with us. We have a lot of access to our students and we spend more 1-on-1 time with the students during a project period. In such a project the student is compelled to spend at least an hour a week with the lecturer to resolve problems, etc. So it helps if the groups are smaller, because then you get results much quicker, but I get that 300 to 600 students in one class is practically undoable.*

Quality assessment is feasible with small groups and has a less mark-driven nature when the interaction between lecturer and student is greater. A one-hour session with the lecturer during the project period, to address pertinent issues, is mandatory and such issues are resolved much more efficiently in small groups. This kind of collaboration between lecturer and student is, however, simply not possible in groups of 300-600 students. Participants indicated that the number of projects correlates with the credit level of the module, but there remains a tendency to over-assess.

A3: *So it’s the number of class hours compared to the hours spent on projects. In your first and second year it ranges between 5 or 6 projects per semester. Third and fourth year it ranges between 3 to 4 projects, because it’s much more intensive.*

Projects range from 5 to 6 in the first and second year and between 3 and 4 for third- and fourth-year students per semester. Faculty policy dictates, as it does in Faculty 5, the number of assignments/projects according to number of hours in a module. The participant may well rightly confirm that the correlation between hours and projects adheres to subject group policy, but it exceeds the university’s prescription of two assignments for an eight-credit module and is attributed to the inability to offer quality assessment to such large groups of students.
Lecturers do not have the time to conduct anything else but content-based, quantitative and norm-referenced assessment, even with “practical” and performance-based modules. The smaller the classes are, the more time the lecturer has for qualitative and criterion-referenced assessment.

A3: Let’s say a student has a participation of 60%, but redid 3 of the 4 formative projects, then it will influence the mark a lot and improve to the point where it’s more a 70% portfolio, instead of a 60% participation mark. So if the panel feels the student improved during the given time, his mark rises, but if the panel feels the student weakened or is worse than he was before, it will lower his mark.

Student performance in projects is assessed quantitatively, which is in conflict with the qualitative approach to performance-based assessment. It results in a mark-driven assessment that centres on improving the participation mark. Marks are revised in accordance with whether lecturers “feel” the student’s performance improved or weakened over a given period. It is an approach that speaks of convergent formative assessment, characterised by judgmental or quantitative evaluation (“good or bad”) focusing on contrasting errors (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

The information obtained from convergent formative assessment is mainly applied for summative purposes, in which the curriculum is considered a product and analysis of the interaction between the student and the curriculum occurs from the perspective of the curriculum (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617), which will be further elucidated in the next chapter.

The assessment in smaller classes is largely process oriented, according to a divergent formative approach, where performance is measured in terms of qualitative and criterion-referenced assessment to promote learning. It analyses the interaction of the student and curriculum from the perspective of the student and the curriculum (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

6.7.2 Summative assessment

Certain modules in this faculty employ the traditional pen-and-paper exam and others the portfolio as method of summative assessment. The portfolio assessment pertains more to the “practical” modules, replacing the final exam, and is assessed by an internal and external panel.

Certain members of this faculty take a fragmented view of theory and practice and the traditional pen-and-paper exam is deemed appropriate for certain “theoretical” modules and year groups.
A3: ...within the overall BA course subjects like Communication and Psychology, etc., the more theoretical subjects, they still write exams.

The abovementioned modules are deemed “theoretical”, as opposed to those that are more “practical” in nature, and have the traditional pen-and-paper essentially content-based exam at the end of the semester.

A1: You also want assess to achieve your CCFOs and then you also want there to be subject-specific knowledge. I don’t think barrelling in and writing an exam lends itself thereto to test what you do when you have freedom of thought and movement. You can test synthesis and application, etc. in exams, but to see what he does when he is out there in the sun.

The project, as performance-based assessment, tests application of knowledge and skills in true-to-life contexts. The above participant considers the cross-curricular and critical outcomes important and the traditional pen-and-paper exam does not provide for assessing these outcomes. These twelve critical outcomes, as described in Chapter 3, relate to the competencies the student has to demonstrate according to the different levels of the NQF (see Chapter 3) of the education system. Both learning and teaching should thus be guided by these critical outcomes.

Assessment, as integral part of teaching and learning, serves as mechanism through which information on the nature of learning (student’s level of ability) and efficacy of teaching is generated that both student and lecturer may improve the quality of their learning and teaching respectively. The exam does not accommodate “freedom of thought”, according to the participant, and is deemed inadequate to assess competency in the workplace – hence the use of alternative assessment methods, such as the portfolio and panel exam.

A3: It’s rather difficult...because we are a practical subject group on the system, we can submit a practical portfolio on the same level as an exam, so it has the same value as an exam (50:50)...

A3: I feel a portfolio approach is a fantastic opportunity in any subject for the student to show how he offers his own input on the work for e.g. the past 6 months, where he can say this is what I understand and this is what I could do during the 6 months...on first-year level facts must be given and tested in an exam, but after that it is important for them to render their own independent learning in a portfolio...the exam situation is sometimes limited in terms of the forced learning that occurs. They are limited in...free-thinking subjects with “here is
the book, study it and write it”. So we are limiting freedom of thought in the student, when we should actually be teaching it to the student.

A2: A portfolio is much more valuable for seeing whether a person holistically understands what they're doing. So, I don't always see the value of an exam.

Portfolio assessment is deemed suitable and optimal for providing the student and lecturer with a continuous and holistic overview of the student’s progress. It is a collection of the student’s work that gives a precise reflection of the student’s output at different stages. The portfolio is of equal value as the exam, according to the participants, and is assessed at the same level by an internal and external panel. The summative panel exam provides an overall impression of the student's progress.

A3: We have a panel exam at the end of the semester and with the exam we take all of the semester’s work, in which we indeed asked them to make changes according to the marking rubric, which is then assessed by the entire subject group or at least 4 staff members...the lecturer of the relevant subject may only talk about the project given and the outcomes of the rubric…the panel then discusses the student’s work and assesses whether the student achieved what was specifically given…were the outcomes achieved, is there adequate development from when the student first submitted to now, etc….participation is 50% and the summative 50%...

A3: ...our assessment is done by a panel for the first and second semester and then in our exit years there is an external panel. So we first have internal assessment, then external panel that usually consists of 2 from the industry itself and one from the subject group who also gives class to the same year group.

The internal and external panel exams are held at the end of the semester. The former comprises at least four member subject groups and the latter of the relevant module’s lecturer, a member of the subject group and two from industry. Student performance is measured, unlike in Faculty 1-5, according to a rubric for the achievement of learning outcomes. The panel then assesses whether the student achieved the outcome.

Equal weight is given to formative and summative assessment, denoted by a percentage, and reflects that the faculty moves from a qualitative (a rubric measuring outcomes) to a quantitative norm-referenced approach (final result given in a numeric percentage). Assessing student
performance against outcomes indicates a criterion-referenced approach, although the criteria and levels are not clear and explicit.

Despite portfolio assessment being an equal-level replacement for the exam, lecturers do not receive the same support from the NWU’s institutional office. Participants attribute this to the exam-driven policy of the NWU and cited the following adverse effects on portfolio assessment:

A1: "...we would like to see more breathing room created in the academic rules, because you could make it practical if you wanted to."

A2: "...the problems we have are more subject and faculty oriented. It is one of my big problems with summative assessment...we expect students to write and only give facts, which is in no way a reflection of the students' understanding...we also have a new degree we’re starting this year aimed at working municipal managers and officials and we have also put in portfolio assessment and they threw us out at ICAS saying the academic rules states you write exam. Now these adult learners are expected to write an exam...policies are so strict that there is no room for renewal in academics, except the portfolio, scrap the academic rules! It has to be specific to the discipline and the outcomes, especially outcomes that entail the demonstration of skills. To then give 50% weight to a summative writing of an exam doesn’t make sense to me."

A3: "...we have a rule that says that we may not put the submission date of a project or starting date of a project in the test week. Because they have other subjects, we give them some grace during that time. We don’t give them that time off, it still falls within the total period for the project, so it’s basically consultation time, etc....I don’t know how much value it has."

The difficulties encountered with assessment relate to the subject and faculty, according to the participant, viz. the prescriptive and autocratic nature of the institutional quality office. Excessive emphasis is placed on producing factual knowledge in an exam, not on reflecting the student’s actual level of comprehension.

A3: "It works really well...we have internships...during the June-July holidays. Originally it was a form of formative assessment, but we found that the people we place students with and have to write the forms make more of a mess than the students. The internship is, however, mandatory and then the agency has to write a report on the project and all it entailed."
Despite the above participant describing the mandatory internships arranged during the June-July holidays as working “really well”, the formative assessment by practitioners in the field is found to be unreliable and invalid. Internships are limited to “holiday work” and experience the same difficulties with industry practitioners described in Faculty 1-3.

Participants view the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and academic rules as impediments to the lecturer’s teaching and assessment task. The academic rules are deemed too prescriptive, failing to make provision for the professional context, and should thus be “scrapped”. Participants would also like the teaching and learning policy to allow modules to be presented within the context and demands of the industry. They did, however, concede to ignorance about the procedures the policy contains.

A2:  *It doesn’t surprise me at all that there is one, but we’re not aware of it.*

A1:  *See we get to do with this is how it works. So we don’t sit together and look how it must be done, it’s more that we are told how it must be done.*

The above participant is highly critical of the bureaucratic nature of assessment administration. Lecturers are not afforded the opportunity to offer input into the decision-making process and are merely informed of how to proceed.

### 6.8 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 7

#### 6.8.1 Formative assessment

Informal formative assessment is an integrated part of classroom activities, while formal formative assessment consists of assignments and class tests, of which the latter make up 50% of the participation mark. Unlike in Faculty 1-6, formative assessment has been integrated into the teaching.

**EMS1:** *Our formative assessment…usually consists of between two to four assessments. I suppose not all, but mine do. So I have three assessments that are usually classwork, then we have a test and then also assignments.*

**EMS1:** *…assessment is important, yes, but if you…teaching must relate to the assessment…you cannot separate them…the manner of teaching…to show people…to assess on that level it doesn’t help to teach on this level. Informal assessment also relates a lot to the teaching*
strategy...inductive teaching, where you give the responsibilities to the student, there you’ll have a different kind of informal assessment and that is how I teach...I don’t stand in the class and give class...I expect the students to do activities. So it creates a very good basis of informal assessment...rather ask them to give me feedback. I don’t like the word “understand”, because you cannot measure it. So they have to give me feedback, either through presentations or...giving an opinion...not everybody does that. It’s only my frame of reference.

The frame of reference reflects that assessment and teaching cannot be separated and must be integrated into learning, according to the participant, wherein the level of assessment must correspond with that of the teaching. Informal formative assessment is linked to the inductive teaching strategy, which entails involving the student by giving him/her certain responsibilities and the student then providing feedback by means of presentations and reasoning. This student-centred approach indicates that informal formative assessment not only occurs spontaneously in the classroom, but is aligned with teaching and learning. Students also have the opportunity to discuss the exam question in class as part of an informal formative assignment.

EMS1: ...they are a huge group, they are 250. So what I usually do with them is I give an old exam question to work through...individually...they bring it back and we trade. I then mark it specifically according to the memo, I say where there are principles. I tell them here you have to see if the candidate applied the principle...from that they learn better exam technique and know how to answer the exam. They also receive feedback from someone next to them, not necessarily from the lecturer. It works rather well. The other thing...is to give them small assignments in groups and then the assignment counts about ten. I have everything count for the participation mark. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to have such small class activities count more than 10 percent.

The student receives an exam question to complete, which is then assessed by a fellow student in class according to the memorandum the lecturer provides. This engages the entire class in the teaching and learning events, offering them feedback from a source other than the lecturer and assistance with applying principles accurately. It is an informal formative assessment technique that not only promotes teaching and learning, by means of a summative assessment tool, but also develops exam-writing skill. According to faculty policy, such informal formative assessment in
class may not make up more than 10\% of the participation mark. It is a type of assessment that does not focus on marks, as in Faculty 1-6, but on learning.

**EMS3:** *What is great with honours is they are less, they are 65 on average. So you can...give them individual stuff to do that they swap and then without even putting up a memo, for them to critique each other’s stuff and...then swap again. Then you have someone else marking the original plus the critique. In the end they learn a lot from it.*

The student, especially in smaller honours classes, is actively involved in the assessment process. After students have assessed each other’s assignments and offered feedback, the students once again have the opportunity to assess each other’s feedback. Such assessment of feedback not only offers the student double the feedback, but it is also a technique to develop metacognitive thinking.

The number of assignments did not conform to the number of credits of the module prescribed in the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (20122).

**EMS1:** *The policy gives you a guideline on how many assessments you have per module. It’s a very good way to say you only have three assessments or five assessments for a 16-credit module, but what happens…the lecturers…have their final set of three marks, but that one mark consists of 10 class tests. The following consists of 15 of those. So we have here, for example, a lecturer who assesses to death and she complains constantly. That’s not right.*

**EMS3:** *...those three assessments…I get so many burdens for many of the lecturers…even for us…five tests of the best three...Is that the policy or not? So now you have to see if it is really meaningful to have a policy.*

According to the participants, policy stipulates three assignments for an eight-credit module and five for a sixteen-credit module. The final three and five assessments for a sixteen-credit module do not reflect the number of assessments, i.e. fifteen class tests could be calculated to represent one class test, a practice also observed in other faculties. Such repetitive assessment places great pressure on both the student and the lecturer. This over-assessment and deviation from prescriptions raise questions over the use of having an assessment and moderation policy at all. As in Faculty 1-6, formative assessment also serves to ensure continuous effort by the student.
EMS2: It's true what you're saying about continuous work. It's the same with us, because undergraduate shapes our honours year. Our honours year is a terrible year for our students…with the CAs. If they study a week before the exam, and it is possible, he will pass, but then he studied patterns of how a question may be asked and what should I do if it's asked this way. Then he's going to have a big problem next year. So he has to, they have to through the semester, it's literally an ingraining process.

Formative assessment, especially by means of class tests, is deemed an ingraining process that forces students to learn to work hard at undergraduate level already and prepares them for the honours year. Any student who does not put in the work throughout the academic year, will only pass by studying the “patterns” and this reflects, as in Faculty 6, the reliance on short-time memory and superficial learning. Such students usually struggle with the honours year. This view relates to learning in the zone of proximal development, which will be explained in the next chapter.

Students furthermore complain about the inadequate preparation time given during the test week, as the following response indicates:

EMS1: Everybody here makes use of the test week. They write the same number of modules as they would in the exam, only in much shorter time. So students complain. They can't finish the, they can't study [it all]…in the exam they have a second opportunity, here they don’t…especially because the fifty percent is part of the participation mark. Especially with the first-year…

The test week matches the exam in number of exam papers, but not in the time available for completion and is a source of great frustration among students. The time given is inadequate for preparation and even for completing the actual exam paper. Such complaints are especially prevalent among first-year students, since the test makes up 50% of the participation mark. Lecturers, however, consider first-year students as being incapable of in-depth learning as yet.

EMS1: I feel the first-years...are very immature for in-depth corporative learning or group work, they still see a division of labour…we give them an assignment and each does his part.

That’s just the way it works. It’s difficult in terms of assessment during that time.

This faculty follows a more lecturer-centred approach and a more deductive one with first-year students, in contrast to the above inductive approach. Assessment is largely individual, with limited corporative learning or group work. The above reference to the immaturity of first-year students echoes the observations from other faculties about the calibre of the student. Aside from
academic readiness, the vast first-year student population is another determining factor for assessment strategy.

EMS1: *It happens with the first-years, because they can’t always do presentations, because they’re too many. But with the seniors, where there are less students, it’s very easy.*

Large student numbers, in comparison to honours classes, makes group and practical work rather difficult and is the reason (according to the participants) lecturers opt for a content-based approach.

EMS3: *The numbers are as such that you can’t assess them meaningfully. We would like to and…there are two three modules where, instead of saying go learn it all by heart and come write exam, you can come with a case study or write that paper that integrates the whole thing. But to do that and then say, after we criminally prosecuted so many about plagiarism, etc. and what is the second opportunity for that, because the guy probably worked the past two months on his…project.*

Large undergraduate student numbers make the assessment of practical and group assessment quite difficult for all the faculties on campus and plagiarism rises considerably, resulting in the traditional pen-and-paper method of memorisation instead of any kind of application or insight.

The faculties do, however, create the opportunity for interdisciplinary interaction among students, as explained below:

EMS5: *…we have three programmes in our school. We have labour relations and human resource management and industrial psychology where they have to work with someone from another discipline and it’s that kind of thing that must feature strongly…in my groups I do this to show them the value of why all three programmes must have those specific subjects. At this stage they also assess each other. They have to show proof of the preparation each of them did, together with the theory. I see the students taking fellow students to task. They’ll even say you no longer work with us…*

Such interdisciplinary interaction occurs in a group assignment among the students of the three programmes of the school. This activity includes peer assessment and requires students to submit proof of their individual contribution to the assignment. It is especially important to the following participant that students achieve the relevant learning outcomes:
EMS2: ...it depends a lot on the nature of the module and the way you achieve the outcomes. If you say the outcomes are about how you learn to work with other people...how you engage in discussions in class and so on, then...there must be a point to that participation, etc. If you have...a more mechanical thing where you say the guy has to in the end...it’s all I’m interested in. He has to have the following knowledge or he must be able to demonstrate the following skills. I don’t care whether he only studies the past week or worked throughout the semester. Then the participation mark kind of becomes irrelevant.

The above response advocates assessing students on the achievement of specific learning outcomes, i.e. should the learning outcome be participation in class, then the student should receive a mark for his/her demonstration of the relevant knowledge and skills as proof of achieving the learning outcome. This response reflects the participant’s distinction between the curriculum as product and the curriculum as process. The process of achieving an outcome and by extension the participation mark is immaterial to this lecturer. Should the learning outcome relate to the process, marks must be awarded for the process. Only the end product is important to this participant and participation is deemed irrelevant. The latter may well be, but marks are still awarded for the product (learning outcome).

This is a lecturer-centred approach that focuses entirely on the achievement of learning outcomes, which are denoted in marks and percentages. The following responses show a similar lack of interest in the participation mark:

EMS3: ...I had a student who wrote the exam with a participation mark of 23 who then got deep in the sixties for both exams. I decided he should get the subject.

EMS4: But they won’t be burdened during the semester, because they all believe they can move mountains in those last weeks.

The above responses reflect that marks do not represent student performance, since even students with low participation marks can pull through in the exam. Summative assessment performance is thus not equal to the participation marks that represent formative assessment. It is a discrepancy that is bolstered by the focus on marks indicated below:

EMS2: At the moment it’s about marks, it’s not about participation, it’s not about outcomes, it’s about marks.
EMS3: If something doesn’t count marks or doesn’t count serious marks, it’s as though the students aren’t really motivated to do it. So these participation marks will make up part of it, but if it doesn’t carry that serious weight I fear they won’t take it seriously.

EMS3: I started trying this, because of that ten percent…many more people will attend class and work in class if it counts a bit more, but I was told we’re not allowed.

EMS4: I only said I want it a bit more to motivate them to put in more effort. Because that ten percent…many of them just leave it. They say what is ten percent?

Students are motivated by marks and teaching, learning and assessment do not matter much when no marks are at stake. Even the 10% participation mark is of little consequence to students and thus the participant’s plea for a greater percentage weight for class attendance and the participants’ practice of employing marks to ensure some effort from students.

EMS1: He can’t just give an answer…it’s difficult for them…if they don’t motivate something, then I subtract marks. If they don’t give me a reason for doing what they did, then I subtract marks. So they have to learn to motivate whatever they say…and they have to motivate it from the literature.

EMS3: What works well is…I give them a question or a small assignment to do in a group and it counts about ten, but you can get fifty percent extra if you’re willing to come do it in front. So even those who aren’t willing to do it in front…still get their hundred percent…those who are willing…get a hundred and fifty percent.

Marks are subtracted for failure to perform a certain action, such as motivating an answer, to drive students towards higher cognitive levels. They are even rewarded for the confidence and willingness to demonstrate a presentation to the class. Marks are thus linked to the relevant outcomes, but are subject to quantitative and norm-referenced assessment.

The focus on attendance requirements speaks of the outcomes-based assessment approach of the first decade, described in Chapter 2, in which assessment is an add-on to instruction and not an integral part of the instructional process or source of information to both lecturer and student.

### 6.8.2 Summative assessment

Participants are of the view that summative assessment should bear greater weight than formative assessment, as the following reveals:
EMS2: The big problem is that because you must treat it like an exam, as seriously, when assignments come in. It is a Turn-it-in nightmare [all agree]. This year we’re paying an assistant for that week to go through the Turn-it-in reports. You can’t just look at the percentage. You have to look through the report to see what’s going on in there. So it becomes a huge job to remove the dishonesty from such an assignment, whereas if it’s only a small part of your story, then you can blow it off. But if it counts thirty percent or something of an exam, then it becomes...

EMS3: ...I don’t have a problem with the fifty-fifty as such, because I think it forces the students to know they have to work through the exam and through the semester. When you make one of the weighs more, they’re immediately stressed. Now the exam counts seventy and how will we know whether we will manage the exam, did we prepare enough for exam conditions, the exam. If you let it count less, I don’t know, I’ve never had such a situation, but I think it will be some sort of headache.

EMS5: Yes in an ideal world you would have the participation process as half, for its formative value. The fact that you get the opportunity to develop...but it’s not a buffer in view of the exam. It helps you, because you get all that background and knowledge. The exam is the exam. It would be best, because it would take away all this admin and worry about supervisors and Turn-it-in…then you purely do participation in its ideal form. Then it is truly about participation.

The formative value of formative assessment is considered a pipedream and the opportunity afforded the student to develop is not a guarantee for success in the exam. The exam is uppermost ("The exam is the exam"), because it produces more reliable results and ensures participation under the kind of controlled conditions that prevent dishonesty and plagiarism that makes the reliability of the results of formative assessment questionable and inhibits its formative value. The advocacy for the exam is thus related to the behaviour of students and not to the teaching, learning and assessment process. An equal division of weight between the formative and summative assessment would, according to participants, ensure equal work effort. This problem could be addressed with a revision of the assessment plan, as explained below:

EMS3: ...with us if you ask for a change to the assessment plan, based on your teaching method…the director is quite open-minded. I, for example, asked permission to adapt my assessment for my third-years, so it’s still fifty-fifty…can we show a participation that still
counts fifty percent...the student has a huge assignment for staff management, which I find senseless to count for the formal formative. They have so much work to do for that assignment that I consider it a summative assignment. So...my exam...counts seventy percent and my assignment counts thirty percent of the exam mark of the exam mark that is then fifty percent. It works incredibly well, because the students know that what they do in April they do as part of their exam mark. It is in a group.

The division between formative and summative assessment is 50:50. The assignment, which is completed during the semester, makes up 30% of the exam mark and is made equal to the exam, as in Faculty 6, thereby employing formative assessment for summative value. Making the formative assessment task both part of the participation mark and also the exam mark engenders the appropriate effort from students, since it now “counts for the exam”. This transitional outcomes-based assessment approach of the 1990s is considered more motivational, corrective and progressive in purpose with regard to student performance (Brainard, 1997:164). The exam must, as participants indicated, meet certain standards.

EMS5: Yes, and he assesses...it includes everything…

EMS4: ...integration is also important to me in the final exam…

EMS2: It has to be on the right levels, it can’t be a load of old questions. It must be a prime exam opportunity, in its best form that you may discriminate between who knows and who doesn’t know.

The exam paper is to encompass all the content covered during the semester or year and must be a “prime opportunity” to determine students’ knowledge and skills. It must also provide for integration and application of knowledge (as advocated in Faculties 1, 4 and 5).

EMS5: So, on honours level, especially because they’re application subjects, I don’t like to test knowledge, I would rather have the theory applied or I would rather have them practise it, but it would only be in assignments. I don’t have them write a big test at honours level anyway. The depth of the assignments is adequate to determine whether they have it under control.

EMS1: They do presentations...they build models, they do all sorts of stuff. So I do it and then I view it as finished. Because they also have to show me that they have mastered the theory. But I have to tell you it works very well, they are enormously well prepared. I have not yet
given a bad mark, because they know…with me they don’t submit any written work, they do a presentation…then they have a model and then I ask them questions. I say why did you do this, why did you do that, do you think this would have been better, please motivate the following.

Students apply theory by means of presentations and model proposals. They are always thoroughly prepared and duly receive high marks. Lecturers may also then ask them to explain certain aspects of such presentations, such as its development and objective.

As the following response indicates, performance-based assessment is mainly conducted by means of group work:

EMS5: It’s always some kind of consultancy team, so they have to work in groups. Then they also have class participation and class participation work with a scale of descriptors saying they first have to give themselves a mark and then I also give a mark. So I can bring the case study they had to prepare to class any time, it’s also a bit more informal.

EMS1: …where they work in groups and each individual has a task or a portfolio. That is for the third-years…

Practical work consists of portfolio assignments, case studies, proposals, PowerPoint presentations in class and building models. The majority of these occur in groups, where each member of the group is tasked with a certain section of the work to ensure the participation of every student. Completed case studies first undergo self-assessment, according to a rubric, and then assessment by the lecturer. The participant further ensures participation and class attendance by keeping students in the dark about when assessment of case studies will occur and when presentations/proposals will be given. Presentations may also be assessed outside out the scheduled class time and each student receives a group mark.

EMS1: It’s about…sixty students, which I divide into groups of five. So I have twelve groups that do presentations…it’s a whole weekend…it’s fun, there’s stuff to eat and…it’s almost like a social, but like a prestige forum. So, they come in, it’s formal. They get something, then they do the presentation and I as client ask questions…

Students are divided into groups and then schedule a time for their presentation over the course of a weekend. The assessment is formal, but is conducted in an informal social environment. Presentations take the form of role play, upon which the lecturer (client) poses questions.
EMS1: ...It’s difficult to mark, but I like it because the students think it’s easier but it isn’t necessarily... I don’t tell them to bring their handbook, I tell them to bring any source they want. So they can sit there with 3G and Internet and everything, because I want to see how they think. I don’t want to assess the information necessarily.

Open-book tests also form part of this faculty’s assessment practices and, as was found to be the case in Faculty 1 and 2, students tend to underestimate the open-book test. Students are allowed to make use of any resource, even the Internet, since the objective is to test thought process in the application of knowledge and not the theory itself. Participants speak of a fragmented view on theory and practice, but application denotes an integrated approach. As the following response reveals, the application of knowledge and skills is markedly influenced by the industry:

EMS3: Look our professional bodies are really quite focused. They tell you to teach your guys by way of skills, you have to teach them soft skills. They are really focused on the exam part and they are really focused on what you test in the final exam. For example, for CIMA accreditation, to decide whether our university gets accreditation or not. At the moment we have full exemption, the maximum. To decide that, you send your admission exam that counts sixty percent with honours and your final exam that counts seventy of their final mark, their participation mark counts thirty percent.

EMS4: The thing with us, it sounds terrible, but the whole goal with our programme is almost to prepare students for the council exam. It’s all these projects and stuff, we all like it, but in the end your student has to pass the exam. That’s all it is, no one is going to care whether he can demonstrate presentation skills, he has to pass the exam. Another thing is, those long exams...it’s integrated...small tests are difficult...the semester test has fallen away, we found it very difficult, because how do you prepare a student with formative assessment for a big integrated exam?

According to the participant, some of the schools in the faculty are accredited with professional councils that have certain requirements on assessment. These councils, representing the industry, urge that greater weight be given to the semester exam that serves as an admission exam and exact great influence over the ultimate objective of formative and summative assessment. Although formative assessment is of little importance to these councils, it becomes the lecturers’ task to prepare students already at undergraduate level with formative assessment for the council exam. The abovementioned influence of the councils thus also extends to the weighting ratio of
30% to 70%, for formative and summative assessment respectively, as well as the content of the exam (Allais, 2007:2) to ensure relevance.

**EMS3:** They want to see what you asked in the admission exam...it is according to CIMA guidelines and requirements, but what are you doing now?...with us they will know everything they need to know...but I can tell you now that our professional bodies won’t, for example, approve this at all.

**EMS5:** ...it will depend on the subject whether the outcomes lend themselves thereto or to the councils...they have to register with the Health Proficiency Council and there are also certain stuff...so there won’t be just one policy...and you have to, but you also need academic freedom.

The professional council referred to requires that the content of the admission exam conforms to their prescriptions and also for summative assessment to outweigh formative assessment, since the former is deemed to be more reliable. Assessment practices are thus not only regulated by the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), but also by the stipulations of the professional councils of the industry.

Aside from the usual challenges associated with assessment of integrated learning, participants also have to deal with the tension between adhering to the standards set by the industry and the desire to protect the NWU’s academic freedom. It is a conflict further exacerbated by the pressure to place masses of student within the industry in a rural area that lacks the appropriate facilities.

**EMS3:** No, we have too many students.

**EMS1:** Student numbers, but also the availability of places where they can go...where do you send him?...if I want someone to assess them, I have to contact that company and you know the admin, I would run away, not a chance.

The challenges that beset work-integrated learning are the excessive administration, large number of students and the lack of resources in the industry. Challenges experienced by all the other faculties of the NWU’s Potchefstroom campus. The mentioned lack of resources of this rural city becomes even more problematic with the ever-increasing competition between universities.

**EMS3:** Remember, we can’t do it on the GR programme, because of the enormous competition between universities for the passing percentage and passing figure and that type of stuff. No one gives away their trade secrets.
The competition among universities not only relates to available resources, as indicated above, but also to the quality of students. Universities, therefore, don’t collaborate or share knowledge, skills and resources. This competition among South African universities extends to attracting high-performing students to ensure high passing rates and gives rise to the need for a new paradigm at the NWU, as expressed by participants in this faculty as well as Faculties 4 and 6.

EMS2: Even then you may get someone who resists any change. I would like expose more people to assessment in other places to realise see how well they do it at UCT or whatever, we have to wake up. Most people are for it, we must compare and change and I think once you have that culture of we don’t have to do it the way it has always been done, then it can get rolling…If all your colleagues’ stuff is on the following level, most guys will realise, this makes me look bad, I need to shape up!

This change in paradigm also entails exposure to the assessment practices of other universities. The reference to insight into the practices of UCT echoes that of a participant in Faculty 1 about the assessment conducted at the University of Stellenbosch and reflects how limiting and inhibiting participants find the NWU’s teaching and learning policy.

EMS3: I don’t know what it states.

EMS5: ...those procedures definitely have an impact on what you do…

EMS1: Everything is determined by the marks system. So it doesn’t matter what you think you want, they just tell you the stuff needs to get done, because the marks system is closing.

EMS2: ...it dominates everything!

Members of this faculty also admitted their ignorance about the content of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), but indicated its domineering impact on assessment practices. As indicated in Faculty 6, the lecturer has very little freedom in the assessment process, to the extent that lecturers even have to obtain permission for the type of exam they wish to offer.

6.9 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 8

6.9.1 Informal formative assessment

This faculty, like Faculties 1-7 and the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012), does not differentiate between informal and formal formative assessment.
**N3:** So we don’t really have informal…each lecturer decides…also with attendance – sometimes I give an equation for five marks…if he was there or not, a one or a zero or I make it count five marks.

**N1:** Usually, I have them write an attendance test at the start of class in which I ask one or two questions, about two to three minutes, and it doesn’t count any marks, it’s only for attendance and to see if they understand the class work. I usually ask the demi to go through them for me, just to sort the rights and the wrongs and I quickly check the wrongs to see how many rights to how many wrongs…the first fifteen minutes of class they then get time for the class test…

The participant indicated that the faculty does not conduct informal formative assessment at all and any spontaneous informal interaction between the lecturer and students or between the students is not considered (informal) assessment. Formative assessment is labelled “informal” when marks are not recorded. Students write a test in every class and although the participant claimed that it provides an indication of students’ understanding of subject content, only a cursory review is made of the number of “right” answers and the test is merely a tool to confirm attendance. Formal formative assessment consists of assignments, class tests and projects.

**N1:** Class tests once every two weeks, about the work of the previous learning unit, and then assignments. Then they work on a big project for the end of the semester, in class. It helps them – the students get an idea of how the exam questions will be and it prepares them for how they should learn…the test series is in the middle of the semester and after that there’s still a lot of work to assess.

Apart from the test written the first fifteen minutes of every class, students write another test every two weeks and on top of that also the test week mid-semester and a number of projects. Class tests and exam assignments are all geared toward preparing students for the kind of questions to expect.

**N6:** ...there should be a week for the really big tests, but…it may not count more than 35 of the participation mark; now you tell the students there are 10 chapters and we must do everything up to chapter 5 and you write about it all…but it can’t bear much weight in the end…but that test would be good for preparing for the exam, where you can combine stuff and ask chapters more integrated.
Chapter 6: Analysis of assessment practices

Class tests assess each completed study unit, while the semester test provides an integrated overview of the student's progress at a given point in time. The participants greatly favour the latter as preparation for the exam for its similarly integrated formulation, only on a smaller scale, making it a kind of mini exam. This faculty conducts strongly exam-driven formative assessment, while also attending to the participation mark.

N7: They already barely manage to come to class, if you then tell them they don't need a participation mark what'll they do then?

N1: ...it's preparation for the exam. Because the exam counts so much...writing the semester mark gives them the benefit of marks in the same format...we now have the one semester mark and then the two class tests during the semester...the big tests count 50 and goes toward the participation mark, we count 20 percent – no, perhaps 15 percent per test – and then the semester tests counts 35 percent.

The participation mark drives the assessment process, since it is the only means by which lecturers can ensure class attendance. Participants furthermore advocate an increase in the percentage weight of the semester test in view of the amount of course work it involves. Marks serve to motivate students, as observed in Faculties 1-7. Another method of formal formative assessment (as opposed to informal formative assessment) is the tutorial, presented by lecturers' assistants.

N3: We use the Gradebook in which all the tutorials' marks and other marks are recorded and the student can immediately see his mark and any mistakes can quickly be corrected.

N3: The tutorials, yes, every week – they count about 20 percent of the participation mark and are about the previous week's work. It is available on eFundi, so they can already start beforehand with the tutorial. The engineers, for example, have class on Friday afternoons – the practical. So as of this year if they already submit it on Friday, they get a bonus mark and if they only submit it on Monday, they only get the mark for the tutorial. So, it's to force them to complete it on Friday.

Weekly tutorials offer students support and additional learning, while providing the lecturer with an additional teaching forum. The tutorial centres on completing assignments that have to be submitted by a certain deadline and contribute 20% to the participation mark. This mark-driven approach is further cemented by rewarding/motivating students’ with a “bonus mark” for early submission. Feedback is thus summative, not formative, which makes it norm-referenced
assessment. This approach is further strengthened with the quantitative (marks and percentages) assessment of performance-based activities, such as presentations and the like.

N9:  ...we have the students give presentations – so they have to submit an assignment and then they also give a presentation before the lecture on the relevant topic. It also forces them to prepare…it counts something like 10 percent of the semester…

N7:  We also have practical – it is practical in the laboratory – and the students write a short test beforehand to see if they prepared. It counts. The practical actually counts 45 percent of the final value and a part thereof are then reports they have to submit after every practical.

Students demonstrate their knowledge and skills in presentations. Such presentations force them to prepare for class, since they make up 20% of the semester mark. Practical skills are also tested through laboratory work, for which they have to submit reports, and accounts for 45% of their semester mark. Although the practical is a performance-based activity that requires grading performance in competence terms, by awarding it a percentage the participants have turned it into quantitative and normative assessment. This norm-referenced assessment does not only relate to how assessment is conducted, but also by whom.

N9:  We are allowing them to work on their own as of this year, but before…The students don't like working in groups and some always work harder than others. So it's difficult to have them evaluate each other.

N7:  It depends on the size of the class groups. If it's under 100, we do the marking ourselves…more than that, we make use of demis…

The assessment method, i.e. who is responsible for assessment, is determined by the class size – anything over 100 students requires assistance. The vast number of students hampers group work and the faculty now follows a more individual approach. Another obstacle to alternative assessment methods is the dishonesty of students, as the following responses show:

N3:  ...because we have so many students...150 to a class...we have...tests and mix up the questions…on different coloured paper. We have students who wrote in the “Weet en Sweet”, but because he's not available we have to accommodate everybody in class. So we ensure that the tests alternate as they write and we also get guys to help us supervise. We try to limit the copying as much as possible. In a way we kind of manage, because the tests are different colours.
N1: We also have a lot of assignments and we handle it by warning them about plagiarism, etc. with the first assignment. When they load it on eFundi it is in Word with Turn-it-in and when the results come back...I give them zero for the first assignment as a warning. I tell them they get zero for this or that reason, in future I won’t be as kind. Next time I will take it further. They usually get a huge fright and then from then on the assignments look much better...because it is big insight assignments...they all go through Turn-it-in and it helps a lot to use it for assignments.

Large student numbers packed into inadequate classrooms makes copying off of a classmate’s paper easy and tempting. A range of steps has been taken to prevent cheating, such as alternating questions in different coloured exam papers and making use of Turn-it-in to address plagiarism. In an attempt to make assessment more constructive, a participant offers feedback in the form of reports and marks.

N1: I usually give them a report on the general mistakes and give them their own marks back. Typically their small assignments, about two to three page reports. Then I tell them to come to me if they have any questions about their marks or reports or how they got the mark...I don’t give the hard copies back. I give general notes back.

The errors in students’ work are set out for them in reports. The reference to “general notes”, offering commentary on assignments, denotes a qualitative assessment method. Creating best-student awards is considered “unfair”, as the following response indicates:

N5: ...it is potentially unfair to give prizes to the best students in the module...

The above methods of rewards is the norm-referenced practice of comparing student performance with fellow students’ average percentage and building a ranking order, i.e. reporting results in percentages and class position. It calls to mind Hodnett’s (2001:179) assertion, described in the next chapter, on the negative impact of normative assessment on the student and is clearly reflected in the response below. It not only fails to motivate the student to put in a greater effort, but also the lecturer.

N5: I don’t know whether we should go to such trouble for people repeating subjects – it seems to me that they didn’t do their part in the past and to then try and accommodate everybody is almost – we are almost too accommodating.
The participant questions whether lecturers should go to such lengths to accommodate students who repeat modules and clearly feels that students also bear responsibility in the learning process. It illustrates how student behaviour influences practices, especially in terms of the test timetable, and is another factor in an assessment process that already has to adapt to large student numbers by, for example, not giving first-year students open-book tests.

N7: Our third- and second-years aren't that many. Our first-years don't do open-book exams, because they are too busy...

This participant finds the formative open-book test appropriate for second- and third-year, but not first-year students. First-year students are not deemed capable yet, a sentiment that corresponds with observations made in the other faculties over their lack of “maturity” for such an assessment technique. It is also further reference to the issue of the calibre of the student entering tertiary study cited in the other faculties.

N1: Open-book tests - ? As long as they don't cheat with plagiarism...Because you can give them different tests, but they can do what they want. So I don't have to check for crib notes or whatever, because the questions aren't...they won't use crib notes. It's much more difficult, because you have to study a lot harder. Because if you don't know what's going on in the textbook, it won't help you at all. I draw up the exam paper in such a way...say they write about study unit one to four, but you can also ask questions from other sections that overlap with that chapter. So you have to see the thing as a whole...

N5: ...open-book exams...are much harder to study for and there are no easy questions. If they're going to write exam, they have to put in much more effort to pass and do well.

The open-book test is designed to offer an integrated overview or whole of the different study units. This assessment technique does not test predetermined facts, concepts and theories, but largely insight on the relation between concepts and the study units. It is formative assessment that requires the student to have a clear understanding of the precise interrelation of themes of the subject content and also in-depth insight. The open-book format allows the student to consult the study material during the completion of the test, preventing any dishonesty in obtaining information. Just as open-book testing is confined to senior students, work-integrated learning only pertains to postgraduate studies.

N5: We have our M programme where the student does a work-integrated project in the industry during the second semester. They're already almost trained to go out there, but it’s the first
place where they get it. It would be almost impossible, because most B-students will have to go work in Johannesburg or Pretoria or Cape Town. Here it would be impossible...definitely not for our students' line of work.

N9: Our honours students do projects together in the field. We have a pro bono office that do projects for the municipality and their practical is to help with the problems...last year was the first year...I took it over this year and I'll give them a mark for participation. It is different from community service. If there is formal assessment, then it's part of their module mark.

Work-integrated learning is also rather limited for undergraduate students in this faculty, because of the lack of facilities in the area, and confined to input from visiting practitioners. Master's students are deemed industry ready, while honour students have the collective opportunity to gain practical experience and offer assistance to the local municipality.

N1: ...we also get people from Vodacom to present workshops for the third-years and honours on mobile application development of cell phones, etc. For example, the third-years do IT development usually in September in which they have to do certain projects. The whole module consists of a number of projects they have to work on – sometimes individually, sometimes in groups. After Vodacom has been here...then the project that follows has to do with the workshop presentation. It's a bit of contact with the industry, but they don't necessarily go work there.

Undergraduate work-integrated learning comprises of a number of workshops by industry professionals, which are each followed by a related project. In an endeavour to compensate for the lack of work-integrated learning and open-book tests, the participants assess integrated learning in the exam.

6.9.2 Summative assessment

N6: What's difficult with class tests, especially in maths, is that you can't really ask integrated questions. Maths doesn't work that way, in the end you have to be able to kind of mix everything...the chapters can't be separated. So the final exam paper is truly a summary, integration of everything they've done.

N7: The same goes for chemistry – it's theory and mathematics in one. You can't do a bit in detail and then that and that – only when they write exam...
The subject specifics of the module also steers the design and composition of the exam paper, as it does in other faculties. The exam is valued as a summation and integration of the student’s knowledge and skills. The exam is also essential to the requirements of the industry’s professional council.

*N5:* No, our externals have...Because the exam is for exemption, they are sometimes rather...not just about the language, they are also rather...some of the exam papers the students write for NQF levels are also unrealistic, because of the council....if we look at the NQF...then our students will have to put their exam paper in at a higher level each time. We have external exams...external examiners for our exam papers for exemption purposes. We have a professional council...

External examiners contribute to the design of exam papers to ensure that they meet the difficulty standards of the profession’s council and the NQF levels. The participant indicates that the requirements for admission to the profession sometimes make exam papers unrealistically complex. Aside from the marked influence of the industry on practices, especially summative assessment, this faculty also has to uphold flow-through rates like the other faculties on campus.

*N5:* Then there are flow-through targets...that’s the problem...when the exam paper gets external input, then too few people pass. Then you might as well have the exam paper count less when you put the exam mark on the system. So such external factors have a great impact.

The above participant indicates the low pass rate for exams assessed by external examiners, which forces lecturers to adjust the weight percentage of the exam to comply with flow-through rates. Lecturers endeavour to render a more reliable and valid representation of student performance by collaborating on the compilation of exam papers.

*N1:* What we do with math...we are four lecturers for the first-years. So when we write two exam papers per exam, then there are four exam papers. So each lecturer draws up a paper, but he sends it to another lecturer without a memo. Those lecturers then work through the exams without a memo – that way you can see if there are any alternatives and they also offer suggestions for questions.

Participants thus promote reliability and validity of assessment by collaborating on the compilation of exam papers and memoranda, in which each lecturer completes the exam of a colleague.
Despite the above exploration of diversity in exam questions, participation still utilises marks to motivate participation and diligence among students.

N1: *Making a participation mark 50 to force students to work harder during the quarter is a good idea, because it prepares them for the exam and they then take the exam more seriously, they take participation more seriously. If they know there is only one exam, they also take that exam much more seriously.*

N5: *Two exam papers, an hour and a half. No, 75-75. No, it's only for math, but it's a lot of work for the students. So as of last year we now have... two exam papers we can write. So we divide it into study units that more or less fit for them and then they write two different exam papers...it isn't two modules, so he has to pass both...*

The participant is of the view that giving summative assessment a greater percentage weight will engender greater preparation among students and similar to the formal formative assessment, summative assessment also consists of multiple assessments. Regardless of an integrated approach, the amount of work seemingly necessitates students writing two exam papers. In conjunction thereto students are also offered a second opportunity that is often abused, according to participants.

N1: *...he writes the first opportunity to get a look at the exam paper, he writes another subject the next day, so he barely studied for this one – it's the more difficult subject – and then he writes the second opportunity and gets high marks. So it seems the second opportunity helps a lot to make the marks better.*

N5: *I found with my one subject last year that everybody who failed the first opportunity had a participation of less than 60...if they passed the second opportunity, but the first opportunity, for all those who had a participation of 60, I have one or two that passed the first opportunity...it seems to indicate that...those who passed the second opportunity it was just a few extras.*

N1 related how students often write the first assessment opportunity unprepared merely to gain insight into the nature of the exam and then do well in the second opportunity. The second participant indicated the rarity of students with a participation mark of 60% or less passing the exam, when in truth a student should pass the exam if marks reflect his/her progress and summative assessment is the value of the formative assessment.
Similar to the other faculties’ responses on the culture of learning on the campus, the participants of this faculty ascribe poor performance to laziness.

**N1:** I often have students with 40, 41 participation who pass, but I think it’s because they’re lazy during the semester. They know they only have to get 40 to write and will study harder during the exam. He then works himself to death during the exam and passes. The issue of the second opportunity comes later...

**N5:** It’s really difficult to do something like cooperative learning effectively in class, because…participation forces them to do something, for their own good. If you leave a student who doesn’t work, he won’t work.

The above perception of laziness among students refers back to the earlier observations about students “not doing their part”. The above participant finds cooperative learning ineffective when students refuse to participate and only do the work when compelled to do so.

Enquiries into the need for staff training led to the following remarks regarding alternative assessment:

**N5:** ...I was bored enough to do it at Waldo Krugel who…finds new ways of conveying information. He is very technologically driven, looking at animations and that stuff and I think they give them workshops that he adds to and then it says on his LinkedIn he has…a blog. He is the exception, I think, because he is rather young.

**N7:** You can see he has some kind of driving force...

The reference to employing technology and animation reflects the wish, also expressed in other faculties, for new and alternative methods of assessment. This wish comes from the general consensus within faculties that the current paradigm has become obsolete.

**N5:** I find it a good thing...you can easily stagnate...the world has changed...our young students here have a different attitude than when we were young students...they are not as conceptually developed as those who studied with me; they are much more technologically driven, than the people of our time.

**N1:** ...about technology in terms of assessment...if new techniques are developed for assessment with technology, then there must...there are workshops on eFundi, etc. and...it’s a good thing...but to make it compulsory, I don’t think that’s a good idea.
The world has changed, according to the participant, and refusing to keep abreast of development leads to stagnation. Students are considered part of a new generation that is more technologically advanced, but not as well rounded as previous generations. Given that the current generation is so “technology driven”, it is imperative for lecturers to receive training in the technological aspect to assessment such as eFundi. Participants do not feel that it needs to be compulsory. The lecturers in this faculty share the dissatisfaction of other faculties with the training offered to date at the NWU.

N5: ...these work sessions presented to us aren’t always applicable to the subject...there were some good ideas…it is important that we be exposed to it. It is easier in a group than individually...it could almost be incorporated into the assessment week, when there are no classes. It’s good to be aware of things out there and strategies...

Similar to the other faculties, the training is described as generic and not subject specific. Alternative assessment methodology is still deemed as something “out there”, although its value is recognised and lecturers would indeed welcome training specific to subject groups that would enable mutual support.

Professional industry councils not only set certain assessment requirements for students, but also for lecturers.

N5: ...I have to do a certain number of CDPs...it’s “compulsory”, but what’s great is that the annual congress is richly attended; no one reads beforehand, you just attend a session and listen, then you get your points and you get hours. There are indications, since the profession has been discovered, of intentions to testing people a bit more or some or other web-based thing to show you read through the thing or...

According to the participant, lecturers who are members of professional councils must fulfil an annual continuous professional development point (CPD) requirement that includes attending conferences and the possibility of online assessment.
6.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter details the assessment practices of each of the cases, in relation to the categories contained in Chapter 1. Analysis of the data offer certain insights, often relevant to all the cases and yet unique in other cases. The next chapter is indeed an endeavour to make sense of the patterns from *inter alia* the detail and complexity of the data. Although it requires greater conceptual and integrated analysis, the interpretation process remains highly personal – largely influenced by my own perspectives and interpretation ability.
CHAPTER 7: REFLECTION ON LECTURERS’ ASSESSMENT PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter opens with reflection, as part of a multiple case study report, on the dominant assessment practices and perspectives to illustrate similarities and differences within the faculties. This reflection includes a clear conception and justification of the theoretical constructs that inform these assessment practices and perspectives.

The case study data was analysed by means of the organisational logic model, suggested by Yin (2014:162), which entailed matching the empirically observed events to the theoretical predicted events. This array permitted the analysis to probe whether lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives appear to be different or similar. The predicted similarity or contrast derived from the literature is displayed in Table 5.1, illustrating whether the findings from the observed profiles of the eight faculties either confirmed or disconfirmed original expectations and connected to the prior research reviewed in developing the original design.

The trace cross-case patterns derived from the cross-case synthesis, in the second section, illustrate that the cases are well connected and replicated or contrasted with each other and rely strongly on argumentative interpretation. The findings of the study are based on the observed profiles of the cases, confirmed and disconfirmed with the trends in the literature, thus connecting well to the prior research and document analysis reviewed in developing the original design.

This heuristic model of Grundy (1987) serves as classification framework to filter through a clearer and more reliable perspective on assessment practices. Considering the aforementioned classification framework, this chapter reports on lecturers’ assessment perspectives and practices in the light of filters deemed to be meaningful.
7.2 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 1

The analysis of lecturer assessment practices and perspectives in Faculty 1, revealed the following assessment approaches:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Table 7.1: Faculty 1 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 1</th>
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<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
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<td>SECOND DECADE 1990-</td>
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<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
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<td>Formative (formal and informal) assessment used for summative purposes</td>
<td>Informal formative assessment strategies over the course of events</td>
<td>No evidence found of assessment practices and perspectives that steer towards transformational outcomes-based assessment. Participants, however, express a need for a new paradigm in education</td>
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<td>Formal formative assessment pen-and-paper semester tests, class tests and major assignments</td>
<td>Informal formative assessment activities, e.g. questioning and multiple-choice class tests, monitoring student performance daily</td>
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<td>Repeated summative assessment</td>
<td>Exam-driven - no evidence of formal formative assessment to enhance teaching and learning</td>
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<td><strong>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</strong></td>
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Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers' assessment perspectives and practices

7.2.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

Informal formative assessment, in support of the teaching and learning process, is not fully realised in the faculty. This kind of assessment is conducted according to a specific curricular framework in a systematic and structured fashion, which makes it formal formative assessment (Yorke, 2003:479).

Informal formative assessment is applied to compel students to participate in learning events; to teach them greater responsibility and discipline; and to ensure class attendance. It serves to promote accountability rather than teaching and learning.

Assessing informal formative assessment quantitatively (marks and percentages) and giving norm-referenced feedback limit the constructive value of qualitative feedback. Giving student performance a certain value makes it formal formative and not informal formative assessment. The essential support that informal formative assessment should offer student learning does not occur.

This faculty’s formal formative assessment mainly takes place by means of traditional scheduled pen-and-paper semester tests, class tests and major assignments. Pen-and-paper class tests are especially popular among lecturers, which they give throughout the semester during class time, and are intended to measure progress as well as prepare students for the exam.

This formative assessment approach correlates with convergent formative assessment, in which the lecturer tests whether students can fulfil pre-specified objectives (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).
Lecturers take a quantitative and norm-referenced approach to formal formative assessment, in which performance-based assessment activities (case studies, demonstrations and presentations) serve to integrate theory into practice, regardless of whether it is content- or performance-based assessment, instead of a qualitative and criterion-referenced approach.

The faculty has a strongly exam-driven assessment structure, in which assignments and class tests are the means to prepare the student for the exam. It makes up 60% of the module mark and is of the traditional pen-and-paper variety.

This form of summative assessment is deemed important for providing a summation of the semester’s work and an overview of the study unit. It is also considered quite effective to manipulate student behaviour and address the responsibility (or lack thereof) they take for their own learning.

Teaching, learning and assessment are subject to quality-assurance processes and exam papers must be drawn up at the start of the semester in order to undergo moderation. According to the participants, it is this quality-assurance requirement that leads to “assessment driving learning” and “teaching towards the exam”.

Theory and practical application are seen and implemented independently from each other, a reality that is exacerbated by the lack of facilities in the Potchefstroom area for workplace experience and assessment. What limits the integration of theory and application further is the less than positive relationship between the faculty and the industry.

In this faculty the autocratic and patently lecturer-centred assessment approach requires a slavish adherence to prescriptions and allows the student little freedom for creativity. The lecturer-centred nature of assessment could possibly be ascribed to the culture of excessive student dependence that reduces the student to an object in the teaching and learning process. Naturally the relationship between lecturer and student is distant and impersonal.

7.2.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed that the purpose of informal and formal assessment is mainly to ensure accountability rather than to promote teaching and learning.
Assessment is aimed at discovering if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means (the textbook version of the scientific method) (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116).

Assessment practices are characterised by lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced assessment. It is a standards-based approach in which the lecturer assesses the student from the curriculum perspective. This view of assessment centres on repeated summative assessment, in which the student has no say and is merely the recipient of assessment.

Practices are positivist and behaviourist in nature and assessment is considered a procedure that is aimed at being as objective as possible. The behaviouristic assessment elements of marks and promotion serve to alter behaviour and guide students into more desirable directions.

Behaviouristic instruction techniques may well be useful in the classroom, but the use of assessment to ensure accountability, discipline, responsibility and class attendance (in other words behaviour manipulation and control) is alarming (Reynecke, 2008:23). This behaviouristic assessment approach robs the student of the right to reflect and make critical judgements on the knowledge and skills he/she is to master.

7.2.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

The faculty has moved away from the traditional content-based approach to more innovative performance-based assessment. In some modules content is revised annually to correspond with developments in knowledge and skills in the media and profession.

Students are offered alternative assessment opportunities in the form of case studies, open-book exams, work-integrated modules, oral tests for students with barriers to learning and oral exams. Case studies, given in open-book exams, enable lecturers to contextualise content to make the learning meaningful and relevant. Case studies are practically oriented and provide an overview of the study unit, whilst multiple-choice class tests aid baseline and diagnostic assessment.

Questioning is one of the techniques that steers teaching and learning activities. The information obtained from questioning and multiple-choice class tests assist the lecturer in determining students’ entry levels – e.g. their knowledge related to a lesson topic. According to Yorke (2003:479), informal formative assessment strategies are often accomplished through questions posed by the lecturer over the course of events and includes instantaneous feedback (Yorke, 2003:479). Informal formative assessment activities, such as questioning and multiple-choice
class tests, monitor student performance daily and are integral to the teaching and learning process.

Progress is measured in a variety of ways (lecturer, self-, peer and group assessment) and student involvement is ensured by means of alternative techniques such as debates, case studies, orals and presentations. The information obtained from these activities facilitates the teaching process, reflecting that assessment has been integrated into the education process.

Assignments usually entail identifying and solving true-to-life problems as well as critiquing and debating the views contained in industry articles, all of which develops the student's higher-order thinking skills.

7.2.4 Dominant interpretivist and constructivist view on assessment

The analysis of the lecturer’s assessment practices and perspectives reveals the faculty’s move towards diverse approaches to assessment.

The assessment approach is characterised by flexible planning that incorporates alternative forms of assessment such as questioning, debates, case studies, oral tests, practical presentations, open-book exams, work-integrated modules, an oral as third exam opportunity, multiple-choice class tests as well as baseline and diagnostic assessment. Assessment is accomplished jointly by the lecturer and the student. It involves making judgements to promote teaching as well as the good of all stakeholders – demanding a push towards qualitative outcomes.

The faculty endeavours to accommodate students with learning barriers through alternative assessment techniques, such as the oral exam, an initiative lecturers would like to expand by receiving training in remedial education. The starting point for lecturers is the development of pedagogical self-awareness, which entails recognising and being cautious of taken-for-granted lecturer-student interaction. Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:22) furthermore urge lecturers to adapt their assessment strategies to account for the special and specific needs of students.

Students are presented with a problem, requiring a specific activity, and students must then gather and apply information/knowledge to solve the problem in a particular context. Pragmatism advocates the active participation of students in the learning process by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve problems related to real-world situations. The assessment approach is based on a socio-constructivist view of learning and an intention of the lecturer to teach in the zone of proximal development. It is a divergent assessment approach aimed at discovering what
the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. Pragmatism focuses on the practical implementation of teaching, learning and assessment (Meyer et al., 2010:19). The interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employ practical modes of reasoning, as Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116) point out, where appropriate discussions are conducted in the light of the prevailing circumstances and not on the basis of pre-defined objectives.

Support is located in creating multiple opportunities by means of a range of teaching, learning and assessment methods that offer the student a reasonable chance of demonstrating his/her knowledge and skills to the best of his/her ability. Constructivism emphasises learning diversity (Beets, 2007:92) and sensitivity to this diversity in students’ needs and styles will enable the lecturer to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to one that employs alternative teaching, learning and assessment opportunities.

7.3 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 2

The analysis of the lecturer’s assessment practices and perspectives in this faculty, revealed the following assessment approaches:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment;
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment;
- Transformational outcomes-based assessment within the postmodern view on assessment.
Table 7.2: Faculty 2 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 2</th>
<th>STRUCTURALISM</th>
<th>POST-STRUCTURALISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST**  
**FIRST DECADE 1980-**  
Traditional outcomes-based education | Formative assessment applied for summative purposes | Formative assessment is viewed a continuous process |
<p>| Informal formative assessment - “informal” when marks awarded are not recorded | | |
| Formative assessment reviews student performance, addresses student behaviour (diligence and responsibility) and ensures class attendance | | |
| Formative assessment functions independent of learning process | Feedback shows how to proceed to next level or solve a problem | Work-integrated learning not aimed at student education and academic assessment, but to serve community |
| Content and practice separately assessed, resulting in fragmented view of learning | Move towards alternative assessment practices | Alternative assessment includes community projects |
| Strongly lecturer-centred approach, exemplified in lecturer’s preference to conduct assessment personally | Group work part of the teaching method - assessment jointly accomplished by lecturer and student to produce best performance | Lecturers and students should act as change agents by analysing and addressing societal needs. |
| Norm-referenced and quantitative approach | | |
| Content-based assessment | Students apply appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems | Assessment focuses strongly on context in which student learns |
| Criteria for practical work to grade student performance in competence terms, not clear and explicit | | Student to master competencies like critical thinking, good communication, technological proficiency and problem solving in real situations/contexts |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST DECADE 1980–</strong></td>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based</td>
<td><strong>SECOND DECADE 1990–</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional outcomes-based education</strong></td>
<td>assessment - student assessed from curriculum perspective</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Decade 2000–</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assessment of work-integrated</strong></td>
<td><strong>THIRD DECADE 2000–</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformational outcomes-based education</strong></td>
<td>learning conducted externally by workplace, as part of quality-assurance procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards-based assessment - student assessed from curriculum perspective</td>
<td>Perspectives lean towards divergent formative assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (class tests) centres on repeated summative assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class tests, part of formative assessment, considered “add-on” and not part of number of assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
<td>Student’s developmental levels taken into account – assessment characterised by flexible planning</td>
<td>Student exposed to cross-disciplinary approach - learning a constructive process in which student constructs knowledge or makes meaning, according to own perception of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivist and behaviourist view of assessment</td>
<td>Active participation of student in learning process, as advocated by pragmatism - assessment based on socio-constructivist view of learning</td>
<td>Community involvement of students, as per later form of interpretative tradition and socio-cultural perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturer intent on going beyond current boundaries of knowledge, implying an emancipatory approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

Informal formative assessment is deemed “informal” when the marks awarded are not recorded.

Formative assessment occurs through assignments, class tests and conventional semester tests that all contribute to the student’s participation mark. The information obtained from such assessment is applied summatively.

Similar to Faculty 1, the above assessment serves to review student performance as well as address student behaviour (diligence and responsibility) and ensure class attendance. It is an approach that functions independently of the learning process.
The very popular pen-and-paper exams do not only entail the memorisation of historical facts and expressions, but also the development of analytical thinking skills. Language skills are practically applied through translation exercises.

The faculty follows a strongly lecturer-centred approach, exemplified in the lecturer's preference to conduct all assessment personally. This approach focuses more on the intentions of the lecturer, than on the intended results of the learning events. Learned dependence has the student passively following the lecturer's instructions, without seeking beyond the boundaries seemingly set for the task (Yorke, 2003:489). Assistants and honours students are at times called on to teach and assess classes, which is a practice that could well estrange the lecturer from both the assessment process and from students.

In line with the traditional norm-referenced and quantitative approach, assessment is centred on content. Lecturers assess assignments according to a scheme, but clearly measurable criteria have not been formulated. The criteria for the practical work, which grades competence, are not clear and explicit either. Marks are awarded to a student relative to his/her place ("top 10") in a group, measuring relative rank and not growth. Promoting learning is not the primary objective.

### 7.3.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are discussed in detail under 7.2.2.

Faculty 2’s assessment practices are similar to those of Faculty 1 in that they are characterised by lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced assessment. As indicated in Chapter 1, the assessment approach is standards-based and the lecturer assesses the student from the curriculum perspective. This view of assessment centres on repeated summative assessment. The lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means (e.g. textbook version of the scientific method) (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116).

These assessment practices, as indicated in Chapter 1, are more closely related to the positivist and behaviourist view of assessment. The lecturer’s positivist perspective considers assessment a procedure that is aimed to be as objective as possible. Behaviouristic assessment techniques such as marks and promotion are mainly aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it into more desirable directions, which is also the case in this faculty. Behaviouristic instructions techniques may well be useful in the classroom, but to use assessment for accountability issues, discipline,
responsibility and class attendance (in other words behaviour manipulation and control) is alarming (Reynecke, 2008:23). This behaviouristic assessment approach robs the student of the right to reflect and make critical judgements on the knowledge and skills he/she must master. This approach functions independently of the learning process.

7.3.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

The faculty is greatly in favour of formative assessment, which is deemed a continuous process and compared to a “chain reaction”. In contrast to content-based assessment, the developmental levels of the student’s already acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account. Feedback serves to show the student how to proceed to the next level or how to solve a problem.

Group work forms part of the teaching method, as in Faculty 1, where the different perspectives in articles are debated. The assessment technique to “initiate a bit of discussion on perspectives to work other than on your own” leans more towards the divergent formative assessment approach, in which assessment is jointly accomplished by the lecturer and the student to produce the best performance (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

7.3.4 Dominant interpretivist and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, which characterises the transformational outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives in this faculty as well as Faculty 1 revealed the move towards alternative assessment practices.

The assessment approach is characterised by flexible planning, which incorporates alternative assessment such as community projects. The community involvement of students corresponds to the later form of the interpretative tradition and the socio-cultural perspective focuses strongly on the context in which the student learns. Learning results from the interaction between the student and his/her social environment (Beets, 2007:93; Morgan et al., 2004:9). This rationale for following a socio-cultural perspective to learning espouses the view that it is the sum total of all the components of the classroom that determines learning and not just the intellectual development of the student (Bell, 2005:50). It is a divergent assessment approach aimed at discovering what the student knows and understands, or whether the student is capable of applying a predetermined concept.
Students in this faculty, as in Faculty 1, are presented with a problem requiring a specific activity and the student must then gather and apply information/knowledge to solve the problem in a particular context. The active participation of students in the learning process is advocated by pragmatism, by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve problems related to real-world situations. The assessment approach is based on a socio-constructivist view of learning and an intention of the lecturer to teach in the zone of proximal development.

The interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employ practical modes of reasoning, Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116) point out, where appropriate discussions are conducted in the light of the prevailing circumstances and not on the basis of pre-defined objectives.

### 7.3.5 Transformational outcomes-based assessment practices

Assessment of work-integrated learning is conducted externally by the workplace, as part of quality-assurance procedures. The faculty is at present exploring innovative methods of implementing work-integrated learning through community and research projects. The purpose of work-integrated learning is not aimed predominantly at student education and academic assessment, but serving the community.

The transformational outcomes-based curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from centralised prescriptions of a curriculum towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt the guidance provided by a curriculum. In correlation with the democratic andragogical assessment approach, teaching is no longer defined as the transmission of knowledge but as the process of aiding students to understand information and to transform it into their own personal knowledge (Killen, 2004:10).

Transformational outcomes-based education emphasises higher-order skills, Reynecke (2008:28) explains, considered to be essential for life and learning situations. Learning outcomes are formulated not only to enable the student to master the knowledge aspects of the outcomes, but also to demonstrate their application. The ultimate objective of the transformational method is to empower the student as a productive citizen who is able to meet the demands of society. Competencies such as critical thinking, good communication, technological proficiency and problem solving are the skills the student needs to master in real situations/contexts within the classroom (Reynecke, 2008:28).
7.3.6 Dominant postmodern view and emancipatory view on assessment

The community involvement of students corresponds to the later form of the interpretative tradition and the socio-cultural perspective focuses strongly on the context in which the student learns. Learning results from the interaction between the student and his/her social environment (Beets, 2007:93; Morgan et al., 2004:9). Exposing students to a cross-disciplinary approach can be labelled as emancipatory, which implies the intention of the lecturers to go beyond current boundaries of knowledge (Yorke, 2003:477). This school of thought believes that education can improve the wellbeing of society-centred education, whereby lecturers and students should act as change agents by analysing and addressing societal needs. It makes learning a constructive process in which students are constructing knowledge or making meaning, according to their perception of society (Yorke, 2003:477).

7.4 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 3

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed the following assessment approaches:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment
- Transformational outcomes-based assessment, within the postmodern view on assessment
Table 7.3: Faculty 3 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

**LECTURERS’ ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST DECADE 1980–</strong></td>
<td><strong>SECOND DECADE 1990–</strong></td>
<td><strong>THIRD DECADE 2000–</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Formative assessment consists of written assignments, tests as well as semester tests - mainly formal in nature**

**Informal formative assessment to promote participation in learning events and ensure the student reaches a certain level**

**No evidence of assessment practices and perspectives that steer towards transformational outcomes-based assessment, but participants seek a new paradigm in education**

Deterioration in the quality of student interpreted as a mere generation gap to be approached from a different angle

Need for insight and strategies for teaching to “new generation”

<p>| Class tests part of formative assessment, seen as “add-on” and not part of number of assignments | Student assessment incorporated into the teaching process in preparation for learning event | Lecturers seek learning contracts for individuals or groups to tailor their learning needs |
| Lecturer-driven assessment | Students participate in assessment process and included in discussion as users of assessment information – through processes of feedback | |
| Content-based assessment | Divergent assessment approach, characterised by flexible planning, incorporating alternative assessment | |
| Norm-referenced assessment - student performance is reported in percentages and spread against the normal distribution curve | Summative assessment applied for formative purposes | |
| Content and practice separately assessed - fragmented view of learning | Students apply appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems | |
| Theory and practice quantitatively and normatively assessed | | |
| Nature of module determines the assessment technique | | |
| Textbook teaching deemed suitable for traditional content-based assessment | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum point of departure for the formulation of outcomes</th>
<th>Understanding that a range of assessment strategies and practices can be developed and employed is important for a sense of security</th>
<th>Lecturers seek to move from project-based learning to a problem-based approach to ensure teaching, learning and assessment are aligned with profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary approach - instruction planning and implementation based on subject matter categories</td>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline and diagnostic assessment determine existing knowledge and skills - latter conducted prior to instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant use of pen-and-paper exam - limited to memorisation and comprehension of content</td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-based assessment, based on socio-constructivist view of learning and intention to teach in the zone of proximal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-integrated learning, for knowledge in a work environment, not a priority</td>
<td></td>
<td>Active participation of students in learning process, advocated by pragmatism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pass rate (and flow-through numbers) prevent “in-depth” and higher-cognitive assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards-based assessment, student assessed from curriculum perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students not considered prepared for problem-centred approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated summative assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent formative assessment to discover if student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as a procedure aimed to be as objective as possible.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviouristic assessment techniques, like marks and promotion - aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it into more desirable directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.4.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

The formative assessment practices consist of written assignments, tests as well as semester tests and are mainly formal in nature.

Student performance is reported in terms of percentages and class position, indicating the evaluation of the student’s progress in terms of “pass” or “fail”. Student performance is spread against the normal distribution curve to award a certain value to that performance (Meyer et al., 2010:53).

The three conventional theoretical tests and three practical tests both make up two groups that each contribute 50% respectively to the module mark and are assessed separately. This fragmented view of content and practice corresponds to that of Faculties 1 and 2. Both theory and practice are assessed quantitatively and normatively.

The participants believe that the nature of the module determines the assessment technique. Textbook teaching is deemed suitable for traditional content-based assessment, whilst projects and design are considered appropriate for other modules. This is a view straight out of traditional outcomes-based education, in which the existent curriculum serves as point of departure for the formulation of outcomes and not the other way round (Spady, 1994:18-19). Similar to objectives, the outcomes are taken directly from the existent syllabus of traditional subjects. Instruction planning and implementation are based on subject matter categories, also referred to as the disciplinary approach. The assessment process is characterised as convergent formative assessment aimed at discovering if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

Summative assessment in the faculty harks back to the conventional assessment approach, where the body of information (also often referred to as the body of knowledge) of a particular field is highly prized and this importance justifies its incorporation into learning programmes, as Bellis (2001:184) states. The participants do indeed recognise the need for summative assessment to test insight and yet the predominant use of pen-and-paper exam remains limited to memorisation and comprehension of content (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:183).

Work-integrated learning to attain knowledge in a work environment is not viewed as a priority for the faculty. The lack of resources and facilities further affect professional cooperation between the NWU and industry, given the lack of “right companies” and professionals who are willing to collaborate. Work-integrated learning is hampered by a lack of commitment, resources and
support. A further problem is lecturers’ reluctance to take ownership of work-based or experiential learning and assessment. The implication is that the NWU fails to prepare students for functioning effectively in the workplace (Huysamen, 2002:84).

Participants do not yet consider students prepared for a problem-centred approach and cite this as the reason for the return to the conventional content-based assessment that centres on memorisation. A low pass rate (and flow-through numbers) prevents lecturers from including more “in-depth” and higher cognitive questions in exam papers. Participants’ reference to short- or long-term memory highlights the emphasis on the memorisation of content. Students simply assimilate content and reproduce content, in pen-and-paper exams, without being able to demonstrate the desired skill in practice.

### 7.4.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are discussed in detail under 7.2.2.

Faculty 3 follows the same lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced approach as Faculties 1 and 2. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, it is a standards-based approach and the lecturer assesses the student from the curriculum perspective. This view of assessment centres on repeated summative assessment. The lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with pre-defined means (e.g. textbook version of the scientific method) (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116). Assessment practices are aimed at discovering if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.

These assessment practices are, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, more closely related to the positivist and behaviourist view of assessment. This positivist perspective considers assessment as a procedure aimed at being as objective as possible. Behaviouristic assessment techniques, such as marks and promotion, are employed to alter and guide.

### 7.4.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

Apart from the abovementioned traditional outcomes-based assessment approach, this faculty also subscribes to co-operative assessment and includes the student in all steps of the learning process. The group assignment that builds towards an individual assignment is used for summative purposes and provides an overview of the student’s performance at the end of the semester or year. Summative assessment, in the form of an assignment, is applied formatively.
According to Yorke (2003:479), this assignment can be regarded as an in-course assignment that is deliberately designed to be simultaneously formative and summative — formative, because the student is expected to learn from the feedback provided, and summative, because the mark awarded contributes to the overall grade at the end of the semester. Summative assessment in relation to curricular components (e.g. the student passes or fails a module) can act formatively, should the student learn from it (Yorke, 2003:479).

Students draw up tests for their fellow students to conduct peer assessment, thus incorporating student assessment into the teaching process in preparation for the learning event.

The student’s readiness to apply his/her knowledge is determined by means of baseline and diagnostic assessment in the form of a “pretest”. The aim of “informal formative assessment” is to promote participation in learning events and also to ensure that the student reaches a certain level. Baseline and diagnostic assessment serve to determine the student’s existing knowledge and skills, whereby the latter is conducted by the lecturer prior to any form of instruction (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:182; Hodnett, 2001:3). It provides evidence of the current state of learning of each student (Hodnett, 2001:3). The understanding that a range of assessment strategies and practices can be developed and employed is important for a sense of security in further explorations, or as one participant put it: So the more you can stretch it, the more comfortable you start to feel with it.

Lecturers wish to move away from project-based learning to a more problem-based approach and thereby ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are aligned with the profession.

The problem-based assessment approach, as explained in Chapter 6, should not be concerned with the memorisation and the reproduction of voluminous amounts of information, but rather with “an appreciation of the nature of the ‘object of knowledge’...and an ability to construct and defend the particular arguments which constitute the individual’s interpretive perspective” (Kissack, 1995:260).

It is not surprising that students prefer the international exam and should the student pass it, he/she is exempted from the usual semester exam. This is in line with Cretchley and Castle (2001:492) who explain that students find it important to know the purpose of subject matter and are only willing to learn when such content will fulfil a real need in their lives. Students tend to be task-centred or problem-centred, instead of subject-centred. They perceive themselves as self-directed, averse to being told what to do and as such more likely to be motivated by internal
pressures, such as self-esteem, than by external pressures such as marks (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:492).

The initial training offered to new lecturers is generic and abstract, according to participants, who do not consider it either relevant or adequate. The structuring of the courses also seems to leave much to be desired, with the suggestion that the three-day presentation be reduced to half a day and for lecturers to undergo further continuous subject-specific training from a dedicated mentor who would continue to offer guidance and support. Participants also expressed the need for such training to include insight into and strategies for teaching to a “new generation” of students.

In contrast to his/her colleagues in Faculties 1 and 2, who speak of the deterioration in the quality of student and school sector, one participant explained this as a mere generation gap that needs to be approached from a different angle.

**7.4.4 Dominant interpretivist and constructivist view on assessment**

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transitional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4

In some cases and in contrast to the traditional outcomes-based assessment practices, the analysis also revealed pockets of a move towards alternative assessment practices. The divergent assessment approach is characterised by flexible planning and incorporates alternative assessment such as international exams, open-book exams, group assignments that build up towards an individual assignment replacing the final year exam, using summative assessment for formative purposes. Students draw up open-book class tests for peer assessment and in preparation for class. Lecturers also make use of baseline and diagnostic assessment.

The students participate in the assessment process and are included in discussions as users of assessment information – through processes of feedback (Dann, 2002:142). The most critical tool for students to meet their own future needs is the capacity to determine their own learning needs and how they go about meeting them, making-self assessment essential for life-long learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:125). Dann (2002:142) points out that assessment as learning recognises that the student is central to learning and that processes of self-direction and understanding are fundamental to learning.

This can be classified as divergent formative assessment, proposing active collaboration between the lecturer and the student to produce best performance. Assessment involves making
judgements to promote teaching as well as the good of all stakeholders – demanding a push towards qualitative outcomes. Assessment is hereby jointly accomplished by the lecturer and the student, geared towards future development rather than measurement of past or current achievement (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617). Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) advocate the use of learning contracts, which allow individuals or groups to tailor their learning needs. A learning contract assumes that a wide range of learning experiences and assessment options is available for the students to choose from and also the necessary guidance – a situation virtually unknown in South Africa (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:493).

The problem-based assessment approach, as discussed with Faculties 1 and 2, is based on a socio-constructivist view of learning and an intention of the lecturer to teach in the zone of proximal development. Students are presented with a problem, requiring a specific activity, and students must then gather and apply information/knowledge to solve the problem in a particular context. Pragmatism advocates the active participation of students in the learning process by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems.

### 7.5 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 4

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed the following assessment approaches:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment
Table 7.4: Faculty 4 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

**LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRUCTURALISM</strong></td>
<td>Formative assessment applied for summative purposes</td>
<td>Informal formative assessment in the course of events, aimed at monitoring learning progress and engage students in learning process</td>
<td>No evidence of assessment practices and perspectives that steer towards transformational outcomes-based assessment, but participants seek a new paradigm in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class tests part of formative assessment, seen as “add-on” and not part of number of assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal formative assessment essential for class attendance and participation</td>
<td>Informal observations, discussions, student-lecturer interactions and classroom interactions provide a continuous stream of evidence on mastery of knowledge and skills to solve problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal formative assessment motivated by marks and exemption from the exam</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class test has a traditional content-based nature to counter threat to reliability of performance-based assessment</td>
<td>Criterion-referenced assessment impossible in classes of between 300-600 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class test every single week leads to over-assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative assessment feedback mainly given in marks (thus quantitative and normative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standards-based approach - lecturer assesses student from the curriculum perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturer-driven approach - awarding marks seen as authoritarian judgement by student</td>
<td>Group discussions encourage productive participation and facilitate interaction between lecturer and students and among the students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers' assessment perspectives and practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content-based assessment</td>
<td>Performance-based assessment via work-integrated learning and internships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means (e.g. textbook method)</td>
<td>Portfolio assessment - students active participants applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment to motivate and manipulate students to attend class and participate in learning process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' behaviour controlled by external factors (marks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convergent formative assessment, such as “classic class test”, to discover if student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept</td>
<td>Divergent formative assessment aimed at discovering what the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as a procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviouristic assessment techniques – predisposed to marks and promotion - aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it into more desirable directions</td>
<td>Active participation of students in learning process, advocated by pragmatism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 7.5.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

Similar to Faculties 1-3, any activity that contributes little or no marks to the participation mark is considered informal formative assessment.

Formative assessment is conducted by means of assignments varying in size, pop quizzes and class tests. The application of information obtained from such assessment is summative in nature.

The lecturers of this faculty, like those of the first three faculties, consider informal formative assessment essential to ensure class attendance and participation. Any inclination towards innovation in this kind of assessment is inhibited by large student numbers and dishonesty among students.
The driving force behind formal formative assessment is marks, as it is in Faculties 1-3, and promotion (which does not form part of the NWU’s assessment policy) serves as incentive for sustained effort throughout the semester to obtain exemption from the exam. Yet this robs the student of an opportunity to gain an integrated overview of the module. In contrast, Hodnett (2001:4) confirms that summative assessment definitely makes a real contribution to the student’s final results and as soon as the student has had the opportunity to learn, evidence of that learning is realised in the form of a summative measurement like an examination, unit test, assignment, demonstration, etc. The final results should indeed primarily be based on all the summative measurements (Hodnett, 2001:4).

The class test takes a traditional content-based and norm-referenced approach to counter the threat to the reliability of performance-based and authentic assessment conducted by students. Lecturers find it virtually impossible to make use of rubrics or more specifically criterion-referenced assessment in classes of between 300-600 students. A contributing factor to this lack of individual and criterion-referenced assessment is lecturers’ tendency to over-assess by setting a formal assessment class test every single week, in disregard of the university’s teaching and learning policy (2012:2) that prescribes only two to three formal assessment tasks in total to ensure class attendance and accountability.

The excessive amount of formative assessment exceeds the number of activities per module stipulated in the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and draws complaints from students. Hargreaves et al. (2001:1163) furthermore argue that standardised testing does not always reflect true learning performance and explain that accountability devalues learning to a numerical formula, which they describe as “oversimplified and unsuitable for assessing many important aspects of learning”. Limiting formative assessment is not likely to be adequate for monitoring student progress and will probably not provide the required qualitative data to promote learning. Since the feedback is mainly given in marks (thus quantitative), Stiggins (2005:324) says, chances are slim that assessment will promote learning at all.

7.5.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are discussed in detail under 7.2.2.

This faculty follows a standards-based approach, in which the lecturer assesses the student from the curriculum perspective and relies on convergent formative assessment practices, such as the
“classic class test”, to discover if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. The lecturers thus employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means (e.g. textbook version of the scientific method) (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116).

Practices are characterised by lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced assessment. Awarding marks appears like authoritarian judgement to the student, rather than interpretive and descriptive feedback meant to encourage increased participation. It leads to students comparing their marks with those of others and with their own. Using assessment to motivate and even to manipulate students into attending class and participating in the learning process also impacts on students’ workload.

Beets (2007:90) points out that students’ behaviour is always controlled by external factors and lecturers must apply these spheres of external influence to facilitate learning. Ozman and Craver (2003:213-214) explain that behaviourism is systematic and meaningful conditioning, to bolster desirable behaviour, by means of the extrinsic or intrinsic reward of the learner or, as Beets (2007:90) describes it, the basic principle that rewarding certain behaviour will make repetition of such behaviour, under similar conditions, likely.

### 7.5.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

A good example of informal formative assessment for monitoring the progress of a student is staging a game like “Who wants to be a millionaire”, as described in the previous chapter. The informal observations, discussions, student-lecturer interactions as well as classroom interactions during this activity provide the student and the lecturer with a continuous stream of evidence about the student’s progress in the mastery of knowledge and skills to solve problems (Yorke, 2003:479). The above informal formative assessment takes place in the course of events, aimed at monitoring learning progress and engaging the student in the learning process (Yorke, 2003:479). Such informal class activities enable the student to provide and receive instantaneous feedback, while the student participates in a learning activity. Similarly, group discussions encourage productive participation and facilitate interaction between the lecturer and student as well as among the students. They enable the student to spontaneously demonstrate knowledge and skills within a small group, without receiving a percentage or mark. This is a kind of informal formative assessment that determines student progress within the classroom environment (Beets, 2007:69), also affording the student the opportunity to both work in groups and on his/her own.
Lecturers are (planning) introducing performance-based assessment through work-integrated learning and internships, in which assessment occurs by means of informal formative observation (practical demonstration of knowledge and skills, such as the working of an ECG machine) and an oral exam before an assessment panel.

The participants indicated that they make use of portfolio assessment, which is a collection of the student’s work (case studies, practical reports, projects, assignments, etc.). Portfolio assessment makes students active participants in the learning process by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems (Meyer et al., 2010:19).

The appeal for a new paradigm and change leans toward transformational outcomes-based assessment, where learning outcomes are integrated within a particular context. This “new paradigm” is reminiscent of statements Knight (1993:64) had already made in 1993 about the growing sophistication in the way universities tackle assessment as a quality-control approach, versus assessment as support for learning and ultimately to the attainment of learning (Knight, 1993:11).

This kind of learning is a much newer development, arising from contemporary priorities where work settings are being more consistently addressed by higher education, and involves the value of a tertiary education for a wider section of the community and linking learning to a very close relationship with work (Costley, 2007:1).

Lecturers’ appeal for change echoes that of the CHE Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education (2001:112), which stipulates that the repeated testing of the same restricted range of skills and abilities can no longer be justified; instead of simply writing about performance, students should be required to perform in an authentic or simulated real-world context. This demands innovative assessment approaches and methods, which ensure that all objectives are in fact assessed and that assessments add value to student learning.

### 7.5.4 Dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transitional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed a move towards alternative assessment practices.
The assessment approach is characterised by flexible planning that incorporates alternative assessment such as internships, computer programs and medical instruments, like ECG machines to demonstrate knowledge and skills that integrate theory and practice. Portfolio assessment enhances independent and self-directed learning (Meyer et al., 2010:19), emphasising that performance-based assessment is developmental and focuses on the process rather than the product (Huysamen, 2002:84).

It is thus not only the knowledge that is important, but also the gathering and applying of information within a particular context that itself depends on a variety of skills (Huysamen, 2002:84). These “alternative participants” argue that the portfolio, which includes projects, gives a more realistic view of a student’s knowledge and skills. This divergent assessment approach aims to discover the student’s knowledge, comprehension and skills.

Emphasis falls on the broader construct of “capability”, which Yorke (2003:491) summarises as the ability to operate successfully in the world. It corresponds to the SAQA’s (2001:21) view that deems the academic and theoretical foundation, from a pragmatic perspective, as vital for eventual practical implementation. Here knowledge is applied for practical purposes and the interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employ practical modes of reasoning, according to Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116). Assessment decisions are made in the light of the circumstances of the situation and not by predefined means and ends (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116), an epistemological stance known as interpretivism.

Constructivists aim for an interpretive understanding of assessment in a theory that has credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness relative to its historical movement. The aim is to contextually understand assessment as a social phenomenon and to interpret it within a particular context, with due consideration of the influence of social agents on social phenomena (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116).
7.6 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 5

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed the following assessment approaches:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Table 7.5: Faculty 5 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURALISM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980–Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment through class tests, assignments and semester tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class tests part of formative assessment, seen as “add-on” and not part of number of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback is quantitative and normative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment to ensure class attendance and participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| POST-STRUCTURALISM                                           |
| INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST                              |
| SECOND DECADE 1990–Transitional outcomes-based education     |
| Informal formative assessment via a variety of methods and techniques within the context of group work. | Formative assessment builds and shapes learning, finding application in summative assessment - formative and summative assessment complementary |
| Baseline and diagnostic assessment to diagnose learning progress and problems of individual student or group |
| Feedback aimed at indicating how to proceed to the next level or how to solve a problem |
| Increased attention to formative rather than summative assessment |

| CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY                                     |
| THIRD DECADE 2000–Transformational outcomes-based education |
| No evidence of assessment practices and perspectives steering towards transformational outcomes-based assessment. |

Table 7.5: Faculty 5 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 5

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| POST-STRUCTURALISM                                           |
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| CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY                                     |
| THIRD DECADE 2000–Transformational outcomes-based education |
| No evidence of assessment practices and perspectives steering towards transformational outcomes-based assessment. |
### Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers’ assessment perspectives and practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
<td>SECOND DECADE 1990–</td>
<td>THIRD DECADE 2000-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>education</td>
<td>based education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Lecturer-centred assessment** exemplified in lecturers’ discretion to determine number and size of assignments
- **Autocratic system** - over-assessment is the norm and students’ needs not relevant to assignment and test schedule
- **Lack of self-directed learning** among students the prevailing culture
- **Over-assessment in response to absenteeism** when no marks are in the balance
- **Convergent formative assessment** to discover if student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept.
- **Deterioration in calibre of student ascribed to mass student intake**
- **Massive student population, culture of learning** and pressure to comply with flow-through rates leads mark-driven assessment
- **Marks as motivational tool** creates fosters a culture of dependency
- **Lecturers focus on their principal allegiance to their specialist discipline**
- **Content-based assessment**
- **Disciplinary approach**

- **Formative assessment** considered a continuous process, where students participate via group work and receive feedback from a source other than the lecturer
- **Assessment increasingly in service of learning and of student**
- **Divergent formative assessment** to discover what student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept
- **Deterioration in calibre of student**
- **Marks as motivational tool creates fosters a culture of dependency**
- **Lecturers focus on their principal allegiance to their specialist discipline**
- **Content-based assessment**
- **Disciplinary approach**

- **Assessment characterised by flexible planning - incorporating alternative assessment, integrating theory and practice**
- **Performance assessments, like mind maps to measure meta-cognitive and cognitive development**
- **Creative projects to facilitate assessment of work-integrated learning**

*Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers’ assessment perspectives and practices*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion-referenced assessment is from a positivist and behaviourist perspective to describe correlation between assessment results and a future criterion measurement</td>
<td>Constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge applied for practical purposes and interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employed for practical modes of reasoning to solve problems</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7.6.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

Formative assessment takes the form of class tests, assignments and semester tests. It is a quantitative and norm-referenced approach that is employed to ensure class attendance and participation rather than to reflect performance in an assignment.

The lecturer-centred nature of assessment is exemplified in the lecturers’ discretion to set and determine the number and size of assignments. It is an autocratic system, similar to that of Faculties 1-4, where over-assessment is the norm and the students’ needs do not factor into the scheduling of assignments and tests. Such over-assessment is a complete disregard of the prescribed two assignments for an eight-credit module and is in reaction to, as in Faculties 1-4, student absenteeism when no marks are at stake.

The lack of self-directed learning among students, mentioned in Faculties 1-4, also seems to be the prevailing culture in this faculty and necessitates lecturers to provide ample opportunity for students to build a participation mark lest the flow-through rate falls. Participants report a marked deterioration in calibre of student, which they ascribe to the mass student intake and the imperative to uphold a certain flow-through percentage. As indicated by a participant in Faculty 1, the university is under tremendous pressure to comply with a set graduation rate.

It is clear, in correlation with problems universities around the globe experienced with assessment in the 1970s, that the NWU is under considerable pressure to demonstrate quality to the outside world (Knight, 1993:13). The effectiveness of the NWU is measured and funded based on
through-put rates and it is the pressure that this engenders that is the cause of the prevailing problems.

With reference to using formative and summative assessment to force students to learn, Yorke (2003:489) avers that formative and summative assessment can discourage students from developing their full potential. Such students may not go as far as developing “learned helplessness”, but may develop “learned dependence”, in respect of which Boud (1995:39) writes:

“Too often lecturer-driven assessment encourages students to be dependent on the lecturer or examiners to make decisions about what they know and they do not effectively learn to do this for themselves.”

Lecturers focus on their principal allegiance to their specialist discipline rather than on any broader conception of the learning process or personal development of students (Bellis, 2001:187). Stenhouse (1975:83) considers objective-based curricula too narrow in focus, too lecturer-centred and insufficiently sensitive to the complexities of learning and the dynamics of the classroom, calling it “an end-means model which sets arbitrary horizons to one’s efforts”.

7.6.2 Dominant positivist and behaviouralist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are discussed in detail under 7.2.2.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed a lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced approach. Lecturers’ lack of interest in qualitative assessment relates to the massive numbers of students in class, whereby they develop assessments that have not been correlated with any direct measures of whatever they must assess. Research, according to Allen (2004:3), shows the lack of a common definition of criterion-based approaches or their implications for practice, inhibiting a high-quality discourse and adds that it is felt that these learning outcomes would, therefore, require innovative means of assessment.

Rendering formative and summative assessment results in marks and then employing them as motivational tool creates and fosters a culture of dependency. Participants use marks and percentages to manipulate students learning behaviour and teach them responsibility. Learning is accomplished through systematic and meaningful conditioning to bolster desirable behaviour by means of the extrinsic or intrinsic reward of the student (Ozman & Craver, 2003:213-214).
7.6.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

The faculty continuously seeks creative projects to facilitate the assessment of work-integrated learning for the great number of students, one of which entails students recording their teaching at schools for assessment and input by the lecturer. This affords the student the opportunity to improve by reviewing the recording in accordance with the criteria set out in the lecturer’s report. In this way participants endeavour to promote self-regulated learning.

Similar to Faculties 1-8, class tests measure students’ preparation for class or knowledge of research. The information obtained assists the lecturer in determining the students’ entry levels – e.g. their knowledge related to a lesson topic. In support of the above, Louw (2003:22) indicates the effectiveness of baseline and diagnostic assessment to diagnose learning progress and problems of the individual student or group.

Informal formative assessment occurs by means of a variety of methods and techniques within the context of group work. Such group assignments are then discussed and assessed by another group. The intention is to provide students with mutual support and to promote learning. This reflects the view (also found in Faculty 4) expressed by one participant that formative assessment builds and shapes learning, which then finds application in the exam. The participant also related that the student then engages more thoroughly with the module and formative assessment should bear more weight and credits than summative assessment. This view links with transitional outcomes-based assessment in its increased attention to formative rather than summative assessment (Usher, 1996:22). Assessment is increasingly seen to be in service of learning and of the student, which Mothata et al. (2005:86) confirm as follows:

“The overall message (emerging from the new approach to assessment) is that assessment is now more about learning than testing; assessment for benefit of the student and their lecturer rather (than) for accountability to some outside body or programme.”

Tasking the student with drawing up a mind map is one of the techniques to review recently completed work that does not focus on marks (unlike the practices of other faculties), but is intended to promote interaction between students. Performance assessments, such as mind maps, are appropriate for measuring meta-cognitive as well as cognitive development. How well students plan, whether they are proficient at monitoring and assessing their own work, and how skilled they are at reflection, are all possible meta-cognitive targets of performance assessment.
Performance assessment is thus often criterion-referenced, as the student needs to demonstrate how well he/she can do the task in terms of predetermined performance criteria.

A concerted effort is made to offer alternative and formative assessment opportunities that will create feedback to the student. It is considered a continuous process in which students participate through group work and receive feedback from a source other than the lecturer.

Participants demonstrate formative and summative assessment as complementary. Although many within higher education tend to separate summative and formative assessment, Beets (2007:64) indicates that assessment is a single process, and that formative and summative assessment are complementary components of this process. Summative assessment is conducted in the form of a pen-and-paper exam in this faculty and can, in relation to curricular components (e.g. the student passes or fails a module), be formative (Yorke, 2003:479).

Hodnett (2001:4) confirms that summative assessment definitely makes a real contribution to the student’s final results and adds that as soon as the student has had the opportunity to learn, evidence of that learning is realised in the form of a summative measurement like an examination, unit test, assignment, demonstration, etc. The final results should indeed primarily be based on all the summative measurements (Hodnett, 2001).

7.6.4 Dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transitional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4.

Divergent assessment seeks to discover knowledge, comprehension and skills. It is characterised by flexible planning and incorporates alternative assessment, integrating theory and practice.

Feedback is aimed at indicating to the student how to proceed to the next level or how to solve a problem. The lecturer adopts a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development where new learning builds on existent learning; any phase of learning builds on existent, general phases; systems, within ever-expanding systems (Wood, 1987:616) towards summative assessment that provides an overview of the student’s performance at the end of a semester or year.

Knowledge is applied for practical purposes and the interpretive or hermeneutical sciences employ practical modes of reasoning to solve problems (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116). Learning is seen as a constructive process, in which students are “constructing knowledge” or
“making meaning” according to their perception of society. The focus is on the broader construct of “capability”, which Yorke (2003:491) summarises as the ability to operate successfully in the world. It corresponds to the SAQA’s (2001:21) view that deems the academic and theoretical foundation, from a pragmatic perspective, as vital for eventual practical implementation.

Assessment decisions are made in the light of the prevailing circumstances and not by predefined means and ends (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116), i.e. the epistemological stance known as interpretivism. Constructivists aim for an interpretive understanding of assessment in a theory that has credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness relative to its historical movement.

The aim is to contextually understand assessment as a social phenomenon and to interpret it within a particular context, with due consideration of the influence of social agents on social phenomena.

7.7 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 6

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed the following three stages:

- Traditional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment
- Transitional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment
- Transformational outcomes-based assessment, within the postmodern view on assessment
| LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 6 |  |
|---|---|---|
| **STRUCTURALISM** | **POST-STRUCTURALISM** | **CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY THIRD DECADE 2000- Transformational outcomes-based education** |
| Lack of informal formative assessment to large class groups | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Class tests, part of formative assessment, “add-on” and not part of number of assignments | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Lack of informal formative assessment to large class groups | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Class tests, part of formative assessment, “add-on” and not part of number of assignments | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Class tests, part of formative assessment, “add-on” and not part of number of assignments | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
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| Marked distinction between theoretical and practical modules | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Difficulties in defining competence Emphasis on factual knowledge, promoting quantitative content-based assessment | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Performance-based assessment via projects | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Critical outcomes reflect competencies student must demonstrate successfully | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
| Research outputs and time constraints hamper quality teaching and assessment | Baseline assessment to make student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills | Formative assessment summative assessment applied collectively | Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes | Convergent formative assessment, with judgmental or quantitative evaluation focussing on contrasting errors | Divergent formative assessment, with a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |
7.7.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

Participants use class tests to make the student aware of his/her absolute lack of knowledge and skills, whereas baseline assessment is actually supposed to determine the student’s level of knowledge and skill (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:182; Hodnett, 2001:3).

Class tests are not considered assignments and although the number of projects/assignments adheres to subject group policy, it far exceeds the number stipulated for an eight-credit module in the university’s policy. This faculty gives an excessive number of class tests and...
assignments/projects, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes the lack of informal formative assessment to large class groups. This is an approach that speaks of convergent formative assessment, characterised by judgmental or quantitative evaluation focusing on contrasting errors (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

The faculty makes a marked distinction between theoretical and practical modules, by taking a content-based approach to the former in the form of the pen-and-paper exam, and a performance-based one to the latter, in the form of projects. The main objection to the conventional summative assessment approach is that it fails to prepare learners for functioning effectively in the workplace and as adults. Students are allowed to assimilate content somehow and simply reproduce it in pen-and-paper examinations, without being able to demonstrate the desired skills in practice (Huysamen, 2002:84).

Lecturers’ fragmented view of assessment is attributed by participants to the faculty’s inordinate emphasis on factual knowledge, which promotes quantitative content-based assessment, and the overly prescriptive nature of the academic rules that fail to allow for contextualisation within the industry. Another reason cited for the above quantitative approach is large classes of students who do not know each other. Complying with research requirements is a further source of pressure (as found in Faculties 1, 3 and 4) in which time constraints adversely affect lecturers’ ability to offer quality teaching and assessment. Quantitative also triumphs over qualitative assessment in terms of performance-based assessment activities, such as projects, because it is not quite as complex or as time consuming.

The quantitative, content-based and summative approach relates to factors directly related to the students themselves, viz. students’ incompetence in academic writing and referencing, and marks-driven attitude that sees them failing to attend class or complete assignments that are not awarded marks.

The bureaucratic administration of assessment by the institutional office engenders a great deal of negativity in lecturers, and Davidson and McKensie (2009:5) warn of the tendency of assessment policy and practice guidelines to emphasise assessment of learning through attention to procedures around assessments.
7.7.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.2.

A fragmented view of “theory” and “practice” relates to the technical and instrumental debate about the definitions of outcomes. The positivist rationality on which outcomes-based assessment is predicated produces a technical, instrumentalist discourse about definitions of outcomes and the creation of structures and systems to support them. Ecclestone (1999:44) asserts that a technical approach, separated from discussion of the underlying values and purposes of higher education, could increasingly tighten the epistemological stranglehold. This is compounded by increased political influence over processes of defining outcomes and systems to assure their quality. If lecturers should resist these moves, without coherent counter-arguments, the temptation to make them more prescriptive will also increase.

The allegations of autocratic and bureaucratic management and the NWU’s failure to provide for the demands of the industry and profession tie into problems such as the inhibition of student autonomy; difficulties in defining competence; the difficulty of defining core and sub-components; a disregard of the role of classroom inputs; oversimplification of grading categories; and the doubtful status of generic competencies have focused *inter alia* on its behaviourist roots. There are also problems with attempting to establish equivalency between epistemologically distinct forms of learning – the personal unspoken, unformalised knowledge gained from the workplace and community, and the more theoretical rigorous and systematic knowledge of a university classroom (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:488).

Student performance in projects is quantitatively assessed, which is in conflict with the qualitative approach of performance-based assessment. It is a convergent formative assessment approach characterised by judgmental or quantitative evaluation (“good or bad”) focusing on contrasting errors (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617). The curriculum is seen as a *product* and the analysis of the interaction of the student and the curriculum is undertaken from the perspective of the curriculum (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617). The theoretical origins of such an approach would appear, at least implicitly, to be behaviourist and derived from the mastery-learning models, involving assessment of the learner by the lecturer (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).
7.7.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed in some cases a move towards transitional outcomes-based assessment.

Formative assessment is followed by summative assessment. These two types of assessment are not separated but applied collectively. It is an approach about which Yorke (2003:479) explains that some assessments (e.g. in-course assignments) are deliberately designed to be simultaneously formative and summative-formative, because the student is expected to learn from feedback provided, and summative, because the mark awarded contributes to the overall grade at the end of the study unit. Progression within the learning outcomes is the ultimate aim of formative and summative assessment.

Formative assessment is defined as a process to improve the learning process rather than the product or result. The transitional outcomes-based approach, as described in Chapter 2, views the curriculum as a process (Bellis, 2001:185). The curriculum as a process involves the teaching of human issues, “where lecturers could not claim authority on the basis of their subject training” (Stenhouse, 1975:30-31).

Portfolio assessment, as performance-based assessment technique, is an opportunity for students to achieve the necessary competencies and enhances independent and self-directed learning (Meyer et al., 2010:19). It makes students active participants in the learning process by applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve problems related to real-world situations (Meyer et al., 2010:19).

Such performance-based assessment calls for assessment that will produce qualitative, rather than categorical, evidence of student achievement. The emphasis of performance-based assessment is developmental and on the process rather than the product. It is thus not only the knowledge that is important, but also the gathering and applying of information within a particular context that itself depends on a variety of skills (Huysamen, 2002:84).

These “alternative participants” argue that the portfolio, which includes case studies and projects, gives a more realistic view of a student’s knowledge and skills as well as a complete approach to assessment of outcomes.
7.7.4 Dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transitional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed a move towards the dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment, viz.:

- formative and summative assessment that follows an integrated assessment approach towards teaching and learning, while simultaneously focusing on the improvement of learning;
- assessment that seeks self-development, process development and process documentation and confirms the curriculum as a process;
- an andragogical model, according to a set of assumptions about learning that focuses more on the relationship between student and lecturer than on outcomes;
- the alignment of module outcomes with the critical cross-field outcomes, following a qualitative criterion-referenced approach (only with postgraduate students); and
- the use of performance-based assessment to guide students toward the achievement of the learning outcomes.

It is clear from the above that the lecturers are adopting a divergent formative assessment approach, which entails adopting a constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in the zone of proximal development. Wood (1987:242) captures the essence of formative assessment in his discussion on a student’s “maximum performance” in the light of Vygotsky’s (1978) “zone of proximal development” (which – broadly stated – is the region between the student’s existing problem-solving ability and the ability to solve more complex problems given guidance and support from the lecturer) by proposing active collaboration between the lecturer and the student to produce a best performance.

7.7.5 Transformational outcomes-based assessment practices

The postgraduate lecturers of this faculty follow a more democratic assessment approach, with greater flexibility in time, an approach similar to the democratic andragogical model cited in Cretchley and Castle (2001:491). The andragogical model is based on a set of assumptions about learning that focuses more on the relationship between student and lecturer than on outcomes (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:492). Lecturers also emphasise co-operative planning and including
the student in all steps of the learning process. Such a positive learning environment, Killen (2000:11) says, will significantly depend on there being a positive and supportive relationship between the lecturer and the student. As Beets (2007:94) states, students cannot be separated from their interaction with other students and lecturers within their socio-cultural situation. Lecturer-student interaction and student-student interaction also hold certain implications for the lecturer’s teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Transformational outcomes-based systems embody particular interpretations of student-centred practices, i.e. publicly available criteria and specifications of intended outcomes, around which students can “negotiate” their assignments and opportunities to review their progress and record their achievements in terms of the “real-life” relevance embedded in the learning outcomes.

Transformational outcomes-based assessment underpins the broader notion of student-centred education, i.e. intellectual independence, the ability to think creatively and critically understand the concerns of a local community and the world at large, as stated by Edwards and Usher (1999:12). Ecclestone (1999:41) indeed states that when “learning how to learn” is considered of greater importance than being inducted into a subject or professional discipline that fosters critical and transferable skills, intellectual independence seems to have little purchase.

The twelve critical cross-field outcomes the participant cited refer to the characteristics of the competencies a student must demonstrate successfully, in terms of the different levels (of the NQF explained in Chapter 3) within the education system. Transformational outcomes-based education is a radical break with existing structures and methods within institutions (Reynecke, 2008:28).

In contrast to the traditional and transitional approaches, subjects are not recognised in transformational outcomes-based education and educational practices are geared towards the life roles competent citizens have to fulfil to meet the demands of society. It is these twelve critical outcomes that articulate education’s contribution to the ideals envisioned for South African society, in that they set out the ultimate objective of student learning and also the kind of pedagogy that should dominate the classroom.

Transformational outcomes-based education emphasises higher-order skills, Reynecke (2008:28) explains, considered to be essential for life and learning situations. Learning outcomes are formulated not only to enable the student to master the knowledge aspects of the outcomes, but
also to demonstrate their application. The ultimate objective of the transformational method is to empower the student as a productive citizen, who is able to meet the demands of society.

### 7.7.6 Dominant postmodern view and emancipatory view on assessment

The post-modern, emancipatory view on assessment, characteristic of transformational outcomes-based assessment, is described in detail in Chapter 2.

The transformational outcomes-based curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from the centralised prescriptions of a curriculum towards a model that relies on professional capacity to adapt the guidance provided by a curriculum. The intention to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge can be labelled as *emancipatory* (Yorke, 2003:477). This is a school of thought that believes assessment can improve the wellbeing of society-centred education, whereby lecturers and students should act as *change agents* by analysing and addressing societal needs.

The references to a more democratic assessment approach as well as the critical cross-field outcomes reflect a postmodern assessment culture that Dreyer et al. (2010:138) indicate is defined by characteristics such as:

- active participation in authentic, real-life tasks that require the application of existing knowledge and skills;
- participation in a dialogue and conversation between learners and lecturers;
- engagement with and development of criteria and self-regulation of one’s own work;
- employment of a range of diverse assessment modes and methods as well as methods adapted from different subject disciplines;
- opportunity to develop and apply attributes such as reflection, resilience, resourcefulness and professional judgement and conduct in relation to problems; and
- acceptance of the limitations of judgements and the value of dialogue in developing new ways of working.

The above new assessment culture clearly reflects how integral assessment – both student-centred and criterion-referenced assessment – is to teaching and learning, as it engages students in applying knowledge and reflecting on their actions.
7.8  REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 7

The analysis of lecturers' assessment practices and perspectives revealed, in contrast with the other faculties, three stages rather than two. These are:

- traditional outcomes-based assessment, with the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment;
- transitional outcomes-based assessment, with the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment; and
- transformational outcomes-based assessment, with the associated post-structuralist and postmodern view on assessment.

Table 7.7: Faculty 7 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRUCTURALISM</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessments exceed number recorded, functioning as “ingraining” exercises to ensure continuous effort and class attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment to ensure diligence and class attendance - preoccupied with attendance requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content-based assessment - test week basically a replica of exam, only shorter time period and less extensive exam papers</td>
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Informal formative assessment (for post-graduate studies) not driven by marks | | |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
<th>CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY</th>
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<tr>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
<td>SECOND DECADE 1990–</td>
<td>THIRD DECADE 2000-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment applied for summative purposes</td>
<td>Students play an active role in process and develop their metacognitive reasoning skills</td>
<td>Students actively involved via peer assessment to develop metacognitive thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer-centred approach focusing on individual, with limited corporative learning or group work</td>
<td>Limited corporative learning or group work in response to immaturity or low calibre of student</td>
<td>Students actively involved via peer assessment to develop metacognitive thinking</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Students actively involved via peer assessment to develop metacognitive thinking</td>
<td>Students actively involved via peer assessment to develop metacognitive thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student performance measured against predetermined learning outcomes - student must show specific knowledge and skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative and norm-referenced assessment of learning outcomes</td>
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<td>Confidence and motivation during demonstration of a presentation in class key elements of assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment an add-on to instruction, not an integral part of instructional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formative assessment deemed a pipedream and no guarantee of success in the exam</td>
<td>Assessment adapted for formative and summative assessment to serve same purpose - in-course assignment designed to be simultaneously formative and summative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative and summative assessment as polar opposites, not complementary components in an integrated system</td>
<td>Assessment adapted for formative and summative assessment to serve same purpose - in-course assignment designed to be simultaneously formative and summative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative assessment to manage student behaviour rather than academic benefit</td>
<td>Formative assessment more motivational, corrective and progressive in purpose with regard to student performance</td>
<td>Formative assessment more motivational, corrective and progressive in purpose with regard to student performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam ensures reliability and honesty, inhibited by student behaviour in formative assessment</td>
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Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers' assessment perspectives and practices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</strong></th>
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<td>Traditional outcomes-based</td>
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<td>education</td>
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- **Distinction between theory and practice, a fragmented view of education of a single characteristic isolated knowledge or discrete skills**
- **Contextual grasp of assessment as social phenomenon, interpreted within a particular context**
- **Assessment integrated into teaching, guided by inductive teaching strategy**
- **Students capable of managing own learning and can draw on resources of prior experience and social environment**

- **Standards-based approach, student assessed from curriculum perspective**
- **Convergent formative assessment, to discover what student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept**
- **Divergent assessment to discover what student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept**
- **Andragogy education focused on self-directed learning, needs arising from social roles of adults and human resources development**

- **Emphasis on process, rather than product**
- **Collaborative, flexible, cross-disciplinary, outcomes-based, open system and empowerment-oriented**
- **Learning outcomes drive curriculum reform to transform authoritarian curriculum**

- **Standards for exam, as “prime” opportunity to discern knowledge and skills - exam “add-on” at end of learning programme**
- **Exam does not provide opportunities to determine deficiencies in learning for remediation**
- **Pressure to ensure high flow-through rates that grades university according to a ranking order**
- **Restrictive and limiting assessment and moderation policy**
- **Bureaucracy and autocracy impact on assessment and the quality of learning**
- **Participants make assessment decisions in response to prevailing circumstances**
- **Democratic andragogical model focused on relationship between student and lecturer, than on outcomes Involving stakeholders into the creation of outcomes statements**
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<tr>
<th>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST</th>
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<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
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<td>THIRD DECADE 2000-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transitional outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Transformational outcomes-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment approach resembles traditional and objectives model of outcomes-based education</td>
<td>Assessment approach characterised by flexible planning, incorporating alternative assessment, such as inductive approach</td>
<td>Negotiating outcomes with student and industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning takes backseat to quality-assurance processes, driven by institutional risk management and not quality</td>
<td>Wristing power of defining knowledge and skills from institutions, for industry to play larger role in defining “standards”</td>
<td>Professional councils have influence envisioned purpose of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural approach - accumulation of independent facts and skills with independent knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in zone of proximal development</td>
<td>Approach to learning geared at equipping students with knowledge, competency and orientation required for a successful life</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitating process of self-directed enquiry by providing resources of tutors, fellow learners and materials</td>
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<td>Cross-disciplinary approach, labelled emancipatory, with the intention of lecturers to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge</td>
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### 7.8.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

The formative assessments conducted in class far exceed the number recorded and function as so-called “ingraining” exercises to ensure continuous effort and class attendance, leading to the same over-assessment found in other faculties, making the value of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) questionable. The test week is basically a replica of the exam, only over a shorter time period and with less extensive exam papers.

Students complain over the lack of time to prepare and lecturers over the immaturity of students for in-depth learning. This faculty follows a lecturer-centred approach, especially in terms of first-year assessment, which focuses on the individual and limits corporative learning or group work in response to the abovementioned immaturity or as referred to in other faculties, the low calibre of student. It is, however, not only the academic readiness of first-year students that leads to the decidedly traditional deductive, content-based and norm-referenced assessment approach, but also the large first-year student population that sees the increase in plagiarism.
Student performance is measured against predetermined learning outcomes, where the student must demonstrate specific knowledge and skills. This assessment approach is steered by the lecturer’s view of the curriculum as a process and a product, depending on whether the result or the process is deemed important to the lecturer. The emphasis a participant in this faculty placed on the process, rather than the product, indicates a move towards the transitional outcomes-based approach discussed in Chapter 2 and yet the sentiment expressed in “all I’m (lecturer) interested in” speaks of traditional outcomes-based assessment, in which teaching objectives and learning objectives are priority.

Assessment of learning outcomes occurs according to a quantitative and norm-referenced approach that is characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment. Marks are not deemed representative of student performance, since the formative assessment is not consistent with the summative assessment, a discrepancy strengthened by the statement that marks “mean everything!” and yet the participants consider marks irrelevant, but still seek more weight be accorded to formative assessment to ensure diligence and class attendance. Students could earn up to 150% for showing the confidence and motivation to demonstrate a presentation in class.

Although Spady (2005:1) concedes that student confidence and motivation during the demonstration are key elements, the focus must remain on the student’s knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge. Spady (2005:1) adds that learning outcomes are discerned through clearly observable demonstrations of learning, at the end or upon conclusion of a real set of learning experiences and argues that these demonstrations or performances often reflect the key elements of:

- student’s knowledge;
- what the student can actually do with that knowledge; and
- student’s confidence and motivation during the demonstration (Spady, 2005:1).

Participants are preoccupied with attendance requirements, characteristic of the traditional outcomes-based approach of the first decade (as explained in Chapter 1). Assessment for these participants is an add-on to instruction, and not an integral part of the instructional process or source of information to both lecturer and learner.

The formative value of formative assessment is deemed a pipedream and no guarantee of success in the exam, thus portraying formative and summative assessment as polar opposites.
and not complementary components in an integrated system (Yorke, 2003:479). The discourse on weighting of summative assessment relates to managing student behaviour, as it does in Faculties 1-8, rather than to its academic benefit. The exam ensures the reliability and honesty that student behaviour inhibits in formative assessment.

The faculty sets certain standards for the exam, to uphold it as “prime” opportunity to discern students’ knowledge and skills, about which Yorke (2003:479) explains that summative assessments in relation to curricular components (e.g. the student passes or fails a module) can act formatively, should they learn from it. The exam may well indicate, as the participant put it, “who knows and doesn’t know”, but it does not provide student or lecturers with opportunities to determine the deficiencies in learning where remediation can be undertaken (SAQA, 2005:20). As such the exam merely becomes an “add-on” at the end of a learning programme.

Performance-based portfolio assessment activities include case studies, proposals, PowerPoint presentations assignments and the building of models that are all completed in groups.

Intense competition for resources and facilities in the industry as well as recruiting quality students has a marked impact on pass rates. The pressure to ensure high flow-through rates that grades the university according to a ranking order is a problem experienced by all the faculties. This competition between universities and pressure to uphold a certain pass rate is detrimental to assessment practices.

Jansen (2013) adds that South African universities are tempted to enhance their performance only in those areas that can be measured by ranking indicators and rankings, encouraging institutions to focus on numerical comparisons and not on educating students. He describes the ranking of universities as misplaced vanity, a handful of South African universities tend to get swallowed up in these rankings without understanding where and why they are ranked. This faculty (like Faculties 4 and 6) also seeks some kind of change or, as a participant in Faculty 6 called it, a new paradigm at the NWU.

Such change would also entail exposure to the assessment practices of other universities. Most participants consider the university’s teaching and learning policy (2012) restrictive and limiting, but did concede that they knew very little of the actual content of the policy. It is said to be a dominating influence on assessment practices and, as a member of Faculty 6 stated, doesn’t allow the lecturer much freedom. Bureaucracy and autocracy that extends even to requiring permission for an open-book exam no doubt has an impact on assessment and inevitably the
quality of learning. Davidson and McKensie (2009:5) warn of the tendency of assessment policy and practice guidelines to emphasise assessment, through attention to procedures around assessments. The risk of too much attention to rules, regulations, moderation and oversight is the compliance of lecturers with procedure at the expense of effectively determining whether or not students are progressing successfully towards attaining the skills, knowledge and attributes defined in the graduate profile.

This assessment approach resembles the traditional and objectives model of outcomes-based education of the first decade of assessment that accorded great importance to objectivity, specificity, reliability, accuracy, validity and time efficiency. An exclusive or even primary focus on consistency may constrain creativity in assessment, preclude appropriate discipline-specific professional variations in assessment practices and limit the use of feedback and feed-forward processes to inform student learning. Staff and students may conclude that student learning is taking a backseat to quality-assurance processes, driven by institutional risk management and not quality (Huysamen, 2002:84).

### 7.8.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.2.

This faculty clearly distinguishes between theory and practice, as is the case in other faculties, thus a fragmented view of education of a single characteristic isolated knowledge or discrete skills (Mothata et al., 2005:87). Following a behavioural approach to learning and assessment, the accumulation of independent facts and skills with independent knowledge and skills (Mothata et al., 2005:87).

It is a standards-based approach, similar to that of Faculties 1-8, in which the lecturer assesses the student from the curriculum perspective. Convergent formative assessment practices are aimed at discovering if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. The lecturers therefore employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means (e.g. textbook version of the scientific method (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116).

Practices are characterised by lecturer-driven, content-driven and norm-referenced assessment (as found in the rest of the faculties). Using assessment to motivate and even to manipulate students into attending class and participating in the learning process also impacts on students’
workload, due to the resultant over assessment. Ozman and Craver (2003:213-214) describe, as discussed in Chapters 1-7, behaviourism as systematic and meaningful conditioning, to bolster desirable behaviour, by means of the extrinsic or intrinsic reward of the learner or, as Beets (2007:90) explains, the basic principle that rewarding certain behaviour will make repetition of such behaviour, under similar conditions, likely. Behaviouristic techniques in education are mainly aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it into more desirable directions.

7.8.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

This faculty’s informal formative assessment (for postgraduate studies) is not driven by marks, unlike that of Faculty 1-7, but intent on improving teaching and learning. It is deemed as integrated into teaching and guided by an inductive instruction strategy. In turn summative assessment, e.g. exam assignments, is applied for formative assessment purposes and thus not only serves to promote teaching and learning, but also improve summative assessment.

Students are actively involved in the assessment process, by means of peer assessment and repeated feedback to their fellow students on such assignments that aims to develop metacognitive thinking.

One participant even related that he/she adapts his/her assessment plan and thus side-steps the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) to have formative and summative assessment serve the same purpose, i.e. a formative assignment partly completed during the semester that is also submitted for summative/exam purposes. This clearly illustrates Yorke’s (2003:479) assertion that the distinction between formative and summative assessment is far from sharp (as explained in Chapter 2).

This in-course assignment is deliberately designed to be simultaneously formative and summative: formative, because the student is expected to learn from the feedback provided before the exams and summative, because the marks contribute to the exam mark. It is an approach that resembles the transitional outcomes-based assessment of the 1990s and is considered to be more motivational, corrective and progressive in purpose with regard to student performance (Brainard, 1997:164).
7.8.4 Dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transitional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed a move towards transformational assessment practices, although some of the assessment practices have a transitional outcomes-based aspect with the associated interpretivist and constructivist view of assessment.

This divergent assessment approach is aimed at discovering what the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. The assessment approach enables flexible planning that incorporates alternative assessment, such as the inductive approach, and is integrated into teaching. Formative assessment is applied for summative purposes to promote teaching and learning as well as summative assessment. Students play an active role in the process and as such develop their meta-cognitive reasoning skills.

Participants make assessment decisions in response to the prevailing circumstances and not by predefined means and ends. The aim is to contextually understand assessment as a social phenomenon and to interpret it within a particular context, with due consideration of the influence of social agents on social phenomena (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:116) and is the epistemological stance known as interpretivism. Constructivists aim for an interpretive understanding of assessment in a theory that has credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness relative to its historical movement.

7.8.5 Transformational outcomes-based assessment practices

Collaboration across different disciplines within the faculty speaks of the transformational outcomes-based approach, described in Chapter 2, which Spady and Marshall (1991:68) define as a collaborative, flexible, cross-disciplinary, outcomes-based, open-system and empowerment-oriented approach to learning, geared at equipping students with the knowledge, competency and orientation required for a successful life.

Lecturers negotiate the outcomes with the student and also the industry, in which professional councils have a marked influence on the envisioned purpose of assessment. Formative assessment is of little value to them and participants are obliged to already start preparing students at undergraduate level for the eventual council exam, thus an exam-driven approach
that results from the imperative to comply with the requirements of professional bodies. Involving stakeholders into the creation of outcomes statements correlates with transformational outcomes-based assessment (as described in Chapter 2). According to Allais (2007:2), applying learning outcomes to drive curriculum reform seems to be a useful method of transforming the authoritarian curriculum, since it would provide the different stakeholders with an opportunity to provide input into the creation of the outcome statements making up the qualifications (Allais, 2007:2).

The formal formative assessment conducted over weekends in this faculty leans toward Knowles’s (1984:117) democratic andragogical model, which is localised in Chapter 2 within transformational outcomes-based assessment and is based on a set of assumptions about learning that focuses more on the relationship between student and lecturer than on outcomes. Cretchley and Castle (2001:491) show that under the banner of “andragogy” education focuses largely on self-directed learning, the needs arising from the social roles of adults and human resources development. It relates to the relationship between the student and the learning milieu (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:491).

Since students are capable of taking charge of their own learning and can draw on the resources of their prior experience and their social environment, Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) assert, lecturers are unnecessary. They argue that the role of the lecturer is not to teach, but to facilitate a process of self-directed enquiry by making the resources of tutors, fellow learners and materials available to the student.

Students also schedule their own presentation timeslots and assessment occurs in an informal social environment in the form of role play. Another performance-based assessment activity is that of the open-book test, for which students are allowed to select their own resources/aids, and is intended to assess the theory or content and the student’s thought processes in its application. Knowles (1984:11) proposes that the lecturer prepares in advance a set of procedures for engaging students (and other relevant parties) in a process, if following the democratic andragogical model, by establishing a climate conducive to learning and creating a mechanism for mutual planning.

It is interesting to note that although the participants have a fragmented perception of theory and practice, they are integrated in their application. This application is then also strongly influenced by the industry.
7.8.6 Dominant postmodern view and emancipatory view on assessment

The postmodern view and emancipatory view on assessment, characteristic of transformational outcomes-based assessment, are described in Chapters 2 and 6.

Assessment reviews of this decade signal a serious attempt to provide a coordinated approach to curriculum reform, building on earlier reforms and taking account of anticipated future needs deriving from economic, technological and social changes (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345). The transformational outcomes-based curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from centralised prescriptions of a curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt the guidance provided by a curriculum.

In correlation with the democratic andragogical assessment approach, teaching is no longer defined as the transmission of knowledge, but instead it is defined as the process of helping students to understand information and to transform it into their own personal knowledge (Killen, 2004:10). Exposing the students to a cross-disciplinary approach can be labelled as emancipatory and implies the intention of the lecturers to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge (Yorke, 2003:477). This school of thought believes that education can improve the well-being of society-centred education, whereby lecturers and students should act as change agents by analysing and addressing societal needs. This means that learning is a constructive process in which students are constructing knowledge or making meaning, according to their perception of society (Yorke, 2003:477).

7.9 REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES: FACULTY 8

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives revealed, in contrast with the other faculties, three stages rather than two.

These are:

- traditional outcomes-based assessment, with the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment;
- transitional outcomes-based assessment, with the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment; and
- transformational outcomes-based assessment, with the associated post-structuralist and postmodern view on assessment.
### Table 7.8: Faculty 8 – Summation of assessment practices and perspectives within a paradigmatic framework

#### LECTURER’S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN FACULTY 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRUCTURALISM</th>
<th>POST-STRUCTURALISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST</strong></td>
<td>FIRST DECADE 1980-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional outcomes-based education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No distinction between informal and formal formative assessment</td>
<td>No difference in informal and formal assessment</td>
<td>No difference in informal and formal assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials feedback in the form of marks rather than dialogue</td>
<td>No feedback from tutorials</td>
<td>No feedback from tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance-based assessment is quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative assessment in reports issued to students upon completion of projects</td>
<td>Qualitative assessment in reports issued to students upon completion of projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm-referencing assessment - indicating student performance in marks and percentages</td>
<td>Unfairness of ranking order and norm-referenced assessment</td>
<td>Unfairness of ranking order and norm-referenced assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value</td>
<td>Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value</td>
<td>Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation mark drives assessment process, to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments</td>
<td>Participation mark drives assessment process, to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments</td>
<td>Participation mark drives assessment process, to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-assessment, given the number of class tests and semester test</td>
<td>Over-assessment, given the number of class tests and semester test</td>
<td>Over-assessment, given the number of class tests and semester test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of class groups hampers group work</td>
<td>Size of class groups hampers group work</td>
<td>Size of class groups hampers group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work</td>
<td>Students perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work</td>
<td>Students perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Culture of learning” that speaks of dependency of students</td>
<td>“Culture of learning” that speaks of dependency of students</td>
<td>“Culture of learning” that speaks of dependency of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater weight to exam, to compel greater effort and for its summative value</td>
<td>Greater weight to exam, to compel greater effort and for its summative value</td>
<td>Greater weight to exam, to compel greater effort and for its summative value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST** | SECOND DECADE 1990- | Transformational outcomes-based education |
| Traditional outcomes-based education |                 |                   |

**CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY** | THIRD DECADE 2000- | Transformational outcomes-based education |
| Traditional outcomes-based education |                 |                   |

**First Decade 1980-1990**

- Traditional outcomes-based education
- No distinction between informal and formal formative assessment
- Tutorials feedback in the form of marks rather than dialogue
- Performance-based assessment is quantitative
- Norm-referencing assessment - indicating student performance in marks and percentages
- Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value
- Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means
- Participation mark drives assessment process, to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments
- Over-assessment, given the number of class tests and semester test
- Size of class groups hampers group work
- Students perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work
- “Culture of learning” that speaks of dependency of students
- Greater weight to exam, to compel greater effort and for its summative value

**Second Decade 1990-2000**

- Transitional outcomes-based education
- No difference in informal and formal assessment
- Tutorials feedback in the form of marks rather than dialogue
- Qualitative assessment in reports issued to students upon completion of projects
- Unfairness of ranking order and norm-referenced assessment
- Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value
- Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means
- Involvement of industry in formulation of learning outcomes, outcomes prescribed outside educational institutions and separately from educational programmes

**Third Decade 2000-2010**

- Transformational outcomes-based education
- No difference in informal and formal assessment
- Tutorials feedback in the form of marks rather than dialogue
- Qualitative assessment in reports issued to students upon completion of projects
- Unfairness of ranking order and norm-referenced assessment
- Semester test provides an integrated overview, applied for its summative value
- Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means
- Participation mark drives assessment process, to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments
- Involvement of industry in formulation of learning outcomes, outcomes prescribed outside educational institutions and separately from educational programmes
- Students perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work
- “Culture of learning” that speaks of dependency of students
- Greater weight to exam, to compel greater effort and for its summative value
## Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers' assessment perspectives and practices

### POSITIVIST – BEHAVIOURIST
**FIRST DECADE 1980–**
Traditional outcomes-based education

| Weight percentage of exam adjusted to bolster flow-through rates |
| Class tests as punitive measure, with Turn-it-in, to counteract plagiarism |
| Relationship between students and lecturer devoid of respect and integrity |
| Students’ lack of devotion and authoritarian attitude of lecturers adverse to formation of pedagogical and human relationship |
| Second exam opportunity casts suspicion on reliability and validity of summative assessment |
| Exam does not provide holistic overview of student’s progress |
| Lack of practical experience keeps students from being prepared for workplace and as adults |
| Content-based assessment |
| Convergent formative assessment – centred on determining if student knows or understands |
| “General mistakes” assessed – contradicting central purpose of formative assessment |
| Repeated summative assessment – intent on assessing next predetermined thing in a linear progression |
| Behavioural approach – accumulation of independent facts and skills with independent knowledge and skills |

### INTERPRETIVIST – CONSTRUCTIVIST
**SECOND DECADE 1990–**
Transitional outcomes-based education

| Lecturers confer on memorandum for shared concept of student performance - triangulation to enhance credibility |
| Summative assessment integrates and summarises knowledge and skills, holistic assessment |
| Work-integrated learning for undergraduates confined to workshops presented by industry professionals |
| Alternative assessment techniques (e.g. open-book tests) Projects related to work-integrated learning workshops |
| Divergent assessment approach to discover what the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept |
| Lecturers seek new assessment methods, deeming current paradigm obsolete - collaborative, flexible, open-system approach |
| Constructivist view of learning, with intention to teach in the zone of proximal development |

### CRITICAL – EMANCIPATORY
**THIRD DECADE 2000–**
Transformational outcomes-based education

| Working in previously disadvantaged communities confronts masters and honours students with equity, social and welfare issues of the poor |
| Problem-based approach, where aim and meaning of content takes a higher form of knowledge |
| Lecturers seek new assessment methods, deeming current paradigm obsolete - collaborative, flexible, open-system approach |
| Cross-disciplinary approach, labelled emancipatory, implying intention to go beyond current boundaries of knowledge |
7.9.1 Traditional outcomes-based assessment practices

The faculty does not distinguish between informal and formal formative assessment and activities are only considered “informal” when their marks are not recorded. Spontaneous informal interaction between lecturer and student does not qualify as informal formative assessment and even the tutorials serve the formal formative purpose of completing assignments. Formal formative assessment comprises of assignments, class tests, semester presentations and projects that produce marks to meet the participation mark requirement. Performance-based assessment activities that are supposed to reflect competence are quantitatively rather than qualitatively assessed.

The semester test provides an integrated overview of the student’s progress and is thus applied for its summative rather than formative, value.

The size of class groups markedly influences teaching and assessment practices in that it hampers group work and leads to a direct/deductive teaching approach. It also necessitates the aid of assistants in the assessment of a class exceeding 100 students. This state of affairs not only robs the lecturer of the opportunity and benefits of cooperative teaching and learning methods, but also makes a norm-referenced and lecturer-centred approach virtually unavoidable.

Alternative assessment techniques (such as open-book tests) are not deemed appropriate for first-year students, because they are not yet “mature enough”. This observation relates to the consensus among most of the other faculties over the deterioration of the calibre of student entering the university.

Similar to Faculties 1-7, class attendance and participation are also areas of concern that lead to the faculty adopting a mark-based system to motivate and obtain results. The participation mark drives the assessment process in that scheduling a test for every class is the only way to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments. The number of assessments thus far exceeds the university’s stipulations for modules and gives rise to over-assessment, given the added fortnightly class tests and semester test.

Formative assessment thus addresses student behaviour rather than the efficacy of the learning process. Students are perceived as “lazy” and incapable of self-regulated work, a view shared by the other faculties in their reference to the prevailing inadequate “culture of learning” that also speaks of the dependency of students.
In reference to Boud (1995:39), in formative assessment students may not go as far as developing “learned helplessness”, they may develop “learned dependence”, in respect of which Boud (1995:39) writes:

Too often lecturer-driven assessment encourages students to be dependent on the lecturer or examiners to make decisions about what they know and they do not effectively learn to do this for themselves.

This “dependency” is clear from lecturers’ plea for greater weight to the exam, to compel students to put in greater effort and for its summative value. Lecturers are furthermore forced to adjust the weight percentage of the exam to bolster flow-through rates.

Class tests serve as punitive measure, together with Turn-it-in, to counteract plagiarism and deemed necessary in view of students’ inability to distinguish between right and wrong or acceptable and unacceptable. An analysis of the relationship between the students and lecturer’s reflects a total lack of respect and integrity between the two parties. Students’ lack of dedication (reflected in the observation “doesn’t do his/her part”) and the authoritarian attitude of lecturers have an adverse effect on both the formation of a pedagogical and human relationship.

Boud and Falchikov (2007:38) call the curriculum and the pedagogical relationship, as discussed in Chapter 2, the key components of a readiness or even a will on the part of the student in favour of assessment. They add that assessment requires the student to play, willing him-/herself forward and reach the perception that assessment is in his/her educational interest. Students may be encouraged to believe in their own abilities and discover their personal interests, but in the end students have to play their part in the formation of a positive spirit towards their assessments (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:38).

Typically, students will only take up an active and engaged stance towards assessment if they are encouraged to do so. Their authenticity in the educational setting will not simply express itself; it has to be nurtured, necessitating encouragement in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy as well as assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:37).

In contrast to the norm-referenced assessment approach, one participant pointed out the “unfairness” of singling out exceptional student achievement in relation to that of the class. Confirming this sentiment, Hodnett (2001:179) states that aside from the fact that “this grading technique does not encourage growth”, norm-referenced assessment is in actual fact devastating to many students. Weaker students quickly realise that they achieve bad results regardless of the quality of their work.
Students who are continually labelled inadequate and never experience success eventually refuse to make any kind of effort, stunting their growth. Hodnett’s (2001:179) argument on grading technique is clearly illustrated in the exploitation of the second exam opportunity and also casts suspicion on the reliability and validity of this type of summative assessment, viz. students with a 60% participation mark being unlikely to pass the first exam opportunity and then achieve “very high marks” in the second opportunity.

Meyer et al. (2010:52) assert that although norm-referenced assessment enables lecturers to discriminate between better and poorer performers, it provides very little information on students’ actual performance and abilities in relation to predetermined learning outcomes. Neither does the exam provide the expected overview or holistic impression of the student’s progress over the course of the semester. It could be concluded from the difference in student performance between the first and second opportunity that lecturers are drawing up content-based exam papers, in which the emphasis is on memory recall of descriptive knowledge and not on higher-level cognitive skills (UNDP/RBAS, 2006:5).

7.9.2 Dominant positivist and behaviourist view on assessment

Positivism and behaviourism, characteristic of traditional outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.2.

The goal of the informal and formal formative as well as summative assessment conforms to the convergent formative assessment approach that centres on determining if the student knows or understands rather than what the student knows or understands (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616), as explained in Chapter 2, an approach characterised by a behaviourist view of learning. This view of assessment centres on repeated summative assessment with an intention to assess the next predetermined thing in a linear progression (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:628).

7.9.3 Transitional outcomes-based assessment practices

An example of qualitative assessment identified in this faculty is the “general notes” included in reports issued to students upon completion of projects. While the criteria against which student performance is measured may not be clear, it is a shift from marks to descriptive commentary or put differently a shift from norm-referenced and qualitative to more quantitative assessment.

It once again points to the divergent formative assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617) described in Chapter 2 that offers feedback that promotes descriptive, not purely judgemental, evaluation – a focus on miscues – aspects of students work yielding insight into their current
understanding (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617). The reference to “general mistakes”, however, contradicts the central purpose of formative assessment to promote student learning by providing information about performance (Yorke, 2003:478). The intention of assessment for learning, as Davidson and McKensie (2009:4-5) note, is to assist students improve and move forward in their learning. Students thereby also obtain the information necessary to guide and promote their own learning, to meet the intended outcomes.

It requires academic staff to assess in a manner that will allow them to identify the kind of improvements needed and communicate this information to students. The goal of assessment is to promote learning and not to award marks to a student relative to his/her place in a group, measuring relative rank and not growth (Hodnett, 2001:5).

Work-integrated learning for undergraduates is confined to workshops presented by industry professionals and is the only organised exposure they receive to the profession, given the lack of facilities in the area for placement. These students then complete projects related to each workshop. As indicated, this lack of practical experience keeps students from being prepared for functioning effectively in the workplace and as adults.

Summative assessment is intended to integrate and summarise the student’s knowledge and skills, holistic assessment that contrasts with the fragmented view of learning of some participants and the distinction other faculties draw between theory and practice. The integration of teaching and assessment of learning is intended to enable, as Wood (1987:242) puts it, the student’s “maximum performance” in the light of Vygotsky’s (1978) “zone of proximal development” (in simplistic terms, this is the range between the students existing problem-solving ability and the ability to solve more complex problems to produce a best performance).

Participants confer on the memorandum for a shared understanding of student performance, which heightens the validity of the exam. In this regard Holroyd (2000:47) explains that it is vital to ensure that individual assessment items have validity in the light of a degree of shared understanding on the meaning of the benchmark statements for a particular subject (Holroyd, 2000:47).

The most important task confronting lecturers, according to Campbell (2008:1), is developing assessment practices and interpreting results in ways that will engender valid, reliable and fair decisions about students’ progress. If this challenge is not addressed, then lecturers will be ignoring the most important purpose of assessment – the enabling of appropriate teaching and learning decisions (Campbell, 2008:1). Le Grange and Beets (2005b:116) mention two ways in
which triangulation could serve to enhance credibility. Firstly, lecturers can use the results of different assessment tasks (e.g. a journal entry, an exhibition/demonstration and a practical investigation) when making inferences. Secondly, assessments by more than one role player (self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment) can enhance the credibility of inferences.

7.9.4 Dominant interpretive and constructivist view on assessment

Interpretivism and constructivism, characteristic of transformational outcomes-based assessment, are described in detail under 7.2.4.

The notion of assessment challenges lecturers to make the shift from conventional understandings of assessment to embracing the idea of assessment as inference and also to understand that inferences are tentative, requiring processes of falsification. This view of assessment is more closely related to contemporary theories of learning and accepts the complexity of formative assessment. The theoretical implications of this more divergent assessment approach are typified by a socio-constructivist view of learning, a view of assessment jointly accomplished by lecturers.

The community involvement of students correlates with the later form of the interpretative tradition: a socio-cultural perspective. Unlike the constructivist approach, a socio-cultural perspective focuses strongly on the context in which the student learns. Learning transpires within the community as an interaction between the student and his/her social environment (Beets, 2007:93).

7.9.5 Transformational outcomes-based assessment practices

Masters and honours students receive the limited number of work-integrated placements available in the region and also take part in community service to aid in problem-solving initiatives. It is a problem-based approach in which the aim and meaning of content takes a higher form of knowledge (Warnich, 2008:30). Working in previously disadvantaged communities, masters and honours students are confronted with issues relating to equity as well as the social and welfare problems of poverty-stricken communities, as it relates to their workplace. Solving work-related and community problems requires a certain level of knowledge and understanding, a truth that corresponds to the South African Qualifications Authority’s (2001:21) policy or guideline for integrated assessment that students must be able to demonstrate understanding of underpinning theory of their practice in a particular context and, through reflection, must be able to integrate performance with understanding (SAQA, 2001:21).
This faculty is subject to the same external input in the design and weighting of summative assessment that Faculty 6 and 7 experience. The involvement of the industry into the formulation of learning outcomes, described in Chapter 2, is typical of transformational outcomes-based education. Allais (2007:11) calls such outcomes a justification for scientific forms of schooling and system of harnessing the education “industry” for the economy (Smyth & Dow, 2006:292). Outcomes can, therefore, be prescribed outside of educational institutions and separately from educational programmes.

7.9.6 Dominant postmodern and emancipator view on assessment

The postmodern view and emancipatory views on assessment, characteristic of transformational outcomes-based assessment, are fully discussed in Chapter 2, 7 and 8.

The reference to technology and animation speaks to the wish for new and alternative assessment methods, deeming the current paradigm obsolete. It indicates how lecturers are gravitating towards a postmodern assessment culture that Dreyer et al. (2010:138) depict as active participation in authentic, real-life tasks that require the application of existing knowledge and skills. Community projects afford students the opportunity to develop and apply attributes such as reflection, resilience, resourcefulness, professional judgement and conduct in relation to problems and the acceptance of limitations of judgements and the value of dialogue in developing new ways of working.

Collective compilation of exam papers creates room for varied interpretations of student achievement. It is the collaborative, flexible, open-system approach found in transformational outcomes-based education (Spady & Marshall, 1991:68). Enabling varied interpretations ties into the postmodern contention that assessment can in itself never enhance or inhibit learning. It is the assessment-based inferences made that have the potential to promote learning (Killen, 2003:9).

This distinction is important, because it addresses one of the fundamental challenges of outcomes-based education, viz. the challenge of developing assessment instruments that allow lecturers to draw valid inferences about the extent to which students have achieved curriculum outcomes. The message here is simple but frequently overlooked by lecturers. The focus of assessment is not on the designing of an appropriate assessment task only, but on the inferences drawn from students’ results in the assessments.
The above word tables illustrate effectively profiling each case (faculty) – still on a case – by case-basis. The findings based on the observed profiles confirm the original expectations and connect well to the prior research that had been reviewed in developing the original design.

7.10 CROSS-CASE SYNTHESIS: COMPARATIVE REFLECTION ON CAMPUS ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES

The organisational logic model served to analyse the case study data (Yin, 2014:162). It entailed matching the empirically observed events to the theoretical predicted events. This array permitted the analysis to probe whether lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives appear to correspond or differ. The predicted similarity or contrast derived from the literature is displayed in Table 7.9, illustrating whether the findings from the observed profiles of the eight faculties either confirmed or disconfirmed original expectations and connected to the prior research reviewed in developing the original design.

Table 7.9 sets out the cross-case synthesis, depicting whether the cases being studied had replicated or contrasted with each other.

Table 7.9: Cross-case synthesis for the eight cases (faculties) capturing the findings according to the uniform categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Formative vs. Summative Assessment</th>
<th>Norm-referenced vs. Criterion-referenced Assessment</th>
<th>Content-based vs. Performance-based Assessment</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Positivist vs. Interpretivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Formative (formal and informal) assessment used for summative purposes</td>
<td>Norm-referenced assessment Marks employed to alter behaviour and guide students into more desirable directions</td>
<td>Fragmented view of learning - view content and practice separately Lack of facilities for workplace experience and assessment</td>
<td>Behaviouristic assessment - marks employed to alter behaviour and guide students into more desirable directions Pragmatism - applying appropriate knowledge and skills to solve problems related to real-world situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formative assessment reviews student performance, addresses student behaviour (diligence and responsibility) and</td>
<td>Norm-referenced and quantitative approach Students apply appropriate knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems</td>
<td>Content and practice separately assessed, resulting in fragmented view of learning</td>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means Active participation of students in learning process, as advocated by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Formative vs. Summative Assessment</td>
<td>Norm-referenced vs. Criterion-referenced Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Divergent assessment approach, characterised by flexible planning, incorporates alternative assessment</td>
<td>Norm-referenced assessment - student performance is reported in percentages and spread against the normal distribution curve</td>
<td>Predominant use of pen-and-paper exam - limited to memorisation and comprehension of content</td>
<td>Behaviouristic assessment techniques, like marks and promotion - aimed at altering behaviour and guiding it in more desirable directions</td>
<td>Pragmatism - assessment based on socio-constructivist view of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formative assessment applied for summative purposes</td>
<td>Formative assessment feedback mainly given in marks (thus quantitative and normative)</td>
<td>Class test has a traditional content-based nature, to counter threat to reliability of performance-based assessment</td>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as a procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as a procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Formative assessment through class tests, assignments and semester tests</td>
<td>Feedback is quantitative and normative</td>
<td>Assessment characterised by flexible planning - incorporating alternative assessment, integrating theory and practice</td>
<td>Criterion-referenced assessment from a positivist and behaviourist perspective to describe correlation between assessment results and a future criterion measurement</td>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as a procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 7: Reflection on lecturers’ assessment perspectives and practices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Formative vs. Summative Assessment</th>
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<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Positivist vs. Interpretivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lack of informal formative assessment to large class groups</td>
<td>Excessive class tests and projects/assignments, often on a weekly basis, for building a participation mark and attributes</td>
<td>Marked distinction between theoretical and practical modules</td>
<td>Behaviouristic techniques, like marks and promotion aimed at altering behaviours</td>
<td>Behaviouristic techniques, like marks and promotion aimed at altering behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative assessment to ensure diligence and class attendance - preoccupied with attendance requirements</td>
<td>Quantitative and norm-referenced assessment of learning outcomes</td>
<td>Content-based assessment - test week a replica of exam, only shorter time period and less extensive exam papers</td>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
<td>Positivist perspective - assessment as procedure aimed to be as objective as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative assessment applied for summative purposes</td>
<td>Performance-based assessment includes portfolios, case studies, proposals, PowerPoint presentations assignments and building models completed in groups</td>
<td>Behavioural approach - accumulation of independent facts and skills with independent knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in zone of proximal development</td>
<td>Constructivist view of learning, with the intention to teach in zone of proximal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative and summative assessment as polar opposites, not complementary, components in an integrated system</td>
<td>Professional councils have influence envisioned purpose of assessment</td>
<td>Cross-disciplinary approach, labelled emancipator, with the intention of lecturers to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge</td>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
<td>Lecturers employ technical/instrumental reasoning, with predefined means</td>
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The participants’ and faculties differing assessment practices and perspectives represent a continuum of possibilities and it is very difficult if not impossible to classify it narrowly. The analysis of lecturer assessment practices and perspectives reveal, in some (cases) faculties, predominantly two phases of assessment approaches: 1) the traditional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated positivist and behaviourist view on assessment and 2) a slight
move towards the transitional outcomes-based assessment, within the associated interpretive and constructivist view on assessment.

In contrast, there are (cases) faculties that not only have two phases of assessment approaches as indicated above, but also the third phase of transformational outcomes-based assessment within the postmodern view on assessment.

The first group of cases (Faculty 1, 3-5), limited to two phases, shows no evidence of assessment practices and perspectives that steer towards transformational outcomes-based assessment. Participants, however, express a need for a new paradigm in education. The assessment practices are largely summative, content-based and norm-referenced. There is however, a movement towards transitional outcomes-based assessment with evidence of formative assessment, which promotes learning and builds up towards summative assessment. Summative assessment is viewed not as just an “add on”, but complementary to formative assessment and characterised by flexible planning - incorporating alternative assessment, integrating theory and practice.

These faculties also measure meta-cognitive and cognitive development by means of performance assessment (such as mind maps), although feedback is - in contrast with the relevancy of this approach - quantitative and normative. There are faculties that are at present exploring innovative methods of implementing work-integrated learning, through community and research projects, the former corresponding to the later form of the interpretative tradition and the socio-cultural perspective focuses strongly on the context in which the student learns.

The problem-based assessment approach noticed in Faculty 1 and 2 relates to a socio-constructivist view of learning and an intention of the lecturer to teach in the zone of proximal development. In contrast with Faculty 1 and 3, lecturers in Faculty 4 seek to move from project-based learning to a problem-based approach. Work-integrated learning, to attain knowledge in a work environment is, however, not considered a priority in Faculty 4. Lecturers do not yet consider students prepared for a problem-centred approach and cite this as reason for the return to the conventional content-based assessment that centres on memorisation.

The assessment practices and perspectives in Faculty 2, 6 and 8 seem more “progressive” or “alternative”. These faculties have three phases of assessment approaches with a movement towards the transformational outcomes-based assessment and the associated post-structuralism and post-modern view on assessment.
The curriculum is viewed as more “relevant” to the needs of industry and everyday life, moving away from centralised prescriptions to a model relying on professional capacity. The focus is on adult learning - andragogy – i.e. self-directed learning. This perspective embraces the needs of the student arising from the social roles of adults and human resources development. Learning outcomes are not only formulated to enable the student to master the knowledge aspects of the outcomes, but also to demonstrate their application. The ultimate objective of the transformational method is to empower the student as a productive citizen, who is able to meet the demands of society.

The references to a more democratic assessment approach as well as the critical cross-field outcomes reflect a post-modern assessment culture. Students are able to manage own learning and can draw on resources of prior experience and social environment. Faculty 8 revealed the involvement of industry in the formulation of learning outcomes, whereby outcomes are prescribed outside educational institutions and separately from educational programmes. The community involvement of students correlates with the later form of the interpretative tradition, a socio-cultural perspective, and norm-referenced assessment with its ranking orders is deemed unfair to the student.

Lecturers work towards a collaborative, flexible, open-system approach in which the collective compilation of exam papers creates room for varied interpretations of student achievement. Exposing the students to a cross-disciplinary approach can be labelled as emancipator and implies the intention of the lecturers to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge – which is evident of the transformational outcomes-based education, associated to the post-structuralist and post-modern view on assessment.

### 7.11 MAIN CASE STUDY – FINAL CASE STUDY REPORT

The case study is designed to extend to a higher level – i.e. beyond the cross-case synthesis – of which the main case study is about a broader or larger unit of analysis, viz. the NWU (Potchefstroom campus), with the multiple case studies – faculties (and the cross-case synthesis) serving as embedded units. The data from both levels are then fed into the final case study report. The final case study report is thus based on the above cross-case synthesis of the eight faculties at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) assessment practices.

All the faculties consistently apply formal and informal formative assessment.
Formal class tests are usually written upon conclusion of a study unit. The forms of formal formative assessment applied at the Potchefstroom campus are large assessment tests, smaller class tests (5-10 marks), larger class tests (20-30 marks), group assignments, projects, seminar presentations, practical reports, practical teaching, practical tests and debates.

Faculties with large class groups by and large opt for the assessment week to ensure that major tests are written under controlled circumstances. The continuance of some classes is quite problematic, given that students then have to both attend class and write tests. Lecturers tend to support such an assessment week, considering it a form of preparation for examination conditions and format. Some lecturers offer the alternative test opportunity to students who were unable to write the formal major test, for medical reasons or the like, while others deem it an opportunity for students to improve the poor results of the first test opportunity.

Lecturers are once again returning to the individual assignment, usually content-based (but may also include presentations, seminar presentations and posters), given the difficulty to assess students’ contribution to group work. Group work assessment is unfair, according to lecturers, since not all group members put in the same effort and yet still receive the same marks. Peer assessment is also gaining in popularity among lecturers, in which students are carefully guided to mark fellow students’ work fairly according to rubrics.

Informal formative assessment is at times marked and included in the participation mark. This kind of assessment includes questioning in class, group presentations, group discussions, research discussions, debates and class work that are collected and marked. Unprepared class tests or small preparatory tests that often serve to monitor class attendance, make up a small percentage of the participation mark and are marked by the students, marking assistants or the lecturer. Some lecturers prefer to mark these tests to determine students’ knowledge and difficulties. Major class tests are by and large marked by the lecturers themselves, although there are cases where marking assistants do the marking. Large student numbers make a student-centred approach to assessment quite challenging, although lecturers are well aware that formative assessment needs to be student-centred to promote learning. Lecturers have no choice but to follow a quantitative (mark-driven) approach for large class groups (of e.g. 600 students).

Lecturers deem formative assessment as encouragement for students to put in continuous effort and not necessarily another learning opportunity to understand and master the work. According to them, students do not willingly work consistently throughout the semester and only do the bare minimum for admission to the exam, then relying on short-term memory to pass. The assessment system thus revolves around marks and not the learning process.
Given students’ exclusive focus on marks, lecturers now employ it as tool to ensure class attendance. Students simply do not carry out or submit assignments that do not contribute to their mark. There is a degree of concern about over-assessment, yet it seems to be considered a means to cultivate a culture of learning among students – something that is sorely lacking on campus, according to lecturers. Such an excessive amount of assessment, on the other hand, leads to a rather superficial level of learning in the endeavour to assimilate a great deal of subject matter in very little time and students thus do not have the opportunity to really consider and work through a problem.

Students tend to rely on short-term memory to pass the exam, in lecturers’ opinion, which only tests their ability to absorb large amounts of work in a short period and their capacity to render it in a three-hour session. Not only is this a rather unnatural set-up, quite unlike workplace conditions, but students also do not retain much of that information for very long. Examinations test, at the end of the day, students’ study capacity over a few days.

It would seem that lecturers are not always aware of all assessment variables at their disposal, such as setting the examination percentage best suited to their assessment priorities within a range of 30% to 70%. In most cases, the ratio is 50:50. Students are quick to realise that modules with an examination mark of only 30% of the final mark requires them to work hard throughout the semester. Lecturers are of the opinion that the examination should indeed make up much less than 50% of the final mark, since students simply do not spend 50% of their study time in a module on preparation for the exam.

Certain faculties consider the participation mark imperative for students to pass and even recommend that the required participation mark for admission to the examination be raised to 50%, given that very few students with a participation mark of less than 50% ever pass the exam and it may also motivate them to put in the work during the semester and not rely on the exam to pass. Many lecturers also feel that participation marks may well be necessary for the first two years of study, but from then on all students should receive admission to the exam, regardless of their participation mark.

The option of the open-book exam is seen as too difficult for students, due to the high level of accuracy required. Students do not understand that open-book exams require a high level of existent knowledge and mastery, thinking instead that they do not need to prepare all that much. Neither do lecturers find examination conditions (classrooms, supervisors) ideal for open-book examinations.
7.12 REFLECTION ON THE DISCREPANCIES AND PREVAILING SEPARATION OF STANDARDS-BASED AND STUDENT-CENTRED ASSESSMENT

It is clear from the above case study report that assessment developments at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) have not been adequately positioned within the dominant discourse. A key aspect of the transformation process remains the development of alternative, and therefore student-centred, assessments. The following section demonstrates that notwithstanding the policy intentions, current assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) have favoured a measurement and standards-based approach in the classroom that has hindered a shift towards student-centred education.

The analysis of lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) revealed the following two stages:

**Traditional outcomes-based assessment**: A standards-based assessment approach based on *rigorousness*, in which assessment follows learning and the purpose of assessment is to discover how much has been learned. Despite the introduction of formative and alternative forms of assessment (such as projects), norm-referencing and content remain the principal focus of the assessment activity;

**Transitional outcomes-based assessment**: A student-centred and alternative assessment approach, based on *relevance* and the quest to ensure a genuine correlation between what is assessed and the real competence of the student by means of criterion-referenced assessment as well as a closer correspondence between modules and professional practice.

When viewed as critical elements of the contrasting community discourses, the disjuncture and antipathies between the two approaches above take on considerable significance. The accountability argument manifests as regular testing of students to determine if expected levels of performance are attained. In this approach it is noted that teaching and learning in the classroom are assumed to improve if results improve, and thus teaching and learning practices in the classroom are assumed to take care of themselves. Kanjee and Sayed (2013:445) argue that in the context of the assessment policies that also focus on accountability, standards-based assessment will always drive out student-centred practices if they are set in opposition to one another.
The following section offers a perspective on how the assessment practices and perspectives contribute to the discrepancies and the prevailing separation of standards-based and student-centred assessment.

7.12.1 Curriculum discrepancies

Three broad curriculum approaches have been identified in participants’ assessment practices: curriculum as content, curriculum as product and curriculum as process. The analysis revealed the main emphasis to be on content. According to the feedback, participants’ assessment practices display a more content- and result-orientated view of the curriculum.

H2: ...the guy must in the end...have the following knowledge or demonstrate the following skills.

I don’t care whether he studied the last week or whether he studied throughout the semester.

In this content-based approach the lecturer is inclined to believe that giving the student all the information about something is the same as enabling them to use that knowledge, to do something with it. The participant views the curriculum primarily as content and will therefore tend to view education as primarily a transmission of that content (Bellis, 2001:187). This means the student is given a great deal of information, even of theory, and is required to learn it. This learning is often about memorisation, rather than comprehension or ability to apply knowledge. Important as content is, an emphasis on it to the exclusion of the “product” and “process” elements can lead to passive memorising of information that hardly shifts personal capability (Bellis, 2001:187).

Stating that the student must “demonstrate the skills” implies that the student can “do” something with what they have learned, i.e. they can deliver a product of learning. The participant views the curriculum as primarily as product (outcomes or output) and will therefore deem education and assessment as instrumental in achieving certain destinations – as a vehicle to reach a destination (Bellis, 2001:185). Traditional outcomes-based education strengthens this trend. According to Bellis (2001:185), this view is considerably influenced by the behaviourist schools of psychology and the movement towards “behaviourally-stated learning objectives”. The third emphasis is on the process aspects of learning, in relation to only one participant indicated that it is not the end result that is most important, but rather the process to reach the end result.

F4: ...it’s about “education” to me and not the end result...so the final assessment is not that important to me, but how they progress through the semester...can they achieve that outcome?
The focus in this instance is thus on progress and development, how the student progresses, and not on the end result. The participant views the curriculum as a process and will therefore tend to view education and assessment as developmental (Bellis, 2001:185), whereby the student often gains rich personal experience of growth and may come to know what it means to learn. It may be that they acquire little knowledge relating to a subject or intellectual or academic discipline. According to Bellis (2001:185), students may find that they have not gained a great deal in terms of actual abilities to perform certain roles or certain tasks differently or better, or in fact at all.

Participants from Faculty 1, 3 to 6 view the curriculum primarily as content. Bellis (2001:185) indicates that when an educational institution opts primarily for either curriculum as content or product or process, then standards will be derived from and formulated almost entirely in terms of that choice. In contrast, Faculty 2, 7 and 8 provide opportunities to their students to balance content, product (outcome) and process. These faculties establish structure to the development of all the skills, which is the basis of capability to handle more exploratory, problem-solving and developmental learning opportunities.

T2:  *We have a project in which we teach Latin to children in Ikageng and other schools in Potch, so we are involved. It is, however, more of a community and research project, because it provides us with data.*

N9:  *Our honours students do projects together in the field. We have a pro bono office that does projects for the municipality and their practical is to help with the problems… It is different from community service. If there is formal assessment, then it’s part of their module mark.*

The above learning has sociological and economic connotations, imposing a problem that needs to be solved. The above task/project/activity in fact does just that. Faculties 2, 7 and 8 use a problem-based method as suitable way of delivering learning. This problem-based method, according to Bellis (2001:189), is saying “we have a situation. What can be done to solve it/change it/improve the results?” Bellis (2001:191) cites the praxis-type curriculum approach to illustrate why a “problem-centred” method is an appropriate way to deliver learning.

Contemporary discourses aim to encourage “balanced assessment systems”, placing process and product assessments on an equal footing. It means a lecturer should be able to “employ assessment manoeuvrability” by making provision for both process and product assessment in their practices (Meyer et al., 2010:2). Although the curriculum approaches of Faculty 2, 7 and 8 have sociological and economical connotations, the analysis reveals that the view of the
curriculum at the NWU is mainly about content and product. It is therefore not surprising that the other faculties consider the traditional paradigm ineffective and advocate for a new paradigm.

**H3:** We need a new paradigm for work-integrated learning. The traditional paradigm is not working...we want to bring in work-integrated learning in more faculties...If that’s difficult to assess we have to rethink...a distinction should be made in terms of the critical outcomes...regardless of whether the student gets 80, if he doesn’t achieve the critical outcomes...

The three archetypal models of the curriculum, viz. content, product and process models, co-exist in considerable tension. This tension is clearly evident in lecturers’ assessment practices and views. The analysis revealed a strain between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment; content-based and performance-based assessment; formative and summative assessment; convergent formative and divergent formative assessment; and lastly between standards-based and student-centred approaches.

### 7.12.2 Outcomes-based education discrepancies

Transitional outcomes-based education, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, is a student-centred learning process and is (although not always) directed towards the achievement of specific outcomes. The transitional outcomes-based approach intends to enable students to reach their maximum learning potential by setting the learning outcomes to be achieved by the end of the learning process.

The outcomes-based education approach, deemed to underlie the teaching and learning at the NWU at present, is found in learning theories more constructivists in nature. Herein the focus is supposed to shift from teaching to learning, which would then result in student-centred teaching and assessment. The implementation of the higher education curriculum would then, according to Young (1998:27), be one of “curriculum as practice”. Teaching, learning and assessment should not (as is the case in most of the faculties) revolve around a prescribed knowledge structure, but the curriculum should serve as framework in which the lecturer and student collectively seek to successfully achieve the outcomes. While marks usually reflect the success of the lecturer’s teaching in traditional outcomes-based education, the transitional outcomes-based approach aims to determine the student’s competence by means of a variety of assessment strategies.
Against the above perspectives on outcomes-based education, a general pattern of awareness of the meaningful changes that this approach hold for teaching and learning came to light within the faculties on the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU.

E2:  *We don’t test metacognition at all, but we don’t get to that constructivist and cognitive, high-level cognitive, learning. We don’t give marks for the method someone writes down; he has to do the sum and then we check whether the answer is right, but he must be marked on the method he follows.*

Transitional outcomes-based education, based on the constructivism cited above, has turned out to be the great “paradigm shift” the participants referred to earlier in the chapter. The remarkable thing is that lecturers do not associate this shift with the promotion of learning among students, but rather relate it to content changing into a *product* and not so much a *process*. Transitional outcomes-based education requires teaching, learning and assessment to be designed back from the critical cross-field outcomes.

Despite this imperative of transitional outcomes-based assessment, only one participant considered the cross-curricular and critical outcomes important and the traditional pen-and-paper exam as not providing for assessing these outcomes. These twelve critical outcomes, as described in Chapter 3, relate to the competencies the student has to demonstrate according to the different levels of the NQF (see Chapter 3) of the education system.

A1:  *You also want assess to achieve your CCFO’s and then you also want there to be subject-specific knowledge. I don’t think barrelling in and writing an exam lends itself thereto to test what you do when you have freedom of thought and movement. You can test synthesis and application, etc. in exams, but to see what he does when he is out there in the sun.*

Participants generally separate theory (content) from practice (skills), a fragmented view on learning that inevitably leads to the pen-and-paper testing of content. Virtually none of the interviewees saw the mention of assessment criteria or the grading of student performance in terms of competence. A quantitative and norm-referenced approach is followed, regardless of the type of knowledge, skill or cognitive process and which lecturers readily admit can give rise to questions of applicability.

H2:  *They can either do it or not. I don’t know how...it’s something I struggle with and I don’t know how to deal with it. Either a higher percentage to pass or another type of assessment that you know it. Both they can meet all these things and if they can’t do it, then they have to repeat it...*
H1: I have a suggestion...when they write the most absurd things in the exam and which is a critical outcome for that module, I think a distinction must be made between critical outcomes. If your student, regardless of whether he gets 80, but if he doesn't manage some of those critical outcomes...like if he would murder a patient in some way...they sometimes write stuff, which would be murder...

The above responses show lecturers’ clear uncertainty over exactly how outcomes-based education should be realised, the implication being that students also then do not have a clear path towards reaching the eventual exit-level outcomes of the qualification. This designing back may well technically be more difficult than the traditional curriculum development process, but it ensures lecturers and students have a clear route toward achieving the intended outcomes. Warnich (2008:21) differentiates between low-order and exit-level outcomes, the latter of which are considered the highest level of outcomes. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria could as such be the building blocks for reaching the exit-level outcomes. The absence of the learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria in lecturers’ assessment activities gives rise to uncertainty over the efficacy of assessment and leads to the conclusion that the lecturers neither assess what is supposed to be assessed nor does the assessment reflect the progression from the conceptual to the achievement of the exit-level outcomes. I find that this trend could be attributed to inadequate training and/or a perception of the curriculum as a syllabus that needs to be completed.

7.12.3 Outcomes-based assessment discrepancies

Formative (informal and formal) assessment is largely confined to class tests and written assignments for summative purposes. Assessment information thus mainly serves to determine if the student knows, understands or is capable of applying a predetermined concept. Formative assessment is, in other words, convergent rather than divergent (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616).

Lecturers simply do not grasp how alternative assessment should produce a nuanced view of students’ progress, according to which valid conclusions can be reached in order to adapt teaching and to offer feedback to students as well as suggest measures to bridge the gap between their current performance and their expected or potential performance. Assessment decisions continue to be denoted in the form of marks, which also serve as means of motivation.

EMS1: Everything is determined by the marks system. So it doesn’t matter what you think you want, they just tell you the stuff needs to get done, because the marks system is closing.

EMS2: ...it dominates everything!
The above lecturers articulate the perception that is keeping them from truly recognising the opportunities of formative assessment, as inherent element of student-centred learning. The focus remains on indicating progress in marks and percentages. Only Faculties 4 and 5 were able to explain the differences between formative and summative formative assessment, in relation to the intention of assessment. This inability to distinguish between informal and formal formative assessment could surely be attributed to the failure of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) to provide for informal formative assessment.

Although alternative assessment techniques prescribed in the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) are recommended, there are few signs that techniques such as open-book tests and orals are developed to meet the learning needs of students.

**L4:** I chat with them, we talk about the work. I do this especially with my really weak students that come to me for help. Then you realise that it’s a small little problem and they actually know the work, but there’s just something about the oral that enables you to help the student and then they do much better in the written exam.

Assessment is generally not driven by students’ needs or by taking steps to aid students in reaching their highest potential. The intrinsic objective remains obtaining participation mark for admission to the exam. This strongly summative and exam-driven approach functions as accountability measure for the institutional management to determine lecturers’ work performance. The emphasis on the participation mark is further ascribed to the pressure on the university to comply with certain flow-through rates, without which the university (and lecturer) would not survive.

**L2:** It’s the political situation we find ourselves in...we cannot afford it and must have a flow-through rate. It is not our problem, it is not our problem that so many students must pass, there is so much pressure, not only on the faculty or the institutional office. There is so much pressure on government level that the PUK wouldn’t survive.

Consequently, assessment is more about the lecturer’s progress than that of the student, i.e. a scenario centred on accountability in the interest of the lecturer. Given the inadequate in-service training and absence of theoretical grounding in policy documents, it is not surprising that lecturers’ assessment practices resemble the first decade of the outcomes-based education system (1980s). Even research is considered a threat to quality teaching, as the following response shows:

**T4:** See, we’re a top research faculty and to me who leans toward teaching it’s quite strange. I feel a bit neglected…only the teaching committee really ascribe to the importance of
teaching and should there be a meeting that I can’t attend because of my class schedule, then I get a kind of unconcerned “so?” in response.

The question is whether the views on learning that inspire assessment practices and the empowering role of research are of any consequence, and whether the call for student-centred teaching, assessment and learning is not perhaps being underestimated.

7.12.4 Student-centred assessment discrepancies

The transitional outcomes-based approach described above requires deeper exploration to teach the student in his/her zone of proximal development in aid of a better understanding. These educational moments are lost in the lecturer’s endeavour to complete the work rather than promotion of deeper learning. The present rigid assessment approach limits informal interaction between the lecturer and student that could address the true learning needs of the students more effectively. Instead, informal formative assessment functions as measure to control the external behavioural factors of students. Lecturers use informal formative assessment to ensure class attendance and active participation. It conforms to the prevailing culture among students to work only when marks are involved. This is justified, as it is in Faculties 1-4, by students’ failure to submit assignments or write tests where marks are not at stake.

Ed3: ...if I say it doesn’t count marks, not one comes with an idea. Out of a group of 400 I maybe have 10 students and because their title counts a lot in the summative assessment…I want to help them, it is formative assessment after all. It’s about promoting learning. It doesn’t count so I don’t prepare for class. They just sit there and I tell them, what are you doing here? Leave, you are not prepared for class to which they respond: yes, but it doesn’t count. It’s that kind of mentality, so I tell lecturers to do it this way otherwise students simply don’t prepare or just don’t show up.

The above response reflects the prevailing culture in the faculty (and, as indicated, in Faculties 1-4) of the absolute focus on marks. The greatest stumbling blocks to effective implementation of informal formative assessment are the lack of motivation, academic responsibility and trustworthiness of students. These deficiencies necessitate lecturers to institute measures that will ensure students complete assignments and the reason they employ marks to motivate and, in some cases, manipulate students. It is thus not the lecturers’ ignorance of how to best support learning, but rather external factors associated with accountability that lead to the strongly standards-based assessment approach followed and it could be surmised that students’ learning falls victim to lecturers’ compliance with their employer’s directives.
Lecturers’ current assessment practices thus emphasise performance indicators such as standardised test results, completion rates and through-put rates. Measurement at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) relates to a quality-assurance process that examines the aims, structure, inputs, processes, products, outputs and projected outcomes of the NWU’s systems to maintain, improve and enhance the quality of the systems. This standards-based assessment approach assesses the effectiveness of the institution or programme, rather than student learning. All of this is, to a certain degree, a consequence of the need to demonstrate educational accountability (Ruben, 2007:64).

Participants focus primarily on using assessment to educate students on the requisite standards of the study programme, which reflects a marked discrepancy between the standards of the programme and the students’ expectations. The sustainability of assessment beyond this programme does not enter the awareness of most lecturers, who are more concerned with students’ failing to meet the standards. This standards-based approach relegates the student to merely a recipient of assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

Cowie (2005b:202) explains that students play an active role in realising assessment by negotiating, shaping and reflecting on their participation and non-participation. In this way one lecturer affords students the opportunity to design assessment activities and not only assess each other, but also each other’s feedback.

**EMS1**: *Teaching must relate to the assessment...you cannot separate them...the manner of teaching...to show people...to assess on that level it doesn't help to teach on this level. Informal assessment also relates a lot to the teaching strategy...inductive teaching, where you give the responsibilities to the student, there you'll have a different kind of informal assessment and that is how I teach...I don't stand in the class and give class...I expect the students to do activities. So it creates a very good basis of informal assessment...rather ask them to give me feedback. I don't like the word “understand”, because you cannot measure it. So they have to give me feedback, either through presentations or...giving an opinion...not everybody does that. It's only my frame of reference.*

The frame of reference reflects that assessment and teaching cannot be separated and must be integrated into learning, according to the participant, wherein the level of assessment must correspond with that of the teaching. Informal formative assessment is linked to the inductive teaching strategy, which entails involving the student by giving him/her certain responsibilities and the student then providing feedback by means of presentations and reasoning. This student-
centred approach indicates that informal formative assessment not only occurs spontaneously in the classroom, but is aligned with teaching and learning. The above lecturer involves the student in the teaching, learning and assessment process, turning assessment into an “act of collaboration” (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:617).

This “act of collaboration”, however, is only relevant when lecturers relinquished their power over events in the classroom, taking students’ needs into consideration, and seeking opportunities to involve them in the process. The tension between the power (authority) of the student and that of the students was patently obvious during the focus group interviews – often in lecturers’ impatience with the low calibre of the students.

L5:  *I think the problem is the quality of student we get is worse. Europe doesn’t have the same problem, because the school system is better.*

This perception among lecturers, of the ever-falling quality of student, ties into Eloff (2013:3) reporting that one of the biggest challenges South African universities face is the decreasing level of preparedness of high school graduates to undertake tertiary studies. Lecturers’ focus on marks to address this problem, instead of on promoting learning, was quite evident. It would seem that the social value of high marks is underestimated, especially in the light of students’ preoccupation with marks.

The notion in the literature that student-centred assessment could bring about meaningful learning is of little consequence to lecturers. Learning (especially quality learning) is not priority in teaching, a sentiment closely related to the importance the majority of lecturers attach to the exam. Naturally it is this message from lecturers that largely shapes students’ view on teaching and assessment. It then stands to reason that if lecturers shifted their focus from marks to quality learning, students may well do the same. In a guideline document on assessment in England the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2004:1) asserts how important it is that time is found within classroom routines for discussion about how well work meets a particular set of criteria or standards, not only between lecturers and students but also between the students themselves an aspect markedly absent from the focus group interviews.

Lecturers in the eight faculties do recognise how the appropriate assessment can improve teaching and learning. The rationale behind the selection of assessment approach is quite clearly not based on its learning value but on issues of reliability and validity.

T3:  *Last year’s assignments were of no use, because they all did well having worked together and it didn’t reflect their own abilities and that is why I think tests are simply better...they*
work together and inevitably it’s only the good students who do the work…Copying to get the mark.

All faculties experience problems with student’s class attendance, diligence and responsibility. These difficulties influence assessment to such an extent that assessment is adjusted accordingly and the traditional pen-and-paper class test also serves to compel students to attend class and complete assignments. All faculties display an excessive focus on marks, which are used to motivate and manipulate students. Black and William (2006:11) oppose such tactics and argue that students’ beliefs about goals of learning, about risks involved in responding in various ways, and about what learning work should be like were all shown to affect their motivation. It is quite ironic that even though marks serve to ensure class attendance and motivate students, they are said to “thrive” on case studies.

L3: They thrive on case studies during the semester, then the exam comes along and many bite the dust because it’s so theoretical…while a case study you approach like any lawyer would do in the profession.

The participant’s assertion that students “thrive” on case studies contradicts the views of other lecturers who describe students as unmotivated and needing to learn responsibility and discipline. It would seem that students’ lack of motivation to complete assignments pertains more to the type of assessment applied than with students’ degree of accountability. The case study method, so widely used in work-based learning, is another example of a problem-centred method (Bellis, 2001:190). The case study, projects and portfolio assessment as authentic assessment approaches offer alternatives to the traditional methods (multiple-choice tests, standardised tests, etc.) (Lundie, 2008:60). The movement favours performance-based measurements that closely reflect how learners can do meaningful learning. Lundie (2008:60) adds that the appeal of alternative approaches – such as case studies, projects and portfolios – is their focus on students’ processes, products or performance, rather than on memory, information or behaviour (typical of a content-driven curriculum).

Despite the benefits of a student-centred approach, lecturers continue to resort to the traditional class test. It appears to be the endeavour to exact control over the student’s work performance, questioning the quality of the student.

L2: I think you would get the students to the level you want much easier than now. I know there are many lecturers who go to a lot of trouble to make their tests progressively more difficult and I don’t have a problem with that, but I just like to shock them…
L4: That’s why they want to kill themselves at the beginning of the semester, because they get 20%. They studied for days, because it’s the same standard as the exam.

These responses seem to indicate that the established assessment model does not promote quality learning, but rather a method for students to lighten their workload and employ the summative dominant assessment model to their advantage. The lecturers deem assessment as their domain, in which involving students in the assessment process is the rare exception and then only on postgraduate level. Assessment is something the lecturer does to students and not with them, which once again confirms the power dimension prevailing in the process, whereby the lecturer revels in the power to award marks that will ultimately determine the progression of the “powerless” student. The purpose of assessment is summative and tailored to the lecturer’s intentions, in which it can hardly be deemed a process conducted in the interests of the student. Assessment could only promote learning by establishing a more equitable power balance, about which Young (2005:4) asserts that students need to believe that improvements in their learning are more likely to occur through their efforts than their ability. Lecturers thus need to create opportunities for students to participate in the assessment process that they may be able to assess themselves and take responsibility for their own learning.

7.12.5 Lecturer-driven assessment discrepancies

All the faculties follow a strongly lecturer-driven approach, in which the lecturer acts as source of knowledge and to instil learning in the student. Peer and self-assessment, as integral to teaching, have not yet been established – the pedagogical intention of the lecturer is steered by the curriculum and not learning.

The lecturers’ selection of content predominantly reflects tradition (the subject has always been taught this way) or is made for pragmatic reasons (e.g. the availability of resources). It is a rather questionable situation when most academics at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) have a monopoly on definitions of knowing and learning, erecting systems of knowledge for their own sake, which in reality serves their purposes and rejects other legitimate interests (Barnett & Hallam, 1999:34).

This assessment approach focuses more on the intentions of the lecturer than on the intended results of the learning events. Learned dependence, which was highlighted by most lecturers, has the student passively following the lecturer’s instructions, without seeking to go beyond the boundaries seemingly set for the task (Yorke, 2003:489).
L2: You see I’m busy with a very interesting experiment, but I think you have to keep in mind that the students sitting in front of you can’t read and deal with large volumes of reading material like you. Once again not because they’re lazy or bad, but because of the system they come from…There are very few students who truly have the passion.

Assessment practices at the NWU remain predominantly lecturer-driven and all objectives centre on awarding a given value to denote a student’s performance. Assessment at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) mainly serves as instrument of control in discrete activities and is not considered relevant to the study programme, allowing little capacity for developing life-long learning skills. The perspective on students’ capability promotes student dependence on lecturers and stymies their judgement abilities, restricting students’ ability to assess their learning needs in future (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:119). Lecturers’ reluctance to allow students to offer greater input in the assessment process can be ascribed to the number of students per module as well as their view on the most efficient way of completing the work and obtaining valid assessment results.

H3: I have the good fortune of having a large group of first-year students, of about 300 students. I share this module with a colleague and one of the things that happened the past year is that I think we over-assessed students and have really cut back on the formative assessment, in terms of the number of class tests written, but we continue to make use of the formative assessment week for a big test. It’s something we cannot do without. About the class test assessment I feel that because of the size of the group, the classic class test is about as reliable as it’s going to get.

The above response illustrates the impact of large classes on the reliability of formative assessment. This participant prefers the more formal semester test or so-called “classic test”, because of the controlled conditions under which it is written. Reliability or accountability, in conjunction with student volumes, thus results in a lecturer-driven approach which opts for a reliable content-based, norm-reference and summative assessment approach.

Lecturers may well realise the import of formative assessment or more specifically student-centred assessment, but the massive student population impedes the exploitation of the information obtained from assessment. Faculty and institutional quality-assurance measures further strengthen the mark-driven system, given the lack of concrete criteria against which lecturers’ work performance can be measured, in which tabling the student’s promotion mark to faculty management is the primary indicator of a lecturer’s job performance.
L2: We try to help them pass, because of the enormous focus on putting through from above. We can’t get around it, there are these regulations and measures from the authorities, not the university, forced on us from the top, so we try to see how we can achieve it within the system.

Quality assurance is thus not about the quality of the assessment tasks or learning, but the lecturer’s accountability to the university’s institutional management. The university is considered, as during the first decade, as “uppermost” and not the student. The priority is thus to demonstrate the quality of university, measured against flow-through rates, rather than quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. It is indeed a standards-based and not student-centred approach.

This study finds that aside from the obligation of complying with policy requirements, lecturers also have certain views on the different elements of education that have been shaped over the course of time by experiences, insights and the tertiary environment in which they themselves were trained and form an integral part of their professional identity. Lecturers’ perspectives on assessment and how they manifest in practice could thus not be the same. Participants deem the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) as well as the academic rules as inhibiting restrictive and, as Le Grange (2006:907) states, it threatens the expression of a diversity of personal capacities and compromises the authentic self. Participants view the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and academic rules as impediments to the lecturer’s teaching and assessment task.

EMS1: Everything is determined by the marks system. So it doesn’t matter what you think you want, they just tell you the stuff needs to get done, because the marks system is closing.

EMS2: ...it dominates everything!

Lecturers are highly critical of the bureaucratic nature of assessment administration. Lecturers are not afforded the opportunity to offer input into the decision-making process and are merely instructed on how to proceed. Participants would also like the teaching and learning policy to allow modules to be presented within the context and demands of the industry. They did, however, concede to ignorance about the procedures the policy contains. As indicated in Faculty 6, the lecturer has very little freedom in the assessment process, to the extent that lecturers even have to obtain permission for the type of exam they wish to offer.

Van Venn (2003:3) explains that lecturers’ perceptions of their work tend to be highly personal and can therefore be construed as an essential part of their professional identities. Any discrepancy between these personal perceptions and the expectations inherent in current reforms
may therefore rise to strongly negative or strongly positive emotions, exemplified in one participant’s heated demand that the assessment policy be “scrapped”. The same sentiment was expressed over the academic rules that are similarly deemed to be overly prescriptive and failing to make provision for the professional context.

A2:  *...the problems we have are more subject and faculty oriented. It is one of my big problems with summative assessment...we expect students to write and only give facts, which is in no way a reflection of the students’ understanding...we also have a new degree we’re starting this year aimed at working municipal managers and officials and we have also put in portfolio assessment and they threw us out at ICAS saying the academic rules states you write exam. Now these adult learners are expected to write an exam...policies are so strict that there is no room for renewal in academics, except the portfolio, scrap the academic rules! It has to be specific to the discipline and the outcomes, especially outcomes that entail the demonstration of skills. To then give 50% weight to a summative writing of an exam doesn’t make sense to me.*

Lecturers are gradually gravitating towards the collaborative, flexible, open-system transformational outcomes-based approach. Allais (2007:15) indicates that working with the industry to solve problems relates to a cross-disciplinary approach that can be labelled as emancipatory, which implies the intention of the lecturers to go beyond the current boundaries of knowledge. Social constructionist ideas reinforce the rejection of a disciplinary base to education and a privileged role for educational institutions (Allais, 2007:15). The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) not only inhibits transformational outcomes-based education, but also the professional identity of the lecturer.

Lecturers place too much emphasis on rules, regulations and moderation and oversight is the compliance of lecturers with procedure at the expense of effectively determining whether or not students are progressing successfully towards achieving the skills, knowledge and attributes defined in the graduate profile (Davidson & McKensie, 2009:5). This creates a technical and sterile approach that imposes injunctions, without any real understanding of the complexities or of the way that academics see their diverse roles. Lecturers are cynical about the purpose and effects or outcomes of their teaching. They conform publicly to requirements to define outcomes, only to ignore them during teaching or define them vaguely and justify this intellectually. They focus on input factors as a means to define and protect standards. The use of input factors as measure or safeguard for standards, however, is strongly challenged by contemporary trends in access, modes of delivery and modes of student participation (Davidson & McKensie, 2009:5).
It is indeed these challenges in terms of access, contemporary modes of delivery and student participation that create tension in lecturers who are forced to forfeit their beliefs and consequently their professional identity. An authoritarian and unsubstantiated prescription of procedure for the classroom robs lecturers (and students) from the pedagogical space in which to express, reflect on and adapt their personal beliefs. The transformational outcomes-based approach that endorses student-centred assessment and is more flexible and accommodating is further depicted in the following lecturer’s assessment approach:

L2: I personally think that it has nothing to do with standardisation. I mean broad frameworks need to be standardised and conform to a certain level, but I don’t think one can go so far as to say that that is the way it should happen. I also think that the way you assess largely depends on yourself. Your personality influences the way you teach and many of us choose subjects that engage us.

The above participant suggests establishing a broad standardised framework for assessment. Such a framework needs to be accommodating of lecturers’ different approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The problem from an interpretive perspective, where reality is contextually bound and influenced by social agents, is that a standards-based approach disregards the importance of the context of the assessment. This simplified approach also overlooks the fact that determining the requirements of assessment entails more than just considering content relevance and representativeness (Killen, 2003:8). Lecturers have to interpret the impact of students’ personal characteristics on their responses and also interpret the assessment results in valid and reliable ways.

Despite the introduction of outcomes-based education and the concerted effort to incorporate change into pedagogical practices, assessment continues to occur as it did prior to the curriculum change. This has created a disconnect between the stipulations of policy and the reality in the classroom. Lecturers circumvent policy with rather creative semantics in their refusal to present modules according to the outcomes-based approach, which has a significant impact on how assessment is conducted as well as how the information obtained from such assessment is applied.
7.12.6 Formative assessment discrepancies

During the focus group interviews I observed the implementation of informal and formal formative assessment in all eight faculties, both of which forms are geared toward building a participation mark and summative assessment. As previously stated, the NWU’s teaching and learning policy does not provide for informal formative assessment.

Formative assessment opportunities in all the faculties are confined to the conventional class test, considered to be the only reliable option for large class groups, where the student is expected to reproduce the example of the lecturer (knowledge transfer). Forcing students to attend class and complete formative tasks confirms the discrepancy between the purpose of informal formative and formal formative assessment. Informal formative and formal formative assessments are used as repetitive assessment (class tests) for summative purposes, an approach that separates assessment from learning.

Informal formative assessment usually tests students’ existing knowledge at the beginning of a class or a new design, as a form of baseline assessment. Upon conclusion of the lesson, lecturers also make use of class tests as informal formative assessment technique. It is the summative application of such assessment to ensure that students have mastered the relevant concepts and not necessarily to encourage metacognition (reflection on thought).

E2: We don’t test metacognition at all, but we don’t get to that constructivist and cognitive, high-level cognitive, learning. We don’t give marks for the method someone writes down; he has to do the sum and then we check whether the answer is right, but he must be marked on the method he follows.

I would consider such assessment summative, i.e. determining whether the student possesses the knowledge and not pinpointing the student’s level of knowledge. Considering the social dynamics, informal formative assessment practices are clearly a compromise in reference to other factors, such as the culture of learning to which lecturers in Faculties 1, 3 and 5 referred.

Ed2: The point is to answer a question with a question, how else will you create a culture of learning, I ask you? Because we don’t have a culture of learning on this campus.

In response to the lack of a culture of learning, informal formative assessment is counterproductively employed to address personal aspects such as diligence, plagiarism and discipline. Participants hold forth the “culture of learning” as justification for using marking of informal formative assessment to ensure class attendance and completion of assignments,
confirmation of the complexity of the social interaction that occurs within education. I also observed aspects of power in the lecturer’s interpretation of student performance.

EMS2: At the moment it’s about marks, it’s not about participation, it’s not about outcomes, it’s about marks.

EMS3: If something doesn’t count marks or doesn’t count serious marks, it’s as though the students aren’t really motivated to do it. So these participation marks will make up part of it, but if it doesn’t carry that serious weight I fear they won’t take it seriously.

Assessment may be said to be about marks, but it is in fact about power. The dimension of power in the above response is twofold firstly, the student’s “power” to determine the assignment’s importance; and secondly, the lecturer’s “power” to award marks or not or even on the scope of the mark. Black and William (2006:90) provide another example of similar manifestations of power. The lecturer’s authority (subject specialist) to make judgements over accuracy and awarding of marks establishes his/her power over the student as well as the teaching and learning situation. This intention to retain control may also relate to the pressure to deliver high flow-through rates. High flow-through rates as well as the previously referred to lack of a culture of learning may keep students dependent. Students may also demonstrate issues of power that could contribute to this learned dependence. In conjunction to this issue (that may possibly be related) of an increasingly inferior student is the tendency of the university to keep the student dependent.

L2: There is a real culture of keeping students dependent at the PUK and deter them from thinking too big. Those guys struggle to work independently, to function…it is a cultural problem starting with the first-years having to march in rows and wear little hats that type of thing.

The reference to first-year students is somewhat sensitive, given the government investigation into hazing practices, during the research period in 2014, and a number of students and staff were expelled. Complaints were based on the militaristic treatment of first-year students during the orientation programme at the university. In Faculty 1 the autocratic and patently lecturer-centred assessment approach requires a slavish adherence to prescriptions and allows the student little freedom for creativity. The lecturer-centred nature of assessment could possibly be ascribed to the culture of excessive student dependence that reduces the student to an object in the teaching and learning process. Naturally the relationship between lecturer and student is distant and impersonal.
The power dynamic between the lecturer and student described above raises the question as to whether a supportive environment that encourages student-centred assessment has been established at all. The prevailing power (in)balance between lecturer and student most definitely does not foster a milieu in which every student enjoys the advantages of student-centred assessment.

The formal formative assessment predominantly consists of the activities prescribed in the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012). The goal of these guidelines is to counter a heritage of largely summative assessment (tests and exams) by encouraging implementation of a variety of assessment tasks. Stiggins (2005:327) indeed calls formative assessment a method with the prospect to realise the great potential of student-centred assessment by means of many different assessment methods to provide students and lecturers with a continuing stream of evidence of student progress in mastering the knowledge and skills.

My findings show that lecturers do not seek to reach valid conclusions from assessment information to aid the student towards improved performance. The lecturer’s goal (and also that of the student) is to comply with the requirements of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and the academic rules

L5: Tests are given throughout the semester to prepare students for the exam and for them to measure their progress and determine what they know or not. Then you can award a mark or mark it or give him the memorandum for him to mark it, so he can see what he knows. If you then want to give a mark for the participation mark, you can, but I don’t think it’s really necessary.

A large component of formal assessment is still comprised of class tests, verification tests and exams. Earl (2004:22-23), however, points out with regard to this kind of formal assessment that it doesn’t give much indication of the mastery of particular ideas or concepts, because the test content is generally limited and the scoring is too simplistic to represent the broad range of skills and knowledge that has been covered.

This manner of assessment places the lecturer firmly in control of the design of tasks (and mostly also their assessment), characterised by the assessment of the degree and accuracy of the student’s recall of factual knowledge. Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (1999:8) contrastingly asserts that setting tasks in a way which requires students to use certain skills or apply ideas; asking students to communicate their thinking through drawings, artefacts, actions, role play, and concept mapping as well as writing would support learning more effectively.
7.12.8  **Criterion-referenced assessment discrepancies**

Norm-referenced assessment is the only method employed to mark tests, projects, case studies, assignments and exams. This kind of assessment bolsters the perception that a question can only have one possible answer. The focus group interviews portrayed lecturers as authoritarian and judgemental rather than explorative, whereby the lack of descriptive and encouraging feedback could well be a reason for students’ failure to participate in the teaching and learning process.

*L3:  I think in that way you’ll also deal with those who only aim for a participation mark of 50 for admission to the exam. If you can motivate them by saying if you just get a little bit more, then you don’t even have to write the exam, then you’ll get their cooperation. You will have those who shine in class tests, because they have this carrot dangling in front of them and something to work toward.*

Awarding marks instead of providing descriptive feedback could have an adverse effect on the confidence of students (especially that of weaker performers). It inevitably leads to comparisons – also among students themselves – harmful to the weaker student. This type of assessment fails to develop students’ assessment skills, which restricts their ability to assess their learning needs in future (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:119) and could also impact negatively on the classroom climate, because of embedded competitiveness (Meyer et al., 2010:52). As Hodnett (2001:179) puts it: “this grading technique does not encourage growth”. Norm-referenced assessment is in actual fact devastating to many students, since weaker students quickly realise that they achieve bad results regardless of the quality of their work.

*F2:  ...there are many modules with a 35% pass figure for the first opportunity and in the second opportunity it pulls the class through, but the average is about 50, 55% for the first opportunity.*

Although the students are offered two exam opportunities, it seems that the extended summative assessment opportunity does not enhance learning. Lecturers’ reflection on the lack of a culture of learning (“because we don’t have a culture of learning on this campus”) highlights another adverse aspect of norm-referenced assessment, clear from a participant’s mention of a system that allows students to pass if they memorise well:

*F1:  ...the system allows people to pass if they memorise work well, with almost no insight…it happened on Master’s level…where they copied the other’s work…they memorise so well that they even copy the spelling errors of the textbook…in the exam.*
“The system” contributes to the lack of a culture of learning, according to the participants, since it allows students to succeed if they are adept at memorising. Killen (2005:142) explains that norm-referenced assessment enables lecturers to discriminate between better and poorer performers, but it provides very little information on actual performance and abilities in relation to predetermined learning outcomes. The withdrawal and stubborn absenteeism of students, unless threatened with the loss of marks, may be the effect norm-referenced assessment has on their morale and motivation.

The above seems to indicate that it is not only an environment in which students are merely the recipients rather than initiators of assessment that plays a role, but also that the predominance of such assessment forms lower the quality of learning students receive on the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU.

Far more productive ways for assessment to aid students need to be established. According to Young (2005:4), student-centred learning entails two actions between the lecturer and student: “First define and share the learning objective and then offer and use feedback to close the gap.” Clarity of focus is followed by the second aspect of offering and using feedback to improve learning. Lecturers’ main aim with informal formative assessment is to determine whether students grasp the work and whether the particular section has been covered, not to truly ensure that students are ready to take the next step towards mastering the lesson. The lecturer thus fails to ascertain the degree of progress the student is making in attaining the predetermined learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with the single exception of one lecturer comparing learning with a “chain reaction”. Despite the lack of a true understanding and application of informal formative assessment, learning is nonetheless seen as a continuous process.

T4: I find it’s like mathematics, if you don’t understand something, it’s like a chain reaction, then you’re not going to understand what comes next either. So, the lecturer needs to keep up with students’ progress, because if you work too fast and they fall behind, then you’re going to lose them.

Viewing learning as cumulative and articulated through assessment speaks of integrated assessment, in which feedback is aimed at guiding the student on how to proceed to the next level or how to solve the problem. Feedback on formal formative assessment tasks and tests that make up the participation mark is offered in the form of marks, which do not truly indicate to the student his/her, progress in the mastery of the outcomes that would demonstrate competence.
One of the stumbling blocks to providing quality feedback to students is the lack of explicit criteria that should be conveyed to students prior to the assessment task. Faculty 1 did speak of certain cognitive skills, but no mention was made during the focus group interviews of the formulation of measurable criteria against which to test student performance.

L5: Certain principles within the curriculum you simply have to memorise, the basic principles of...the study material for this year is for example an article by Janssen and one by Du Toit, where their opinions are discussed and critiqued. Next year we take an article of another writer. So the point is not to know the specific content, but to know how to judge and formulate an argument. I guess it depends on the subject.

L4: My problem about the exam is that I now have to do a bit of thumb sucking at the beginning of the semester on what I should ask the students.

Even Faculty 1, cited above, measures performance and provides feedback by way of quantitative and norm-referenced assessment. The increasing use of criterion-based approaches to assessment and grading in higher education is a consequence of its theoretical rationale and educational effectiveness (Sadler, 2005:177). This has not been the case at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus), with the important exception of innovations geared explicitly to content.

Analysis of the current assessment practices highlights the lack of a common understanding of criterion-based means and their implications for practice, where the theoretical underpinning is almost completely ignored. Lecturers struggle to grade student performance in competence terms, most probably due to a lack of understanding of the coherence of and articulation between learning outcomes and assessment criteria. In this regard Cohen, Boud & Sampson (2001:249) indicate the following:

The giver of feedback has to identify what constitutes good work in a given subject area and express these ideas in a coherent form, while also communicating effectively with the prospective receivers about their feedback needs. The recipient of feedback benefits from identifying and articulating these needs, from receiving detailed comments from a peer who has faced a similar challenge and from responding appropriately to the feedback.

The predominant use of norm-referenced assessment makes the feedback mostly quantitative and judgemental, rather than detailed descriptions of current progress and expected progress. The absence of assessment information that would promote student-centred learning can be attributed to the dominance of summative assessment via tests and exams, the intention to
complete the curriculum within a set time, the pressure to deliver high flow-through rates, and the lack of involvement of students in the assessment process.

Participants conduct outcomes-based assessment, which basically implies qualitative and criterion-referenced assessment, in a quantitative and norm-referenced manner. Recording qualitative assessment quantitatively is in conflict with the outcomes-based assessment approach. Outcomes-based assessment, which is a student-centred approach that integrates teaching and learning, employs the (descriptive) qualitative assessment information obtained for learning. Since the feedback is mainly given in marks (thus quantitative), Stiggins (2005:324) says, chances are slim that assessment will promote learning at all.

Lecturers develop assessments that have not been correlated with any direct measures of whatever they must assess. Criterion-referenced assessment is implemented from a positivist and behaviourist perspective to describe the correlation between assessment results and a future criterion measurement (Killen, 2003:8). Research, according to Allen (2004:3), shows the lack of a common definition of criterion-based approaches or their implications for practice, inhibiting a high-quality discourse and adds that it is felt that these learning outcomes would therefore require innovative means of assessment.

Stiggins (2005:324) argues that society considers the ranking of students as unreasonable and calls for all students to receive the opportunity to learn according to specific criteria. The aim and structure of assessment are also subject to society’s definition of the role of institutions (Stiggins, 2005). Institutions may no longer rank and classify students according to performance, but should be places where all students acquire competence, where all students achieve prescribed standards and all students are given the opportunity to succeed (Stiggins, 2005:324).

7.12.9 Performance-based assessment discrepancies

Students’ ability to apply attained knowledge in a work environment is not viewed as a priority for the NWU and the university is more intent on laying a theoretical foundation, as the following response reflects:

F1: work-integrated learning is all well and good, but to qualify you have to work three years despite the four-year degree…we don’t focus much on work-integrated learning in the first phase, because we know some company will employ the student for three years and only then it should be considered work-integrated…outside our sphere…we could theoretically give them a student who has never even seen a machine and within three years he’ll be an excellent…so there’s not much pressure on us in terms of work-integrated learning.
Work-integrated learning is considered to be outside the sphere of the faculty and university. The assessment practices at the NWU do not adequately employ authentic and alternative assessment strategies. The majority of participants view set outcomes and content-driven sections as one and the same, with little or no relevance to the demands and experiences of real life – the university is the context in which academic competence is sought. Students are allowed to assimilate content somehow and simply reproduce it in tests/pen-and-paper examinations, without being able to demonstrate the desired skills in practice. In contrast to the content-based approach, one faculty described the industry’s strong influence on the faculty’s assessment practices. The application of knowledge and skills is markedly influenced by the industry:

EMS4: The thing with us, it sounds terrible, but the whole goal with our programme is almost to prepare students for the council exam. It’s all these projects and stuff, we all like it, but in the end your student has to pass the exam. That’s all it is, no one is going to care whether he can demonstrate presentation skills, he has to pass the exam. Another thing is, those long exams…it’s integrated…small tests are difficult…the semester test has fallen away, we found it very difficult, because how do you prepare a student with formative assessment for a big integrated exam?

According to the participant, some of the schools in the faculty are accredited with professional councils that have certain requirements on assessment. These councils, representing the industry, urge that greater weight be given to the semester exam that serves as an admission exam and exact great influence over the ultimate objective of formative and summative assessment. The contradictions between quantitative and qualitative assessment find expression in a participant’s difficulty with assessing outcomes.

EMS3: To decide that, you set your admission exam that counts sixty percent with honours and your final exam that counts seventy of their final mark, their participation mark counts thirty percent.

This faculty is deeply conscious of the value of performance-based assessment, but the assessment of work-integrated learning speaks of a criterion-referenced approach that measures student performance against particular outcomes. The lecturers struggle to understand the challenges inherent in the profession as well as its assessment requirements because of its contextualised nature. Costley (2007:2) explains that the highly contextualised nature of work-integrated learning is an area where assessment and evaluation pose particular challenges to lecturers in the devising of mechanisms that are appropriate across a wide range of circumstances (Costley, 2007:2).
Questions around the reliability of assessment can be ascribed to lecturers’ attempt to assess performance-based assessment tasks, associated with qualitative assessment, by grading student performance in competence terms with quantitative assessment – calculated in numeric form. This would be rather difficult (if not impossible), as indicated by the lecturer, given that quantitative and qualitative assessment are approaches that are opposites on the assessment continuum (Mothata et al., 2005:87). The inability to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative assessment is clear. Performance-based assessment calls for assessment that will produce qualitative, rather than categorical, evidence of student achievement (Mothata et al., 2005:87).

### 7.12.10 Assessment policy discrepancies

Despite the adoption of outcomes-based assessment, which is student-centred and regarded in South Africa as one of the vehicles of educational reform, change in assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) remains stifled by tradition, common practice and the disregard of relevance and student-centredness. The development of an effective assessment policy for improving learning and teaching has been one of the major challenges the NWU faces in post-apartheid South Africa. It has been an area of neglect from the outset, the effect of which has been transmitted over the years across the different policy review and revision processes. A key aspect of the transformation process to address the twin imperative of enquiry and quality of education, particularly for the historically marginalised black population, remains the development of alternative assessment policies.

Notwithstanding the policy intentions, assessment policies – including the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and academic rules – have favoured a measurement approach in the classroom, which has hindered a shift towards student-centred assessment approach (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442). Whilst revisions of assessment policy continue to advocate a formative use of assessment information, the analysis of the assessment practices and perspectives promote the implementation of the summative use of assessment. This is manifested in the form of continuous assessment, with the privileging of formal testing over informal assessment, and thereby promoting a discourse of reporting and recording as opposed to a discourse of using assessment for improving learning and teaching.

There is a discrepancy between the normative nature of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and the key principles of outcomes-based assessment, associated with qualitative and criterion-referenced assessment. Lecturers are more inclined towards norm-referenced
assessment, in which a source of information is set as a benchmark for assessing student achievement and measured against a class average or norm to make a final judgement.

The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012:3) conforms to this traditional normative and quantitative approach in setting a sub-minimum of 40% for admission to the exam, a 50% passing grade and a norm ratio of 50:50 between the participation mark and exam mark. The normative nature of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012:3) is reflected in the moderator’s report (NWU, 2012), with items such as the following:

**Analysis of students’ marks obtained during the summative assessment opportunity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% obtained by student</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>% obtained by students</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 19%</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 - 69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 - 29%</td>
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<td>70 - 79%</td>
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<td>30 - 39%</td>
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<td>80 - 89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 - 49%</td>
<td></td>
<td>90 – 100%</td>
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Formal formative assessment, as stipulated in the NWU teaching and learning policy (2012:3), takes place according to a specific curricular assessment framework. The assessment approach is prescribed and characterised by detailed planning and examination. Using model answers as specifications or criteria to measure student performance tends towards a convergent formative assessment approach, where the lecturer determines if the student knows, understands or is capable of understanding a predetermined concept. Model answers (memorandums) are representative of behaviouristic teaching and learning models that view the curriculum, according to Gibbs (2006:73), as a detailed mass of content conveyed from lecturer to student.

The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) also separates summative and formative assessment, not considered to be complementary components of this process. The NWU teaching and learning policy (2012:3) emphasises summative assessment, by means of
procedures around weighting of participation marks (interpreted as formative assessment) and examination marks (interpreted as summative assessment).

The fundamental problem with using mainly summative assessment is that it casts students as passive subjects who are subjected to the assessment acts of others, i.e. to be measured and classified (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:18). Students conform to the rules and procedures of others, to satisfy the needs of an assessment bureaucracy. They present themselves at set times for examinations, over which they have little or no influence, and they complete assignments which are, by and large, determined with little or no input from those being assessed.

Summative assessment is a major concern at the NWU, in terms of effective student-centred learning, where it is treated as part of programme evaluation (Cretchley & Castle, 2001:493). It is the area of greatest controversy and discrepancy, which weakens student-centred education at the NWU. The act of a lecturer giving a grade is incongruous with the student’s self-directedness, Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) assert, considering external assessment as a sign of disrespect.

The question may arise, on the other hand, whether the power to discipline and control by means of summative assessment could possibly be so lethal that the student may be wounded for life and disarm the student from confronting life; robbing him/her of life with his/her will dissipated or, on the other hand, does summative assessment allow itself to be conquered by the student, who takes up a positive, even belligerent, stance towards it, determined to extract every human possibility it affords (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:37).

Embedded in the policy stipulations of the NWU (such as the teaching and learning policy as well as the academic rules) are the notions of work performance, quality assurance and accountability that have a marked impact on how lecturers regulate assessment in the faculties and classroom.

In contrast to the outcomes-based education approach that centres on student-centred learning, the NWU’s teaching and learning policy and academic rules focus on monitoring and regulating. This results in lecturers administering and employing assessment in a way that complies with institutional expectation. Participants attribute this to the exam-driven policy of the NWU and cited the following adverse effects on assessment:

A1: ...we would like to see more breathing room created in the academic rules, because you could make it practical if you wanted to.

A2: ...the problems we have are more subject and faculty oriented. It is one of my big problems with summative assessment...we expect students to write and only give facts, which is in no way a reflection of the students’ understanding... and we have also put in portfolio
assessment and they threw us out at ICAS saying the academic rules states you write exam. Policies are so strict that there is no room for renewal in academics, except the portfolio, scrap the academic rules.

The difficulties encountered with assessment relate to the NWU assessment policies, according to the participant, viz. the prescriptive and autocratic nature of the institutional quality office. Ball (2003:216) clarifies this compliance with reference to the concept of performativity, which he defines as a technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgement, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity/output or displays of “quality” or “moments” of promotion/inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial.

Despite the policy change to an outcomes-based approach and lecturers’ attempts to incorporate it into their assessment practices, in truth they continue to assess according to the outcomes-based approach of the first decade (as described in Chapter 2).

This creates conflict between the outcomes-based curriculum approach and the actual events of the classroom, i.e. the tension between the traditional outcomes-based approach that is characterised by standards-referenced assessment and the transitional outcomes-based approach that represents student-centred assessment. This separation indicates lecturers’ choice to not follow the outcomes-based approach to the letter. This reluctance to implement the suggested education renewal has, as variously indicated a real impact on the way in which assessment is conducted and especially how assessment information is applied.

Upon closer inspection of the NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) and academic rules currently in force, and in consideration of the views expressed by the eight faculties, it appears that the following three aspects impede the establishment of a student-centred assessment culture.

a) The policy documents are the only official documents lecturers can consult in the face of the lack of curriculum support. In this regard a participant voiced his/her feelings of neglect:

A1: See we get to do with this is how it works. So we don’t sit together and look how it must be done, it’s more that we are told how it must be done.
Assessment policy documents only set forth the prescriptions and requirements the NWU pose to lecturers. Assessment should be an integral part of teaching and learning, a message which is not clearly conveyed in how the different forms of assessment (informal and formative as well as summative assessment) can promote a student-centred approach. Certain changes are peremptorily conveyed to lecturers during brief orientation meetings, without providing a thorough explanation in the policy documents of the reasons for such change and how it will contribute to the intended objective. The lecturer is not simply a machine that performs tasks programmed into him/her. The lecturer has a personal conception of teaching, assessment and learning. Darling-Hammond (1990:240) claims that policy doesn’t function in a vacuum, given that the lecturer’s teaching approach is embedded into a familiar pedagogy. The lecturer must also give expression to such views within the particular environment of the faculty and in relation to students.

b) The NWU’s teaching and learning policy (2012) strongly emphasises quantity – i.e. the number of assignments to be completed within a particular semester or year. Similar emphasis needs to be placed on the quality of assessment tasks. Lecturers also have to be encouraged to expose students to a wide range of alternative techniques, in consideration of their varying levels of intelligence. The validity of the information obtained from these assessments directly relate to the conclusions they may engender. Vandeyar and Killen (2003:121) state that from this perspective, lecturers should not only be trying to maximise the validity of the test they use; they should also be trying to maximise the validity of the inferences they make as a result of using those tests. It is only when the conclusions reached from the assessment information are valid that they can direct the steps to be taken, through feedback and feed-forward, to promote learning.

c) The exam-driven approach overshadows student-centred approaches. Should greater weight be accorded to the exam (e.g. 70%), it would be difficult to convince the lecturer and student of the value of student-centred assessment. In this regard Kanjee and Sayed (2013:442) explains that educational arguments revolve around the role of assessment in determining the curriculum and manifests in practice as the “measurement/standards-driven instruction” or as the “formative assessment movement”. The accountability argument manifests as regular testing of students to determine if expected levels of performance are attained. In this approach it is noted that teaching and learning in the classroom are assumed to improve if results improve, and thus teaching and learning
practices in the classroom are assumed to look after themselves. Kanjee and Sayed, (2013:445), argues that in the context of the assessment policies that also focus on accountability argues summative assessment will always drive out formative assessment if they are set in opposition to one another and adds that “we need to splice them together in an attempt to create the perfect, chimera, the perfect genetically modified assessment system”. This is, however, not presently the case on the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, where the exam is the “prime” opportunity.

EMS2: *It has to be on the right levels, it can’t be a load of old questions. It must be a prime exam opportunity, in its best form that you may discriminate between who knows and who doesn’t know.*

Accountability has a higher priority and not the student’s progress. This approach is representative of most of the participants’ assessment practices, which relate to traditional outcomes-based assessment, with an emphasis on accountability. Assessment information rather than student learning is used to determine accountability, and this is propelled by political, economic and educational forces (Killen, 2003:1).

### 7.12.11 Lecturer preparation and support discrepancies

Missing from the policy development process and the resulting discourse on assessment practices is the task of effective implementation and, in particular, the provision of appropriate guidelines and the training of lecturers. Despite the overwhelming evidence regarding the challenges lecturers face in the implementation of outcomes-based assessment, lecturer preparation and support have been wholly inadequate. Across all faculties at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) lecturers still struggle to meet the demands of outcomes-based assessment and specifically to effectively use assessment for improving student learning in the classroom. The research, for example, revealed that although assessment is supposed to provide information regarding the student’s progress in terms of certain learning outcomes, lecturers do not really teach and assess in exclusive pursuance of the learning outcomes. Participants suggested that both new and senior lecturers need continuous training to keep them abreast of developments in the education field.

It is reasonable to conclude that the teaching and learning approaches of older lecturers, members of the profession over the past 30 years, would be more behaviouristic in nature. These
same lecturers are, however, part of a curriculum setup that requires an outcomes-based mindset and is based on the constructivist philosophy of learning.

Some of the problem areas that lecturers would like to be clarified are as follows:

- Practical examples based on teaching at tertiary level, clearly indicating assessment’s link to the curriculum requirements – to date completely absent.

*H5:* *It’s all good and well, but I still don’t know precisely...and then I get back to my office and I still haven’t applied it, I don’t have time. I have a file full of plans and ideas, but it’s still not part of my module. So I think with assessment you should do a kind of workshop that you can physically incorporate it into your module…*

The lecturer finds it difficult to integrate theory as practices typical to outcomes-based education into his/her planning and teaching, leading to the suggestion of a workshop that demonstrates such integration practically by means of appropriate examples. Participants would like the training to be moulded and contextualised to a subject or module, suggesting a workshop in which lecturers are practically trained in the assessment of their subjects;

- The in-service training for newly appointed lecturers does not enable effective implementation of outcomes-based assessment.

*H5:* *Did it help you at all to assess afterwards? No. I think it improved my awareness and understanding of certain terms and concepts and stuff. Do I assess differently this year having done the course? No.*

Brief orientation sessions, mainly centred on the terminology and principles of outcomes-based assessment, do not train lecturers to make the paradigm shift from theory to practice. The absence of subject-specific examples that can be practically applied makes it rather far-fetched to expect lecturers to unconditionally abandon their existing concepts of teaching, assessment and learning for an as yet untested approach. The focus group interviews revealed the doubts of lecturers that outcomes-based education, which failed in the school sector, is feasible within the described socio-historic and economic environment of the university.

*H3:* *When I did the ICNL course it felt like you learn all these concepts and good ways to teach, but it doesn’t seem possible in such a big class. Maybe with the new curriculum and if we have less students it may work. I don’t know, it doesn’t feel like I can say let’s have a group discussion on this, because I know it won’t work.*
Its application is considered unfeasible for large classes and group work is described as impossible in a class of 150 students.

- No opportunities are created to discuss the different facets of assessment.

_ L1: It will be difficult...we don’t communicate...every subject functions in isolation at this stage. You decide and that’s the way it is. It contributes to the chaos. The student is used to the way things are done in one subject and then in the next one everything is different. They don’t understand why and then it becomes the worst subject in the world to them_

The teaching community seems to be the only body that takes the value and interests of teaching to heart. The above participant feels excluded and denied adequate support.

Lecturers have very distinct ideas about assessment based on personal experiences and particular approaches that have appealed to them over the course of their careers. This has a significant impact on the purpose of assessment as well as the way in which it is integrated into teaching and learning. The teaching and learning practices that lecturers subscribe to are also to a large extent embedded in personal experiences of teaching and learning as students themselves. The nature of such experiences, i.e. whether supportive or inhibitive of personal development, may be a determining factor in how they approach teaching and assessment. Bearing in mind the time in which lecturers underwent their own training, it could be assumed that teaching and learning approaches correspond to the different decades of assessment (Table 5.1).

### 7.13 CONCLUSION

The research reveals that assessment is predominantly conducted in a way similar to the first decade of assessment – i.e. traditional outcomes-based assessment. It is clear from observing the assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) that despite the policy change to outcomes-based education and the concerted effort to incorporate such change into pedagogical practices, assessment continues to occur as it did prior to the curriculum change. Assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) continue to be dominated by standards-based approaches. It is demonstrated in formal formative privileging over informal formative assessment, summative assessment privileging over formative assessment, norm-referenced assessment over criterion-referenced assessment, content-based assessment over performance-based assessment and finally standards-based assessment over student-centred/alternative assessment.
Formative assessment is used for summative purposes and comprises class tests, projects, assignments and student demonstrations. Summative assessment consists of end-of-the-year examinations – also for summative assessment purposes. On the rare occasion, the assessment information gained from informal and formal formative assessment is used to guide the student to the next level of proximal development. Formative assessment is viewed as formal activities, the results of which become part of the student accountability system.

This research also confirms how standards-based assessment will always drive out student-centred assessment, should they function in opposition to one another. The latter is clearly illustrated in the assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) that are still dominated by standards-based approaches, in which norm-referenced and summative assessment have a firm a foothold. It is further demonstrated by the formal formative privileging over informal formative assessment, summative assessment privileging over formative assessment, norm-referenced assessment over criterion-referenced assessment and content-based assessment over performance-based assessment and finally standards-based assessment over student-centred/alternative assessment.

The problem is the rift between the educational arguments for change to assessment, to enhance teaching and learning, and policy demands for institutional improvement and accountability. Lecturers circumvent policy with rather creative semantics in their refusal to present modules according to the outcomes-based approach, which has a significant impact on how assessment is conducted as well as how the information obtained from such assessment is applied. Analysis reveals that the intention of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) of implementing an effective classroom assessment system is in reality a classroom measurement system. The assessment-focused, measurement-driven approach continues to this day and has a negative effect on teaching and learning.

Because of clear differences and discrepancies in their competing discourses, as indicated in this research, it is not surprising that lecturers have little credibility with students and institutional management. Smith et al. (2013:149) assert that those who stand in classrooms every day tend to lack acceptance and authority among students. The lack of common ground between the standards-based and student-centred assessment approaches is puzzling, given that the two groups share the same primary goals of improving the student’s opportunities and outcomes. Yet when examined through the lens of discourse communities and the understanding that personal identity depends in part on talking, acting and thinking differently than members of the other group, it is easily understood.
The key problem in assessment, revealed by the literature review and the analysis, is the dualism between the alternative student-centred assessment approach to enhance learning and the standards-based assessment approach that demands institutional improvement and accountability. The analysis reveals the tension between these paradigms, which has the potential to fracture the overall teaching, learning and assessment process. Assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) have become so marginalised that it has led to a decline in student-centred assessment and this study argues strongly for its reinstatement.
CHAPTER 8:
(RE)CONCEPTUALISING ASSESSMENT

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The need to (re)conceptualise assessment to overcome the dualism between student-centred and standards-based assessment emanates from the discrepancies in the assessment practices and perspectives outlined in the previous chapter.

An endeavour to find an answer to the research question could greatly benefit from the research conducted by Smith et al. (2013:147), using Stokes’ book Pasteur’s Quadrant as a bridge to link rigour with relevance. Their research reveals that when determining effective educational practices, researchers tend to emphasise evidence-based practices supported by research that is rigorous and internally valid, whereas practitioners tend to value practice-based evidence that is relevant and externally valid. Smith et al. (2013:147) explain that these separate mind-sets stem from the classical view of research as being either rigorous or relevant. Smith et al. (2013:147) propose that rigour and relevance are complementary notions that, when merged, advance the production, translation and implementation of instructional practices that are both rigorous (i.e. evidence-based) and relevant (i.e. practice-based). Kanjee and Sayed (2013:442) argue that “we need to splice them together in an attempt to create the perfect chimera, the perfect genetically modified assessment system”.

In line with the above research, this study contends (i) that standards-based assessment validated by rigour may be perceived as less relevant and is often not implemented or sustained widely, because it does not fit nuanced, real-world context such as the university and classrooms; and (i) that student-centred assessment practices that are perceived relevant, but less rigorous are liable to promote ineffective practices. Standards-based assessment (i.e. rigorous, but less relevant) or student-centred assessment (i.e. relevant, but less rigorous) is “perilously insufficient” in isolation, but paradoxically they form “a union of insufficiencies, a marriage of complements” (Shulman, 2004:355) when merged. The weakness of the one is the strength of the other.

This study suggests a (re)conceptualisation of assessment by merging standards-based (rigorous, but less relevant) with student-centred (relevant, but less rigorous) assessment practices. Such a merging entails a reconfiguration of lecturers’ and students’ roles and identities from adversarial to synergistic, guided by a model that respects the differences
between the two approaches and simultaneously reinforces their joint commitment to a shared mission.

This study asserts that standards-based (rigorous) and student-centred (relevant) assessment approaches are not opposites on the continuum but complementary notions and, when merged, would further the implementation of student-centred assessment practices that are both rigorous and relevant.

There is friction between the goals of social relevance and what is referred to as academic standards. Le Grange and Beets (2005b:117) pertinently remind us that “relevance without rigor is no better than rigor without relevance”. The dominant, “value-neutral” content or standards-based assessment, with its emphasis on whether a test is representative of a particular knowledge domain, does not generally provide room for addressing issues of social relevance. Catalytic assessment, however, holds the promise of addressing both the concerns of social relevance and academic standards.

As with Donald Stokes’ Pasteur’s Quadrant: Basic Science and Technological Innovation (1997), this study also maintains that the widely held supposition that standards-based and student-centred assessment are on opposite ends of a linear continuum, forever fated to be in tension with one another, is erroneous. It advances the notion of an “inherent tension between standards and student-centredness as goals of teaching, learning and assessment and by extension, an inherent separation between the categories of assessment that are derived from these goals” (Smith et al., 2013:150).

Student-centred assessment approaches embrace the importance of specific, contextual variables and focus on the impact of assessment in the education setting rather than general efficacy and are as such consistent with a student-centred discourse. Yet to fully overcome the dualism, all role players need to interact within a single community that fosters a merger of roles and perspectives.

Within the present changed socio-political climate, this study has the opportunity and the responsibility to (re)conceptualise assessment constructively to assess the more multiracial NWU student corps, through its academic offering and socially relevant research, to contribute to a more socio-environmentally just and sustainable world.

Catalytic assessment is necessary for social practices such as assessment to be transformative, in the sense that they heighten students’ self-understanding – how dominant social, economic and political discourses influence the construction of students’ identities (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:117).
### 8.2 THE CATALYTIC PARADIGM

The implementation of a more student-centred approach is hampered by a lack of capacity to achieve the social and personal transformation envisaged for South Africa (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442). The key aspect of the transformation process remains the development and effective implementation of alternative student-centred assessment policies. Kanjee and Sayed (2013:442) note that notwithstanding the policy intentions, assessment since 1994 has favoured a measurement-focused approach in the classroom that hindered a shift towards assessment for learning and therefore student-centred approach. This has been an area of neglect from the outset, the effect of which has been transmitted over the years across the different review and revision processes. For example, while the NWU teaching and learning policy (2012) continues to advocate for a formative use of assessment information, they promote the implementation of the summative use of assessment, regulating the former to the category of “symbolic policy” (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442).

The analysis of the assessment practices and perspectives reveals that assessment practices at the NWU remain predominantly lecturer-driven and all objectives centre on awarding a given value to denote a student’s performance. Despite this imperative of transitional outcomes-based assessment, only one participant considered the cross-curricular and critical outcomes important and the traditional pen-and-paper exam as not providing for assessing these outcomes. These twelve critical outcomes, as described in Chapter 3, relate to the competencies the student has to demonstrate according to the different levels of the NQF (see Chapter 3) of the education system.

**A1: You also want assess to achieve your CCFO’s and then you also want there to be subject-specific knowledge. I don’t think barrelling in and writing an exam lends itself thereto to test what you do when you have freedom of thought and movement. You can test synthesis and application, etc. in exams, but to see what he does when he is out there in the sun.**

Participants generally separate theory (content) from practice (skills), a fragmented view on learning that inevitably leads to the pen-and-paper testing of content. Virtually none of the interviews saw the mention of assessment criteria or the grading of student performance in terms of competence. These lecturers are still holding on to the traditional outcomes-based assessment, which is in sharp contrast with society’s expectations of universities. Stiggins (2005:324) reminds us that with society’s expectations of universities (2005:324) have changed, considering the ranking of students as unreasonable and calling for all students to receive the opportunity to learn according to specific criteria. As a result, according to Stiggins
(2005:324), the aim and structure of assessment have changed through society’s redefining of the role of institutions. The conceptualisation that a singular focus on standards-based assessment fails to acknowledge the magnitude of the challenges the higher educational system faces, preventing engagement with multiple processes and outcomes that results from any new assessment approach. Institutions may no longer rank and classify students according to performance, but should be institutions where all students acquire competence, where all students achieve prescribed standards and all students are given the opportunity to succeed. The catalytic paradigm invites a review of the interpretation of “what has been learned” or the meaning of “know”, when an outcome is defined as students’ knowledge and skills. In this sense catalytic assessment concerns the extent to which assessment practices are catalysts for change, emancipation and empowerment.

In other words, the inferences drawn here relate to whether assessment practices have developed a heightened consciousness of how particular assessment practices are oppressive and others liberating. For example, students may (not) understand how assessment tasks or tests are gender, race or culturally biased. Clearly, the view of knowledge referred to here is distinctly different from that of what constitutes propositional knowledge (knowledge expressed as statements, facts or theories) (Le Grange & Beets, 2005:117b).

Propositional knowledge in this study refers to content-driven, norm-referenced and standards-based assessment, which is experienced as oppressive and biased. The aim of this study is to develop among all role players at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) a heightened consciousness of the value of student-centred learning and to (re)conceptualise assessment to liberate and emancipate it from its current oppressive and bureaucratic standards-based nature.

Catalytic assessment concerns the degree to which the assessment process has transformative or empowering outcomes. Lather (1986:67) explains that catalytic assessment is premised on cognition of the reality-altering impact of the assessment process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so that students gain self-understanding and ideally self-determination through participation in assessment.

When inferences are then made about students’ abilities, they should be validated in terms of all three knowledge-constitutive interests that Le Grange and Beets (2005b:117) identify: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. Inferences should not only be based on students’ abilities/achievements of “value-neutral” content knowledge, but also on the extent to which assessment practices have empowered learners to be more democratic and, within the South
African context, perhaps also incorporating the extent to which they foster the aspirations captured in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution.

The community projects in some of the faculties at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) are doing just that. These community projects have sociological and economical connotations, where students serve in community projects in less-affluent areas to address a problem. These projects are not aimed at student education or academic assessment, but to serve the community to solve problems. This problem-based method is saying “we have a situation. What can be done to solve it/change it/improve the results?” Figure 8.1 illustrates the praxis-type curriculum approach and shows why a “problem-centred” method would be a suitable way of delivering the learning.

Assessment involves all key role players in the education process, making it integral to both teaching and learning. How is the assessment conducted? What principles underpin these practices? How are insights gained from assessment used? What access and authority do each of the role players have in the assessment practices? These issues will determine the extent to which assessment addresses their expectations and needs. Assessment is thus not only a significant catalyst for effective learning and appropriate teaching, but also constitutes the rite of passage for students to be afforded “fair treatment and an impartial share of benefits” (Gardner, Holmes & Leitch, 2008:4) that the education system can offer.

This study suggests that the relation between the standards-based and student-centred approaches is best depicted from an integrative and interrelated, rather than a linear, point of view. Bending the linear, one-dimensional spectrum of assessment (running from standards-based to the student-centred approach along a single line) at its midpoint converts standards-based and student-centred assessment into a multi-dimensional conceptual plan.

The interrelatedness of a student-centred approach, together with all key role players and responsibilities, can be depicted graphically as follows:
Figure 8.1: The catalytic paradigm

Figure 8.1 illustrates the iterative and flexible nature of the catalytic paradigm within a social-cultural perspective, where the arrows indicate how assessment can enhance student-centred learning. The lecturer and student work together to identify the educational problem and work towards developing both a theoretical and practical understanding of the problem, through literature reviews and within the context and experiences and expertise of the student. Then potential solutions to the problem and the theoretical basis for those solutions are systematically identified and prototype solutions are developed. The assessment involves the assessment of the prototype solution or its design (e.g. was there an impact?), reflecting on the assessment results (e.g. why or why not?) and using the outcomes of the process to refine the problem solution. It is only through establishing a counter-discourse to the prevailing one that some of the fundamental problems created by current assessment assumptions and practice can be addressed (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:1).
This study aims to achieve precisely that by:

- (re)culturing – moving towards a socio-cultural perspective;
- (re)curriculating – from a fragmented towards an integrated assessment approach;
- (re)training – promoting a scholarship of assessment; and
- (re)structuring – new systems require new structures.

Figure 8.2: Graphic representation of (re)conceptualisation of assessment necessitates (re)curriculating, (re)culturing, (re)structuring, and (re)training lecturers

The endeavour to (re)conceptualise student-centred assessment in its totality, within the complex interrelated teaching- and learning-related activities, necessitates a (re)curriculating, (re)culturing of assessment as well as (re)structuring the system and (re)training lecturers.

The former predominantly autocratic assessment approach has been systematically replaced ([re]cultured) with a new democratic and participatory one. It is an approach that centres on
the student that led to an integrated, interrelated assessment system. Socio-cultural perspectives on assessment make it evident that it is the sum total of all the components of the classroom that determines learning and not just the intellectual development of the student.

8.2.1 (Re)culturing

8.2.1.1 The socio-cultural perspective on assessment

Assessment is a social, political and economic problem encountered in everyday life and relates to certain action(s) within the higher education curriculum and is socio-culturally situated and influenced. It was identified in this study as a real-world problem. The socio-cultural perspective focuses on developing solutions to specific, complex and important educational problems in real-world contexts. Similar to the characteristics of constructivism and outcomes-based education, the socio-cultural perspective reflects a strongly student-centred approach. Both Beets (2007:94) and Gibbs (2006:73) relate how the student-centred approach places a much greater emphasis on the student’s role in the learning process, revolving around the student’s needs. It is also an approach that relates to catalytic assessment – the degree to which assessment has transformative or empowering outcomes. Le Grange and Beets (2005b:117) consider it necessary for social practices such as assessment to be transformative, in the sense that they heighten students’ self-understanding – how dominant social, economic and political discourses influence the construction of students’ identities.

The socio-cultural perspective is based on the premise of focusing on the general effect of assessment. This impact refers to the effect of assessment in a real-world context, with the recognition that instruction and learning are influenced by an array of complex and unpredictable factors that are unique to each setting. Within the context of this study, a key question is – What is the current culture of assessment at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) and what is the effect on teaching and learning?

The analysis revealed that lecturers’ assessment practices are dominated by a measurement-focused approach in the classroom. The primary focus of assessment continues to be directed toward reflecting the student’s progress in term of marks. The perception the lecturers are articulating is the one that is preventing them from embracing the possibilities of student-centred learning. Lecturers simply don’t realise how alternative assessment could offer a more nuanced impression of the student’s progress, according to which valid conclusions can be reached that will enable them to adapt their teaching, provide feedback to students and
suggest measures to narrow the gap between their current performance and their expected or potential performance.

The goal of the socio-cultural perspective, namely of having all students succeed in achieving a set of meaningful learning outcomes, implies that lecturers must be innovative and creative in their assistance to students (Killen, 2000:10). This philosophy situates learning within the interaction between the individual and social environment (James, 2006:56-57), which Daniels (2001:59) describes as a shift to a broader cultural and historical perspective on assessment. It is not only students' participation in assessment processes that are crucial, but also their contribution to such processes – i.e. their prior knowledge informed by their socio-cultural backgrounds.

The purposes of assessment extend beyond those concerned with grading, selection, accountability or learning, Filer (2000:43) states, also playing a role in legitimising the reproduction and perpetuation of social and educational disparities. Economic obstacles are not sufficient to explain disparities in the performance of students from different backgrounds; the cultural habits and dispositions that students bring with them to the university are fundamentally important to success.

Socio-cultural perspectives on learning advocate that knowledge is socially constructed and contextually dependent on human mental processes within their historical, cultural and institutional contexts (Cowie, 2005b:202). The socio-cultural perspective concentrates on the construction of meaningful learning experiences, whereby "each learning outcome must be placed within an appropriate context (so that it will be relevant for the students)". Student-centred assessment invokes notions such as self-direction, which may be blind to the centrality of learning in relation to others' role in learning. Lived experiences are based on communalism and student-centred assessment should crucially be informed by the socio-cultural background of the student.

8.2.1.2 Context

The socio-cultural perspectives consider a range of contextual variables that impact on lecturers' assessment practices and perspectives.

When (re)conceptualising assessment, it is necessary to consider the context of assessment in higher education (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:9). In this study assessment is judged not only on narrow technical grounds, but also considers how the past as well as the current context influence assessment. This ranges from philosophical questions about the fundamentally
problematic nature of assessment as a human activity, through considerations of the socio-political context, to issues of educational practice. The intention of this study is not only to reposition debates about assessment practices and policy, but to also illustrate some practical directions for development. It addresses important questions about the relationship between assessment and pedagogy, and the appropriate kinds of contribution that assessment can make.

The standards-based approach typically endeavours to determine the general efficacy of an assessment practice across settings, by removing or diminishing the effects of the contextually specific variables that lecturers consider critical to understanding the real impact of assessment practices for their students. Because many contextual variables in the assessment process are unknown a priori, a student-centred approach involves the exploration of these contextual variables as part of the assessment process.

Student-centred assessment, due to its cyclical nature, allows for ongoing revisions to how assessment is executed as well as to assessment design and other factors related to the impact of the intervention within the given context. For instance, in addition to determining the reliability of an assessment practice in a specific assessment context, key questions addressed in the assessment might include: Under what particular circumstances was the intervention performed? Did the circumstances influence the manner in which the assessment was conducted? Were changes to the assessment design and curriculum design required as a result? Knowing the situation-specific factors that influence the impact of the assessment – the how, when and why – enhances the relevance of the assessment to the lecturers and the students.

Although assessment practices and perspectives are influenced at the micro level by a certain socio-cultural milieu and on meso level by certain community/public as well as governmental expectations, national and global agendas also prioritise certain notions at macro level. Within the context of this study, a key question is: what situation-specific factors influence the impact of the assessment at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus)?

In the assessment context of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) the analysis revealed that current assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) are influenced by internal and external pressure. Internal pressures include changing the curriculum to outcomes-based education, new concepts and contemporary modes on how students learn. Lecturers also have to deal with external pressures such as the movement from an elite system to a mass system; flow-through rate; growing need to support students’ diverse
needs; critics’ and public’ concern about “standards”; external quality-assurance demands and control; and management systems and changing employment conditions. The analysis revealed that the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) is under immense political, cultural and social pressure.

The pressure is described to be so intense that the NWU won’t survive, which spirals down to lecturers having to “see how they can put through students within the current system”. This political pressure that lecturers encounter within the current political and socio-economic dispensation can be ascribed to the mass intake of students as well as the lower calibre of student entering the university. Across all faculties lecturers struggle to meet the demands of outcomes-based assessment and, in particular, to the student-centred assessment approach.

Considering the diversity of students, lecturers have to demonstrate the willingness to plan courses that ensure quality is based on both narrow academic as well as on social and political imperatives. The growing African student population requires that teaching, learning and assessment practices are in line with the value systems and worldview(s) of such students (Parker, 2002:13).

Teaching from the socio-cultural perspective is no longer defined as the transmission of knowledge; instead, it is defined as the process of aiding students to understand information and to transform it into their own personal knowledge.

Assessment should take into account the context in which the outcomes should be demonstrated and the standard of achievement expected from students. The socio-cultural perspective can enable diversity through a variety of teaching, learning and assessment strategies. It is the lecturer’s responsibility to construct the most suitable context, appropriate for the learning outcomes and also for the student’s life.

The interest of the student is foremost and the lecturer must offer the student expanded opportunities to demonstrate attained knowledge and skills. Lecturers must create a positive learning environment that assures students of assistance, which greatly depends on a positive and supportive relationship between the lecturer and the student (Killen, 2000:11).

8.2.1.3 The student as authentic self-directed human being

The student is viewed, from a socio-cultural perspective, as an authentic being (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:37). Their authenticity in an educational setting such as the NWU will not simply express itself; it has to be nurtured, necessitating encouragement in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy as well as assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:37). A curriculum
for enabling authenticity will provide the student with the freedom to roam, while pedagogy for authenticity will provide the room for the voyaging of being as well as its affirmation. The transformational outcomes-based curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from centralised prescriptions of a curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt the guidance provided by a curriculum.

The analysis revealed that assessment practices are at present dominated by lecturer-driven and syllabus-driven approaches. Lecturers focus on their principal allegiance to their specialist discipline rather than on any broader conception of the learning process or personal development of students (Bellis, 2001:187). Boud (1995:39) writes that this lecturer-driven assessment often encourages students to be dependent on the lecturers or examiners to make decisions about what they know and they do not effectively learn to do this for themselves. It is thus not surprising that lecturers complain that students cannot work independently.

In contrast, the analysis of current assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) revealed that assessment practices are mainly conceptualised and dominated by lecturer-driven and content-based approaches. Lecturers are employing formative and summative assessment to force students to attend classes and complete assignments.

Just like Yorke (2003:489), I also find that formative and summative assessment can discourage students from developing their full potential. It seems that the schooling system and lecturer-driven approach go far toward developing “learned helplessness” and “learned dependence”. Learned dependence, highlighted by most lecturers, has the student passively following the lecturer’s instructions, without seeking to go beyond the boundaries seemingly set for the task (Yorke, 2003:489).

This perspective (that the student is not capable) promotes student dependence on lecturers and stymies their judgement abilities, restricting students’ ability to assess their learning needs in future (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:119). In contrast Cretchley and Castle (2001:491) show that under the banner of “andragogy” education (which is discussed under the section 8.2.2 on (re)curriculum) focuses largely on self-directed learning, the needs arising from the social roles of adults and human resources development. It relates to the relationship between the student and the learning milieu.

The curriculum and the pedagogical relationship are thus key components of a readiness, even a will, on the part of the student in favour of undertaking assessment. Boud and Falchikov (2007:38) add that it also requires the student to propel him-/herself forward and reach the
perception that assessment is in his/her educational interest. Students may be encouraged to believe in their own abilities and discover their personal interests and even delight, but in the end they have to play their part in the formation of a positive spirit towards their assessment. Since students are capable of taking charge of their own learning and can draw on the resources of their prior experience and their social environment, Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) assert, lecturers are unnecessary. The student as an authentic being will embrace assessment to test him-/herself, to push him-/herself to the extreme, to live on the edge. A student can propel him-/herself into a state of authenticity, in which student-centred assessment can play a part. Typically, students will only take up an active and engaged stance towards assessment if they are encouraged to do. Long before assessment is encountered, the student embarks on a voyage of student-centred assessment and reaches a point – even if a point still on the way – in which the potential of assessment is understood and relished for the powers of self-understanding that may ensue (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:38).

Students propel themselves forward, even without knowing the outcome. Through their curricular and pedagogical experiences, they advance to a position in which they can give account of themselves without fear. Assessment as learning may have educational properties after all. Such pedagogy works in both the formation of a pedagogical relationship as well as through the formation of a human relationship.

### 8.2.1.4 Interaction

Interaction within the context of assessment is embodied in informal and formal formative assessment. Informal formative assessment is not at present a priority for the NWU; it would seem, since it is not included at all in the university’s teaching and learning policy (2012). The omission of this kind of assessment in the classroom limits the instantaneous feedback during learning activities which are essential supportiveness towards student learning (Yorke, 2003:479; Brown & Glasner, 1999:6).

The rigidity of lecturers’ assessment approach inhibits informal interaction between the lecturer and the student that could address the learning needs of the student more effectively. As explained in the previous chapter, a guideline document by the Department of Education and Skills in England (DES, 2004:1) highlights the importance that time is found within classroom routines for discussion about how well work meet a particular set of criteria or standards, not only between lecturers and students but also between the students themselves. Time in the classroom for informal interaction is an aspect markedly absent during all the focus group interviews.
The socio-cultural perspective requires student involvement through divergent and convergent assessment approaches to create a model of classroom assessment as an intersubjective social process situated in and accomplished by interaction between students and lecturers (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:616). The development of pedagogical self-awareness is the starting point for the development of effective student-centred assessment and entails recognising and being careful of taken-for-granted lecturer-student interaction.

In contrast with this “taken-for-granted” lecturer-student interaction, the socio-cultural perspective requires a greater effort to understand and accommodate the student’s circumstances and background, a perspective called “predictive assessment” (past experience indicated that student performance in this assessment activity was indicative of the results they might obtain in later assessment) (Killen, 2003:9) as well as more intensive interaction between lecturer and student.

Student-centred assessment is a much deeper involvement of a lecturer in the development and progress of the student which includes guidance, recognition of the student’s context (physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and economic), reflection on their own practice and continued support while walking beside the student on the road to achieving the expected outcomes.

Tracing “assessment” back to the original Latin verb stem assidere shows that this term originally meant: a) to sit beside/close by, b) helping along and c) to watch closely. In sharp contrast, the Latin roots of the term “evaluation” originally referred to: a) ascribing value to, b) stepping back and c) passing judgement (Brainard, 1997:164). This reflects the significant difference between sitting beside students, watching them closely by helping them along that characterised the second decade, and the stepping back from, ascribing value to and passing judgement on their capacity to demonstrate their mastery of learning outcomes in a university subject, characteristic of the first decade.

The lecturer must act as “tour guide” for students, symbolically travelling next to their students and should not be ahead of them, making students follow like slaves, and also not behind them, forcing their charges to pave their own way and face the onslaughts/setbacks of the profession or perhaps getting the impression that someone from behind is “forcing” or “steering” them in a certain direction. Lecturers must stand beside their students, so that they may enter the profession hopefully and confidently in the protective, nurturing and secure presence of their lecturers – as equals. In contrast, the present standards-based assessment approach creates
a cold and clinical relationship between the lecturer and student, reflected in a lecturer who likes to “shock” the students at the beginning of the year.

The student-centred lecturer journeys with the student and acts as a guide, challenging the student to solve the troubles of the travel and offering support when the student stumbles. This depicts the function of a lecturer as more promising and professionally rigorous than occasional companionship, casual tips or help in a crisis.

Lecturers, by nature of their profession, are in a special relationship with their students and the community they serve. It is more than just a connection to the student, because of the job they do; it has to do with the commitment of lecturers “to sit beside” the student and in that way also “sit beside” the community/society. Sincerity and commitment express the lecturer’s humanity in relationship to those whom he/she serves.

It is obvious that student-centred assessment should take place in a learning community system where all role players are bound together by a common purpose, internal motivation and participatory relationships. Lecturers and students collectively participate in a shared community that leads to the generation of shared discourse meanings; these, in turn, help to define and strengthen the community. Participation is not confined to “taking part in”, but also encompasses relationships among lecturers and students reflected in a mutual recognition and appreciation.

Contrary to assessment practices where lecturers use marks to force students to participate, one lecturer argued that marks should not be the motivation for learning. Cretchley and Castle (2001:493) advocate that a dynamic cooperation agreement should be made with the student and suggest the use of learning contracts, which allow individuals or groups to tailor their learning needs. This learning contract assumes that a wide range of learning experiences and assessment options is available for the students to choose from and also the necessary guidance – a situation, revealed by the research findings, virtually unknown at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

Given this deeply cooperative nature of such co-learning agreements, lecturers and students can break down the separation between standards-based and student-centred approaches that may result in investigations that are valuable to both the lecturer (internally valid and rigorous) and the student (externally valid and relevant). Through participating in diverse co-learning agreements, lecturers and students learn about each other’s values, goals and practices as well as how synergising their roles holds the potential to be mutually beneficial.
The student-lecturer relationship must be characterised by at least two fundamental elements for the student to attain his/her future professional goals, viz.: a) a profound, dedicated commitment to relationship by both parties and b) particularly refined, practised skill and competency levels (Potgieter, 2006:55).

The quality of student-centred assessment relies on the level of involvement, confidence and enthusiasm of the lecturers in taking the initiative and responsibility to collaborate with each other and the students – i.e. sharing of knowledge, skills and resources as well as discussion of activities, ideas and successes – and with other universities.

In light of this, the fundamental nature of these interactions could be described as follows:

- **Affective** - based on the friendship, relationship forming, protection, mediation, counselling and socialisation occurring and provided

- **Conative** - based on the voluntary, mutually benevolent and reciprocal, spontaneous nature of the lecturer-student relationship

- **Cognitive** - based on the professional assistance, communication and the nature of the contents the lecturer offers to the student towards improving practice (Potgieter, 2006:75).

Although the immediate purpose of any student-centred learning system is basically facilitation, it does require active and continuous guidance by experienced and knowledgeable lecturers. It is the only way they will make sense of this multifaceted process of education transformation and understand their own role in this integrated process.

The next diagram portrays the interrelatedness of stakeholders, functions, responsibilities, etc. as well as the increasing influence of the university:
Open communication between lecturers and students is imperative for fostering broadened perspectives. Discussion between all stakeholders promotes the development of co-learning agreements and the development of a learning community. Discussions about firmly and personally held convictions (e.g. religion, politics and professional discourse) often inflame existing differences rather than promote mutual understanding. This study thus contends that to realise relevance and rigour the lecturer and the student must engage in something deeper than discussion. Dialogue involves lecturers and students interacting to create new, shared meanings that yield collective understandings that will enable the merger of perspectives.

### 8.2.2 (Re)curricularing

Priestley and Humes (2010:345) sums up the aim of the curriculum neatly by calling it the devise to unlock potential, to enable human beings to “come into presence”. The analysis of lecturer’s assessment practices revealed a dominant focus on a content-based or syllabus-driven curriculum approach, with limited attempts to apply assessment for addressing students learning needs. Work-integrated learning and performance-based assessment (authentic assessment) is not a priority and deemed to be outside the sphere of the faculty and university.
Scotland’s new Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), aimed at transforming teaching and learning at the university, demonstrates the importance of re-engaging lecturers with processes of curriculum development, to place learning at the heart of the curriculum and to change engrained practices of assessment (Priestley & Humes, 2010:345).

The lecturers struggle to understand the challenges inherent to the profession or the assessment requirements that its contextualised nature demands. Taking a narrow “philosophical stance” and ignoring the important sociological dimensions of the curriculum process effectively depoliticises education and treats the curriculum as if it were the product not of a social, economic, political and ideological history, but based on a set of universally valid realms of meaning or selection of subjects (Graham-Jolly, 2009:249). Costley (2007:2) adds and explains that the highly contextualised nature of work-integrated learning is an area where assessment also poses particular challenges to lecturers in the devising of mechanisms that are appropriate across a wide range of circumstances. In contrast with work-integrated learning, were all role-players are involved, Barnett and Hallam (1999:34) questions the situation where most academics have a monopoly on definitions of knowing and learning, erecting systems of knowledge for their own sake, which in reality serve their purposes and reject other legitimate interests. Lather (1986:67) in contrast, explains that inferences are not only based on students’ abilities/achievements of “value-neutral” content knowledge, but also on the extent to which assessment practices have empowered students to be more self-directed. Long-term outcomes are best achieved by having students develop knowledge, skills and dispositions through a system that puts learning in context and integrates different fields of study so that all learning is pertinent and relevant. This approach relates to the catalytic assessment approach as well as the curriculum as praxis, which has transformative or empowering outcomes. Lecturers acknowledged during the focus group interviews that the present paradigm is not working and that a “new” paradigm is required.

The greatest undertaking that still impacts on the NWU after 20 years is the implementation of a new curriculum, one that addresses the ideals of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa and the development of lecturer capacity and skills to provide high-quality education to all students so that they may become active participants in the new society. The key transformation challenge is not limited to the implementation of a new curriculum, but also encompasses the vestiges of the apartheid-based system (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:442). Fundamental to this transformation are the introduction and effective implementation of student-centred assessment policies. Given the discriminatory use of assessment during the
apartheid era, this is critical in order to ensure that the specific learning needs of all students are met in the post-apartheid higher education system.

A central higher educational question, in an extremely unequal society such as South Africa, is whether NWU can make a significant contribution towards inculcating social justice through core functions such as assessment.

In reference to Furman’s (2003:5) statements on social justice and its implications, the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) has come under particular scrutiny the last two years over the interaction between students and lecturers. The research analysis revealed that the same scrutiny is increasingly being levelled at the prevailing assessment practices. It is a discourse that may be ascribed to a number of factors such as “the growing diversity of the student population, the increasing documentation of the achievement and economic gaps between mainstream and minorities students and the proliferation of analyses of social justice as played out in the university, including the injustice that arises from current policy environment of standards-based assessment and accountability (Furman, 2003:5).

Social justice is at its most basic level associated with practices that ensure “fairness”, according to Gardner et al. (2008:4), in pursuit of a type of utopian society and add that in such a society “everyone has equal opportunities and access to resources in order to thrive and succeed, despite any disadvantages that may arise as a result of their gender, race, socio-economic status and language”. It can be argued that in the South African context such a utopian society resembles the society described in the Constitution. Such a society is, however, only possible with the agents to make it a reality. The question, however, remains whether the conditions in which the NWU policies are implemented are indeed conducive to a contribution to the creation of a more equitable, respectful and just society for all. It is at this point important to note that this research revealed that faculties are struggling to partner with the respective industries.

This study sees the need for an alternative model to learning and proposes an integrated assessment model. The integrated nature of a new curriculum offered by the NWU should consequently comprise three main components, viz.: a) an academic, b) a practical career-orientated and c) a professional training component (Potgieter, 2006:74). These three main components of the curriculum refine and raise the level of the three fundamental competencies, viz.: a) “know”, b) “can” and c) “be”. The functions of the student to know, can and be may never be separated. The student’s know competency can only gain meaning by means of his/her can competency, while both his/her know and can competencies contribute to the
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Clearly, the teaching model at the university expands the *know* competency of students, while skills development offered and partner industries expand their *can* competency and professional development expands students’ competency to *be*.

The systematic interaction between the three main components of the university’s teaching model and the three basic competencies can be graphically demonstrated as follows:

![Diagram showing the interaction between three competencies: "can" (ability), "know" (knowledge), "be" (affective), Professional development, Academic development, and Practical career-orientated development.]

**Figure 8.4: The basic components of the integrated assessment model**

According to Figure 8.4, the *be* competency of the student should be developed by means of university-based professional development. The *can* competency should be developed through the student’s university-based practical career-orientated development, and his/her *know* competencies mainly through university-based academic development. Full interaction and underlying connections among the components of the model are possible, making its functional integration systematically viable and practically feasible.

The professional conduct of the lecturer entails establishing relationships, which will only be meaningful if the lecturer possesses knowledge on the specialist subject area; there is appropriate policy and legislation; suitable teaching-learning approaches and curriculum design choices are available.
The student can only be an adequate professional by mastering certain subject-directed skills, at the lowest competency level, during his/her studies. The student, therefore, needs a) a grip on knowledge, b) a grip on skills and c) a grip on religious beliefs and views of life to be able to practise his/her prospective career properly.

For the purpose of this study and answering the research questions, assessment is only student-centred if it is fully integrated into teaching and learning, guiding decisions about the activities that will support and enhance learning. Integrated assessment approaches should add value for student learning (SAQA, 2001:21). It is important to note that an integrated approach to assessment also requires an integrated approach to teaching.

One of the major challenges lecturers at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) face in working towards quality teaching and learning is aligning teaching strategies and assessment with the outcomes stated in the curriculum. Alignment involves identifying the cognitive processes, content and performances that are embedded in (or implied by) particular learning outcomes, teaching in ways that ensure students achieve the learning outcomes and then designing assessment tasks that require students to use those cognitive processes to deal with the relevant content as they attempt the relevant performance. In an attempt to explain how alignment can be planned and conducted, I offer an example in Figure 8.5 to illustrate that the goal of student-centred learning is to support students to achieve the objective(s) and to move them beyond that if possible. This requires a clear understanding of what students are expected to know and do in different learning contexts, stipulated in the curriculum - here I refer to specific dimensions of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and the ability to apply it in known and unknown contexts. This will aid lecturers to not only scaffold the learning of students who show gaps in relation to what is expected or enrich those that have met expected performance levels, but will also provide students with the intended learning trajectory they are on and work towards.

Integral to the process of moving from objective(s) to learning, are outcome-informed teaching and assessment that will guide teaching interventions to eventually help every student to attain their full potential. The entire structuring, the designing of what goes into the curriculum, is based on the knowledge, skills, outcomes and the competencies that need to be acquired and applied by the student. This means a process of analysis to determine what the outcomes are and how the achieving of them will be assessed before deciding on what the content will be and what methods and media will be used to enable the student to experience that learning. These outcomes/applied competencies pitched at particular levels of learning. The process of learning and the decisions about activities and content and methods are guided by the
outcomes and assessment criteria that describe the dimensions of knowledge; performance; the skill; the range; the standard of performance and understanding; and the context. The learning process is observed and assessed (assessment criteria) in using a variety of forms, methods, techniques and instruments of assessment. The processes of teaching, learning and assessing are delivered in learning programmes and modules to enable the students to achieve the learning outcomes/applied competencies. Assessing students for the sake of assessment alone will not produce quality student-centred teaching that will support students in achieving the intended learning outcomes. The subject outcomes, teaching and assessment should be aligned to produce the best learning possible for each student. The diagram in Figure 8.5 illustrates the interrelatedness between teaching, learning and assessment and how teaching, learning and assessment can be aligned.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 8.5: Interrelatedness and alignment between teaching, learning and assessment**

The challenge is therefore to find valid and reliable ways of determining if students are indeed learning systematically as planned. This is where assessment is integrally part of the teaching and learning process. Informal formative, formal formative and summative assessment should be used after key teaching moments to determine how students are progressing and if the teaching strategy is successful, before engaging with the next teaching/learning moment. This requires that each assessment act should reflect an alignment with the specific subject-
learning outcomes. While the evidence produced through assessment shows how well each student attained the intended outcomes, it should also provide an indication of the appropriateness of the teaching strategies used.

The “technical” alignment of teaching, learning and assessment alone is but only one aspect of working towards quality teaching and learning, as these processes and practices take place in a broader higher education context which may be subject to positive or negative influences. The analyses of the lecturers informal and formal formative assessment practices reveals that informal formative assessment is applied to compel students to participate in learning events; to teach them greater responsibility and discipline; and to ensure class attendance. It serves to promote accountability rather than teaching and learning. Thus the key to alignment is not so much the sequence as linkage – that there are explicit and coherent links between pedagogies, assessment practices and student performance, all of which should be intimately linked to the specific purposes and outcomes (Hayes et al., 2006:2). This integrated assessment approach is characterised by a constructivist view of learning, with an intention to teach in the zone of proximal development (Torrance & Pryor, 2001:628). This view of assessment is more closely related to contemporary theories of learning and accepts the complexity of student-centred assessment.

The lecturer should make a deliberate decision that all types of competencies are valued and, depending on the context, equal value will be given to all the dimensions of knowledge – since all dimensions of knowledge correspond with the view of the curriculum as praxis. This interrelated, complex and intricate nature of the lecturer’s responsibilities, characteristics and functions should also correspond with the integrated nature of the university’s curriculum.

8.2.3 (Re)structuring

8.2.3.1 Curriculum as praxis

It might be argued that there is no need for research dealing with integrated assessment approaches, but international practices evident in the literature review in Chapter 1 as well as the research in this study revealed that the assessment of integrated learning is still very limited. The mind-shift of regarding assessment as part of the learning process, rather than assessment as an end in itself has not yet occurred at the NWU. Although the curriculum approaches of Faculty 2, 7 and 8 have sociological and economic connotations, analysis reveals that the view of the curriculum at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) is mainly focused
on content and product. It was also found that these models of the curriculum (viz. content, product and process models) co-exist in considerable tension.

Liberating the student-centred potential of assessment can be realised if the curriculum is conceptualised as praxis rather than a separate process or even as product. This study proposes that if assessment is conceptualised as praxis from a socio-cultural perspective, it would be possible to liberate assessment from its standards-based application.

Transformational outcomes-based assessment emphasises the symbiosis of processes of products, which implies that establishing the student’s achievement of the desired end results or products of learning (the outcomes) is as important as the processes followed or required to obtain the end result (Meyer et al., 2010:1). It is more productive to think of assessment as a unitary concept and praxis.

Figure 8.6 illustrates that one of the ways in which the transformational outcomes-based education approach proves to be effective is to give students an assessment activity to perform or a project to complete through a series of activities – often in groups, but not always – or posing a problem to be solved. The assessment task or project or activity could in fact do just that. The case study method is another example of a problem-centred method that entails setting up a scenario for students to solve, change, improve the results of or resolve the complaint (Bellis, 2001:190).

The “praxis” approach contains “content” and “action” and “processes”, with “reflection” in the context of the students. In reference to thinking about the curriculum, praxis takes place in the real, not imaginary or hypothetical, world. The reality in which praxis is executed is a world of interaction: the social or cultural world (Bellis, 2001:189).

In Figure 8.6 I have taken the transformational outcome or catalytic outcome I used earlier in Section 8.2 and linked that to the praxis-type curriculum approach, endeavouring to show how and why a “problem-centred” method would be a suitable way of delivering student-centred learning.
The curriculum model expresses the clear, interconnected relationship between the main components of the system that relate to the curriculum as praxis. In terms of a student-centred curriculum, the curriculum as praxis has the following key aspects:

- The main aspects of praxis are action and reflection.
- Praxis takes place in the real, not imaginary or hypothetical, world.
- The reality in which praxis takes place is a world of interaction: the social or cultural world.
• The world of praxis is the constructed, not the “natural”, world.

• Praxis assumes a process of meaning-making, but recognises that meaning is socially constructed and not absolute (Bellis, 2001:191).

Through dialogue and interaction the lecturer and the student reflect on the problem, focusing on measures taken (by the student or lecturer) to guide and support the student to solve the problem and achieving meaningful learning outcomes.

It is through thorough reflection that students will obtain metacognitive knowledge (certainty of their knowledge and understanding as well as aspects where uncertainty still remains) and metacognitive skill (ability to select a strategy to rectify the problems) to reach the stage where they can use assessment to take ownership of their own learning.

The question arises as to how the lecturer and the student can practically accomplish this essential development in problem-oriented knowledge? Some faculties are already involved in community projects providing structure to the development of all the knowledge and skills that are the basis of the capability to handle more exploratory, problem-solving and developmental learning opportunities. These assessment practices imply the same process in posing a problem that needs to be solved. The above project could in fact be doing just that. Kraak (2000:15) maintains:

“Knowledge is problem-oriented; it attempts to solve problems by drawing on multiple disciplines, which interact in the real-world contexts of use and application, yielding solutions and new knowledge which are not reducible to any of the participating disciplines.”

If the proposed curriculum as praxis becomes the basis for a student-centred approach, it would inform and direct the identification and formulation of standards of outcomes. It would also inform the way student-centred and standards-based components should be designed as well as the selection of teaching methods and assessment activities and the way in which practice, feedback and assessment will be constructed and administered.

8.2.3.2 Student-centred assessment

(Re)conceptualising assessment to primarily support more efficient student-centred learning – i.e. developing the ability to develop diverse and authentic teaching, learning and assessment strategies with the aim of improving meaningful learning and fostering self-regulation – will open up possibilities for lecturers to develop a better understanding of student-centred learning and to reflect on the effectiveness of the teaching practice involved.
The analysis, in contrast, reveals that there is marked tension in lecturers’ assessment practices and views. Analysis shows that assessment is not driven by students’ needs, but mainly to satisfy the need for accountability. The strongly exam- and summative assessment-driven approach serves as a measure to determine the lecturer’s compliance with the institutional management’s expectations on work performance. These expectations include meeting the university’s required flow-through rate, which naturally impacts on the choice of assessment practices. The reality is that assessment largely centres on the progress of the lecturer and the student, i.e. assessment for accountability, in the interest of the lecturer.

Given the general consensus these days that students construct their own knowledge, students are encouraged in terms of assessment to take responsibility for their own learning through self- and peer assessment. The main benefits of student-centred assessment are undoubtedly greater student participation and the promotion of skills, such as critical self-reflection, essential to effective learning. Student-centred assessment not only bolsters personal development, as Warnich (2008:140) states, but also trains the student in life-long learning. As such, it is a significant step towards self-regulated learning and taking control of their own learning, an essential skill for life-long learning (Jones & Tanner, 2006:60).

Assessment to empower students for learning depends on how it is understood and used by lecturers and students, according to Boud and Falchikov (2007:124), whose study offers insights into the qualitatively different ways that academics may understand and use their power to enhance students’ learning. This study conceptual framework encourage an understanding of student-centred assessment as a social process, in which the epistemological mentality and identity is the social product. Beets (2007:99) points out that the success of student-centred assessment is embedded in the degree to which the attained epistemological mentality and identity enables the student to productively apply the opportunities that assessment offers for optimal and sustainable learning (Beets, 2007:99).

Since the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) institutional administration is in complete control of the assessment system, the lecturer-driven approach is almost inevitable. The generally accepted view that learning and teaching is lecturer- or even institutionally driven has limited merit. The greater truth, from a socio-cultural perspective, is that both the lecturer and student are instrumental in establishing structured learning support.

Student-centred assessment advocates that communication between role players needs to be aimed at mutual understanding and respect for the views of others. Taylor, Fraser and Fisher (1977:295) avers that lecturers and students need to be offered the opportunity to negotiate
the nature of the learning activities. Outcomes-based assessment is a student-centred approach which implies that lecturers need to be aware of and sensitive to every student’s strengths and needs as well as social background in order to create an inclusive classroom environment. Alternative assessment techniques and activities that conform to the relevant assessment criteria address the special and specific needs of students.

Determining such special and specific needs requires gaining knowledge of students’ knowledge and skill levels by means of baseline assessment and diagnostic assessment. In doing so, the lecturer makes a “diagnosis” of the student’s learning that both enables accurate judgement of performance as well as obtaining valuable information about the student’s strengths and weaknesses, as indicated by participants. The assessment technique of questioning, as described by the participants, is applied (informal) formatively to guide teaching and learning activities. The information obtained assists the lecturer in determining the students’ entry levels – e.g. their knowledge on a lesson topic. The function of informal formative assessment to support the teaching and learning process is, however, not fully realised and is more about awarding a certain value to the student’s performance.

Lecturers need to design assessment tasks that are both suitable for the learning outcomes as well as accommodate the different learning styles and specific needs of students. The tasks’ appropriateness relates to the validity and reliability of assessment, necessitating the lecturer to incorporate a wide variety of assessment methods, techniques and instruments. Lecturers must realise the correlation between assessment types and the goal of assessment, which means each type has its rightful place within the assessment process and programme.

When planning effective student-centred assessment of learning outcomes, it is essential to ensure that the assessment is centred on what is important, of value and required for students to be successful in future. Lecturers must understand the role of learning outcomes and that assessment criteria must be unpacked in terms of knowledge and skills. Applying a variety of assessment methods, techniques and instruments to measure student progress in the mastery of knowledge and its application necessitates knowledge of the requirements of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Student-centred assessment involves the student as initiator of assessment as well as modernisation of control, with assessment as self-surveillance in working towards a new account of warranty and accountability of assessment. Concerns about measurement, objectivity, standards and integrity are integral to the notion of informing judgement, but in themselves they are secondary to the act of becoming informed (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:14).
This is a shift from foregrounding measurement to contextualising it as integral processes of informing judgement that is important. A view of assessment that places informed judgement at the centre is able to include key graduate learning attributes as an intrinsic part of the goal of assessment. It gives prominence to students making judgements about their own learning as a normal part of assessment activities and not as a special add-on (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:14). It acknowledges the importance of reflexivity and self-regulation, which relates to ipsative-referenced assessment (Meyer et al., 2010:53), as explained below.

### 8.2.3.3 Ipsative-referenced assessment

Ipsative-referenced assessment advocates student-centred assessment practices to “empower” students toward achieving self-directed learning. The analysis of the assessment practices reveals a slavish adherence to prescriptions and allows the student and the lecturer little freedom for creativity.

The lecturer-centred nature of assessment could possibly be ascribed to the culture of excessive student dependence that reduces the student to an object in the teaching and learning process. The relationship between lecturer and student is distant and impersonal. The assessment system is autocratic, where over-assessment is the norm and students’ needs do not factor into the scheduling of assignments and tests. The allegations of autocratic and bureaucratic management and the NWU’s failure to provide for the demands of students needs tie into Cretchley and Castle’s (2001:488) assertion over the inhibition of student autonomy. Bureaucracy and autocracy that extends even to requiring permission for an open-book exam no doubt has an impact on assessment and inevitably the quality of learning. Difficulties encountered with student-centred assessment relate to the NWU assessment policies, according to the participant, viz. the prescriptive and autocratic nature of the institutional quality office. The risk of too much attention to rules, regulations, moderation and oversight is the compliance of lecturers with procedure at the expense of effectively determining whether or not students are progressing successfully towards attaining the skills, knowledge and attributes defined in the graduate profile (Davidson & McKensie, 2009:5). Staff and students may conclude that student-centred learning is taking a back seat to quality-assurance processes, driven by institutional risk management and not quality (Huysamen, 2002:84).

Meyer et al. (2010:53) explain that ipsative-referenced assessment, in contrast, lessens the power over students and thereby ensures that feedback is not unduly dominated by the lecturer’s views. Ipsative-referenced assessment should enhance and enable student-centred and self-directed learning, rather than merely act as instrument of justification, measurement
and limitation. It signifies assessment as learning or reflection and that the student uses him-/herself as reference point for comparison.

8.2.3.4 Assessment as learning

Assessment as learning is crucial for developing and sustaining students’ own assessment abilities for long-term learning, Boud and Falchikov (2007:123) assert. This form of assessment advocates the student taking responsibility for his/her own learning, i.e. directed learning. The progressive levels of awareness of assessment as learning also indicate that academics with greater awareness of critical aspects seem to relate in a more reflexive manner to their own power and also resist the power of their surroundings better (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:124).

Continuous reflection can serve as a link between formative and summative assessment. The analysis of the assessment practices, however, reveals both a lecturer-driven and exam-driven approach. The excessive emphasis on the exam and the pressure placed on lecturers lead to an exclusive focus on those sections that will be tested in the exam. This exam-driven approach has a direct impact on the teaching process and robs the lecturer of the opportunity to assist students, and to analyse and reflect systematically, not just after assessment, but also during the assessment, whilst they’re close to the action. Potgieter (2006:83) states it is “‘replaying’ students’ actions to determine what happened, when it happened and why it happened...Looking back therefore involves a dialogue of thoughts and actions by means of which someone acquires more skills”. Skilful teaching know-how comes from the combination of making a thoughtful attempt and thinking carefully about how it went, both during and after the action. This requires not just monitoring of what happened, but also analysis of the what, how and why of the assessment strategy precisely through such planning and its reflective analysis at various levels.

Reflection here relates to rhizomatic assessment (Le Grange & Beets, 2005b:118). This study proposes that rhizomatic and ipsative-referenced assessment, which are integral to student-centred and self-directed learning, can be conducted through the means of praxis in relation to action and reflection.

8.2.3.5 Rhizomatic assessment

Rhizomatic assessment disrupts the notion of the single rootedness of assessments, underpinned by positivist assumptions.

It was found that the current assessment approach is dominated by measurement-/standards-driven instruction. The demands on students as they move through their programmes of study
are likely to become more complex, e.g. undertaking a final-year project (or later a research degree). Developmentally they will be expected to become increasingly able to deal with greater complexity. The potential for problems to arise also increases with the complexity of the problem and the successful student has the capacity to cope with disconfirming evidence (i.e. negative feedback on his/her performance) and move on.


Rhizomatic assessment, advocated by Lather (1994:46) as well as Le Grange and Beets (2005b:118), dissolves inferences “by making them temporary, partial (and) invested”. Lecturers self-reflexively engage the inferences they seek to draw, i.e. lecturers acknowledge they have an autobiography marked by the signifiers of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, etc. (Usher, 1996:38) that impact on the work they perform – in this case drawing (temporary) inferences.

Furthermore, lecturers might view inferences as networks of seemingly unrelated concepts or performances. These networks are assemblages of unplanned manifestations of learning arising in different places and at unexpected times Lather (1994:46).

It is important for all the faculties to realise this and also the way that student-centred assessment can and does have an impact on the organisation and management of the teaching-learning milieu, together with the hierarchical management and attitude of administration, the authoritarian and lecturer-centred attitude, and the lack of structured learning support (“scaffolding”) on the zone of proximal development. Lather (1994:45) states that to act rhizomatically:

... is to act via relay, circuit, multiple-openings, as crabgrass in the lawn of academic preconceptions...there is no trunk, no emergence from single root, but rather arbitrary branchings off and temporary frontiers that can only be mapped, not blueprinted...Rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and complexity of problematic where any concepts, when pulled, are recognised as connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field. (Lather, 1994:45)
This experiential learning theory more often than not serves as conceptual framework to direct the continuous reflective practices. The following five phases has identified in the reflective cycle:

- The first phase is action.
- This is followed by a conscious retrospection and contemplation of this action.
- The third phase is awareness of important issues.
- The fourth phase is the establishment of alternative methods of action.
- The last phase is trying again (Potgieter, 2006:83).

The third phase requires expanding the theoretical base, given students’ greater consciousness of their situation on which they have to reflect, aided by the lecturer. Meaningful reflection is only possible if an open and honest relationship between the student and lecturer has been established, in which the lecturer has created a safe and supportive environment that will promote the development of the student. The important point is that continuous, reflective practices are future-driven activities, given that the ultimate aim is to improve teaching and encourage self-directed and self-regulating learning.

Lecturers are knowledge agents who, in consideration of their educational realities and perspectives, make decisions and then mediate them in the classroom. Dann (2002:150) asserts that lecturers are able to consider that which is imposed on them and to judge the best ways to translate such requirements into their specific working contexts of teaching, learning and assessment. The introduction of new educational approaches does not merely represent new teaching and assessment activities in the classroom.

This research reveals the necessity of lecturer development before proceeding to implement new pedagogical approaches, such as outcomes-based education, or to be more specific, student-centred assessment.

The research showed that although assessment provides information on the student’s progress in terms of certain learning outcomes, lecturers don’t teach and assess primarily in pursuance of the learning outcomes.
8.2.4 (Re)training

8.2.4.1 Scholarship of assessment

The call on lecturers at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) to adapt or align their methods with those of outcomes-based education has to date not been realised, partly as a result of the peremptory introduction of new teaching and assessment practices as the merely technical execution of isolated activities in compliance with the lecturer’s job description.

All teaching and assessment actions and interactions between the lecturer, student, classmates and learning material should be considered one integrated activity focused on supporting the student to achieve a higher level of achievement than he/she could achieve alone (Dann, 2002:25). Supporting every student along his/her own zone of proximal development necessitates the pursuit of the critical and subject outcomes, implementing a variety of assessment strategies, adopting criterion-referenced assessment, providing feedback and feed-forward, recognition of the learning milieu and all the other aspects inherent to student-centred assessment.

It cannot simply be about assessment as a required part of teaching – it needs to be about student-centred learning that incorporates all outcomes-based practices to meaningfully support every student. At the very least, this challenge has to be effectively addressed if the key goal of improving quality for all students in the NWU is to be achieved.

According to Bell (2005:108), research has shown that lecturer development is crucial before implementing new education systems such as outcomes-based education. Introducing a new approach is not merely instituting other teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Bell (2005:108) explains that many other aspects of pedagogy need to be changed or developed, e.g. lecturers’ views, teaching, learner and learning, and the nature of the subject.

This study proposes that the NWU should focus on developing complete professionalism, proven leadership, in-depth perspective, sound understanding and lifelong learning. This reasoning clearly reflects the need for a scholarship addressing issues of assessment. The following questions arise when considering a scholarship for assessment:

- Which theoretical (philosophical) paradigm characterises lecturers’ assessment practices? Do they understand the purpose and the appropriateness of the forms, methods, techniques and instruments of assessment they use?
- Why a scholarship for assessment? Is the aim social and educational transformation, in which the lecturer and the student are regarded as intellectually reforming “agents of change” or is it the continuation of entrenched practices, whereby the lecturers merely have to conform to set expectations and do their part in moving the student from one stage to the next in the course of study?

- Is the university basically a conveyer belt, manned by higher educational technicians who follow rituals and routines within an authoritarian assessment approach, or is the lecturer a knowledge facilitator that guides students towards critical, independent, self-regulating thinkers for the future?

- How could the lecturer contribute to the development of the critical awareness of student-centred assessment – i.e. a consciousness of the lecturer as being responsible for both his/her own choices and also his/her personal goals, ideals and beliefs?

It is important to realise that when lecturers’ professional confidence and interpretations of policy are manifested in practice, they are underpinned by the lecturers’ particular assumptions, values and frames of reference (Proudfoot, 1998:139). Referring to the lecturers’ role, Smith et al. (2013:15) suggest a reconfiguration of the lecturer’s role. Lecturers who have spent their careers firmly rooted in their respective professional discourses, understanding, collaborating and even sharing roles with one another may find this daunting and perhaps revolutionary.

The following diagram portrays this interrelated, complex and intricate nature of the lecturer’s responsibilities, characteristics and functions:
The NWU (Potchefstroom campus) needs to have assessment practices based on a student-centred and criterion-referenced approach to assessment. Fundamental to this process is redirecting the conceptual understanding of assessment from the use of assessment results to support administrative functions towards developing and using assessment information, in collaboration with students, to guide current learning towards self-direction in the future.

(Re)conceptualising the understanding of assessment from applying its results, to supporting administrative functions, to developing and using assessment information (in collaboration with students) and to student-centred and self-directed learning will depend largely on the development of a scholarship of assessment.

A scholarship of assessment can be described as a “systematic enquiry about assessment”, “sophisticated thinking about assessment” and building on scholarly assessment, i.e. the “practice of assessment” – developed by both lecturer and student (Beets, 2007:582).

A scholarship of assessment reflects the sophistication of the way universities should view assessment as a quality approach, as support for meaningful learning and ultimately for the
attainment of student-centred learning. Such scholarship will enable an approach measuring the quality and effectiveness of student-centred learning, which also requires flexible and diverse teaching and learning methods to facilitate the relationship between assessment and learning.

This study proposes a scholarship of assessment to provide all stakeholders and role players with clarity on pedagogically essential issues, such as:

a) precisely how lecturers view student-centred assessment (i.e. what they think student-centred assessment entails/should entail);

b) whether their student-centred assessment is relevant at all in the current higher education environment; and

c) whether the lecturer should (as one lecturer responded during the interview) “just have to do it, we have no choice” or the “university will not survive” or whether they (students included) should rather be regenerating, transforming intellectuals who endeavour to use innovative ways to re-question/rethink the purpose, content, form and function of higher education assessment in South Africa and globally.

The scholarship of assessment is based on the post-modern philosophical principles of transformation, whereby assessment is viewed as multidimensional and complex. Assessment opportunities created for students must bring about change (read “transformation”) in both the individual and the group. A transformational approach requires that the lecturer should have a high cognitive and affective level of growth, given the emphasis on continuous reflection. According to Vandeyar (2005:470), the lecturer who endorses the emancipatory approach to educational and assessment change:

- has the capacity to make discretionary judgements, in the interest of improved student outcomes and educational change;

- ensures that his/her professional conduct is centred on the exercise of expert knowledge and also demonstrates an altruistic commitment through his/her constant reflection on and improvement of his/her practice in the interests of his/her students;

- is a confident lecturer who makes important decisions not only about his/her conduct, but also about the growth and development of students and he/she demonstrates that he/she is in control, despite the general feeling of uncertainty among most lecturers in the field;
• does not accept policy unquestioningly, but rather adopts a more critical stance in interpreting policy requirements;

• demonstrates a more proactive approach in its implementation;

• displays a “writerly” perspective on professional interpretation of educational policy;

• problematises taken-for-granted assumptions and values underpinning policy response and professional practice, reflecting a marked degree of professional consciousness;

• implements outcomes-based policy according to a frame of reference of best-practice teaching;

• considers criterion-referenced assessment, as stipulated in the assessment policy of outcomes-based education, as “something useful that could be incorporated” and informs students of the assessment criteria prior to the assessment task and upon completion of the assessment task; and

• develops coping strategies seemingly vested in the interest of the learners and not in self-preservation.

Constraining beliefs on assessment must be replaced with the clear recognition that student assessment involves:

• a complex set of activities informed not only by one specialised knowledge base, but by a range of different types of knowledge;

• a move beyond the necessary content knowledge and assessment craft knowledge into assessment scholarship – which will involve continuing training and development support;

• a range of types of decision making, most of which remain difficult and discretionary, even when national policy entails a degree of reduction in autonomy;

• effective interaction with all assessment stakeholders requiring collegiality, communication, cooperation, partnership and negotiation;

• a positive emphasis on assessment that empowers students through enhanced learning;

• a code of practice in which values of equity (i.e. the removal of assessment bias), justice (in both the awarding of grades and in their aggregation), truth seeking and an insistence on personal responsibility (to combat student dishonesty) are firmly embedded; and
• a commitment to critical reflection on personal assessment practice and to research on assessment whether personal, subject-based or institutional.

These seven features can serve as the basis for assessment scholarship but, Holroyd (2000:49) states, should not be considered a justification for creating a new expert group within higher education – “the assessment professionals” – because assessment is intimately intertwined with teaching and learning and should not be detached from these activities. If the assessment scholarship of academics is to be centred on their role as lecturers, then that role has to remain student-centred at its core.

Taking of complex, discretionary decisions should be followed by effective action and the work should have clear value for the wellbeing of society as a whole. There is scope for training and the acquisition of assessment scholarship to obtain the subject content knowledge and assessment craft knowledge that grading and provision of feedback in assessment require (Holroyd, 2000:47). Academics are now living in a post-professional age and it may be that academic professionalism never genuinely existed. In this sense, academics are still pre-professional or perhaps their professionalism has declined in relation to criteria that are no longer appropriate and there is now an opportunity to claim a new professionalism on the basis of different criteria.

A code of practice needs to be one in which values of equity, justice, truth seeking and an insistence on personal responsibility are firmly embedded. Over the last decade, as already indicated in this chapter, social justice and its implications in education have come under increasing scrutiny in educational discourses in different global contexts.

A support system must be established for students and lecturers to address problems, in which interaction is not limited to the student-lecturer relationship and extends to participation within groups as well. Collaboration between the lecturer and the student entails accepting responsibility for the lecturer-student relationship. The lecturer is responsible for two overall assessment functions, viz.: a) the guidance, support, orientation and induction of the student, and b) the establishment and maintenance of a supportive, sympathetic network of students. The accomplishment of these functions is greatly facilitated by the following supportive assessment functions:

• **Advisory function:** addressing the student’s need for acquiring new perspectives, skills and knowledge as well as answering questions and aiding in problem solving
- **Communication function**: ensuring that communication channels are always open and unobstructed
- **Consulting function**: continuously providing emotional support to the student
- **Directive function**: orientating the student on the culture, norms and values of a specific community
- **Role model advocating function**: acting as role model and identification figure to the student, through consistent advocating of professional conduct and expertise (subject-related knowledge)
- **Protective function**: acting as buffer between student and the rest of the specific community/workplace that may harm the student’s educational progress and performance
- **Development function**: assisting the student in word and deed in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, norms and attitudes (Potgieter, 2006:73)

The views of Potgieter (2006:39) on the responsibility and functions of mentoring have been adapted for the purposes of a scholarship for assessment and could be graphically illustrated as follows:
It is vital that continuous, structured and accredited in-service training be developed, according to the different needs identified among lecturers, to adequately equip them for the effective implementation of assessment within an outcomes-based education approach and the associated guidelines and policy of the education department. This kind of training will ensure that lecturers not only receive theoretical training, but also develop the practical skills for the proficient application of this training.

This in-depth training must be presented on a continuous basis, by experienced and capable facilitators who possess first-hand theoretical and practical knowledge of outcomes-based education.
assessment. It is important that the scope of the training focuses on the specific needs of the lecturers and students, in order for the training to go beyond the merely theoretical to equip lecturers and students as assessors with the skills for practical implementation. It is important that the lecturer as an assessor demonstrate the following competencies:

(a) Foundational competence

- An understanding the assumptions that underlie a range of assessment approaches and their particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to the student and subject being assessed
- An understanding the different assessment principles underpinning the structuring of different assessment tasks
- An understanding a range of assessment approaches and methods appropriate to the student and subject
- An understanding language, terminology and content to be used in the assessment task and the degree to which this is gender and culturally sensitive
- An understanding formative and qualitative reporting within a context of the student and subject

(b) Practical competence:

- The ability to make appropriate use of alternative assessment practices
- The ability to assess in a manner appropriate to the subject context
- The ability to provide feedback to students in sensitive and educationally helpful ways
- The ability to judge students’ competence and performance in fair, valid and reliable ways
- The ability to maintain efficient recording and reporting of academic progress

(c) Reflexive competence

- The ability to justify assessment design decisions and choices about assessment tasks and approaches
- The ability to reflect on appropriateness of assessment decisions made in particular leaning situations and adjusting the assessment tasks and approaches, where necessary
- The ability to interpret and use assessment results to feed into processes for the improvement of learning
Lecturers’ professionalism lies in their responsibility to each other and to the student. They must be proactive in obtaining continuous, structured and accredited in-service training to ensure that they are adequately equipped to implement student-centred assessment productively and in accordance with the transformational outcomes-based education approach. Participating in multiple and continuous training components will ensure that lecturers not only receive comprehensive theoretical training, but will also be equipped with the practical skills that effective application requires.

Student-centred assessment is a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of different levels of experience and expertise, which incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and/or educational development and socialisation functions into the relationship. The extent of the parameters of mutuality and compatibility in the relationship is commensurate with the potential outcomes of respect, professionalism, collegiality and role fulfilment.

8.3 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Sharing the conclusions from this case study means bringing its results and findings to closure (Yin, 2014:181). This final section concludes with a critical reflection on the methodological path rigorously undertaken for this study.

The case study path began with the careful and thoughtful posing of a research question, based on the complexity of a real-world problem. The core problem inherent to assessment in higher education is that it relates to a range of elements simultaneously. Carless (2007:57) summarises this aspect of assessment as follows:

“It is about grading and about learning; it is about evaluating student achievements and teaching them better; it is about standards and invokes comparisons between individuals; it communicates explicit and hidden messages. Assessment thus engenders tensions and compromises.”

It is thus understandable that a change from standards-oriented to student-centred practices could be problematic. Altering lecturers’ conceptualisation of assessment, Killen (1996:101) states, “whether by mandate or through professional development activities, may be doomed to failure, unless these conceptions are acknowledged, challenged and eventually changed”.

The need to (re)conceptualise assessment to overcome the dualism between standards-based and student-centred assessment emanates from the tension between these two approaches. Answering the research question and influencing lecturers’ assessment practices made it
necessary to determine how lecturers conceptualise assessment. Exploring conceptions of assessment was to investigate how they understand and experience assessment, concepts common to literature during the last thirty years. The endeavour to bring change to the assessment practices and perspectives of lecturers entailed determining “how” lecturers assess and “why” they assess the way they do. The research question is at its core about the manner in which lecturers conceptualise assessment – i.e. how they think and within which theoretical paradigm they would think.

It was extremely difficult to maintain complete objectivity, especially when observing how the participants understand or misunderstand assessment in terms of their personal system of meaning. The case study protocol enabled me to step back and challenge the controlling effect of assessment that focuses students on the performance of assessment itself, rather than on the true purpose of higher education. The protocol also helped me to focus on a “case” and retain a holistic and real-world perspective.

By drawing on the international perspectives, a justified contrast how curriculum assessment practices evolved in South Africa is provided. The most specific point of this research was how the academic staff of the eight faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) perceives and conducts various assessment practices. This research sought to create new understandings of assessment by academic staff in the eight faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). The case for this to be undertaken and the conceptualisation on how that would be achieved are clearly presented and argued from various theoretical standpoints.

Considerable attention was devoted to explaining the philosophical undertakings for the research design, as a strategic vision of the methodological approach to the study. The interpretive perspective, as a conceptual framework, helped me to understand assessment within social and cultural contexts of the classroom and centre on intellectual and socio-cultural education renewal. The conceptual framework represented “the lens” through which I explored the assessment practices and perspectives in the cases and made it quite clear that assessment is much more complex than merely the design and completion of assignments, tests and examinations.

The findings of the study demonstrate just how crucial answering the fundamental questions truly is for successful assessment. Lecturers have to know (a) “what” they are doing and (b) “why” they are doing so. Lecturers have to know the social nature of assessment and also the pedagogical essence of assessment. The socio-cultural view of assessment enabled me to
understand and recognise the essential relationships between lecturers’ mental processes and the social, cultural and institutional environment (Nuthall, 1997:711).

The context for this study was the eight faculties of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus), which offers a variety of award programmes that in turn involve numerous disciplines. These educational programmes are not homogeneous in student socio-cultural expectations, teaching/learning processes or modes of outcomes. Neither is the academic staff homogeneous in their respective disciplinary traditions, professional experience or familiarity with procedures of curriculum assessment in its wider meanings and practices.

Promoting (re)conceptualisation of assessment does, therefore, not treat the eight faculties as a single homogenous entity, but interprets case study data within socio-cultural and subject-didactic or curriculum aspects – the context of the case (faculty). Following an interpretive approach, it was confirmed that assessment within the eight faculties of the NWU cannot be isolated from the external agents, situations and structures of the process.

The case study research design was used to address the technically distinctive situation within the faculties (cases), which had a range of variables of interest. The distinctive need for case study research arose out of the desire to understand the complexity of assessment problems and because the research questions required an extensive and “in-depth” description of the complexity of the “real-world’ assessment problem(s). The case study research design enabled me to understand contextual conditions pertinent to each faculty (case) and the (main case) the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

The findings indicate the intricacy of assessment and its varied interpretations by lecturers. It also clarifies that assessment relates to a range of elements within education. Despite the similarities observed between faculties, in many ways each of the eight faculties is unique and this uniqueness is found in their situatedness within certain socio-cultural events. This “uniqueness” is inevitable given the finding that a lecturer’s perception of learning and his/her expectations of students influence his/her assessment practices. The observed differences in lecturers’ assessment practices were directly related to lecturers’ perspectives on learning, in which the challenge is to achieve a balance between the different aspects of assessment.

Developing a substantiated perspective on the assessment practices was virtually an impossible task, given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of this education element. Tracing the trends in different countries was difficult given the uneven development of higher education over the past 30 years. One of the complexities was the time period which was marked by classes of events that differ substantially from those of other time periods (Yin,
2014:154). The time series in this multiple case study was complex and it was found that changes or developments in approaches to assessment did not occur at all once. The literature review revealed for example that the Australian higher education sector experienced expansion throughout the 1990s, but had little discussion and analysis of standards up to that time, compared to the UK and USA who endured considerable criticism in the 1980s. It was also found that higher education in South Africa is currently struggling with quality issues related to the first decade of assessment.

The findings also revealed that the rise in the trends of formative and criterion-referenced assessment was followed by a decline of summative and norm-referenced assessment within the same case. This type of mixed pattern was evident across decades and difficult to trace narrowly.

The multiple case studies not only strengthened the ability to assess series of time, but to also develop a rich explanation for the complex time series (Yin, 2014:152). The use of multiple sources of evidence, however, enabled me to address a broader range of historical and behavioural events. The most important advantage of multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry. I have followed the principle of navigation, whereby the intersection of different reference points is used to calculate the precise location of the object. Basing this multiple case study on several different sources of information made the findings or conclusions more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2014:181).

The unique strength of the multiple case studies was its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, documents, artefacts, interviews and observations. The general strategy was one of theoretical propositions, working data from the ground up, using descriptive frameworks and reviewing rival explanations (Yin, 2014:123).

The organisational logic model recommended, by Yin (2014:162), was used for examining theory of change. The research question necessitated breaking down the problem into secondary questions, in order to divide the main problem into appropriate secondary problems. I then addressed these with the aim of solving the main problem. I started the data analysis of the “small questions” first, to identify evidence that addresses the first question, and drew a tentative conclusion based on the weight of the evidence. I then proceeded to the larger questions and repeated the procedure, until I addressed the main research question.

In this sense, the descriptive approach helped to identify an overall pattern of complexity to explain lecturers’ current assessment practices and perspectives in the eight cases (faculties) at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus). Textual data (words and phrases) matching the above
categories, built up towards more complex categories as multiple combinations were found. The organisational logic model matched the empirically observed events to theoretical predicted events, stipulating and operationalising a complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time. The analysis of lecturers' assessment practices and perspectives at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) revealed the following two stages:

Traditional outcomes-based assessment: A standards-based assessment approach based on rigorousness, in which assessment follows learning and the purpose of assessment is to discover how much has been learned. Despite the introduction of formative and alternative forms of assessment (such as projects), norm-referencing and content remain the main focus of the assessment activity.

Transitional outcomes-based assessment: A student-centred and alternative assessment approach, based on relevance and the quest to ensure a genuine correlation between what is assessed and the real competence of the student by means of criterion-referenced assessment as well as a closer correspondence between modules and professional practice.

Using the organisational logic model suggested by Yin (2014:162) enabled the study to move away from a fragmented take up or perspective of changes of assessment approaches in binary terms to a perspective of change that occupies a continuum of change from traditional standards-based to more student-centred forms of assessment. The organisational logic model was used to analyse different assessment approaches and perspectives. It entailed matching the empirically observed events to the theoretically predicted events.

Assessment trends in the case study were presented in chronological order and classified according to three different decades, viz. the traditional outcomes-based assessment of the first decade of assessment in the 1980s, followed by the transitional outcomes-based assessment of the second decade in the 1990s and lastly, the transformational outcomes-based assessment since the 2000s. Arraying a whole set of categories or features of assessment practices and perspectives, as set out in the tables, effectively profiled each case. This array permitted the analysis to probe whether different cases appear to share similar profiles and deserve to be considered instances (replications) of the same “type” of general case.

The complexity of the assessment was carefully detailed and data triangulation was an appropriate device for analysis, in that multiple sources serve to corroborate findings. The study’s theoretical orientation guided the case study analysis. Relying on theoretical propositions not only shaped my data-collection plan, as Yin (2014:136) indicates, but also
yielded analytic priorities. The strategy was based on theoretical propositions, working data from the ground up, using descriptive frameworks and checking on rival explanations all triangulating on the same set of research questions.

Generalisations about lecturers’ assessment practices and perspectives were derived by means of replication logic, given that all of the analysis showed positive results. A qualitative analysis of the entire collection of tables then enabled the study to draw cross-case conclusions about the eight individual faculties. The cross-case patterns derived from the cross-case synthesis illustrate that the cases are well connected and replicated or contrasted with each other and rely strongly on argumentative interpretation.

Multiple sources of evidence essentially provided multiple measures of assessment within the faculties of the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) and increased confidence in the accuracy of the findings. Triangulation remained important, to ensure that the case study rendered the participants’ perspective accurately (Yin, 2014:123).

The findings of the study are based on the observed profiles of the cases, confirmed or disconfirmed with the trends in the literature, thus connecting well to the prior research and document analysis reviewed in developing the original design. According to Yin (2014:40), theoretical propositions play a critical role in aiding the researcher to generalise the lessons learned from the study. The research questions, which favour explanatory case study research design, are made up of “how” and “why” questions (and collecting additional data) aiding the quest for generalisations – i.e. striving for external validity (Yin, 2014:48).

Although external validity of this study was increased by means of replication logic in multiple case studies related to the eight faculties, the findings are confined to a single domain. Therefore, generalisation of the findings only pertains to the assessment practices at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).

Reflecting on the limitations, the greatest concern was a presumed need for greater rigor and not allowing equivocal evidence to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions. This case study drew a single set of “cross-case” conclusions from multiple cases, with reference to Yin (2014:199), in the presumption that lack of rigor is less likely when a range of methods is used. Although cross-case conclusions served to enhance reliability, this study is not based on a multiple set of experiments that replicated the lectures’ practices and perspectives under different conditions.

Documenting the procedures followed for the first case and repeating the process for each case minimised the errors and bias in the study and increased its reliability (Yin, 2014:48). This
was achieved by means of a case study protocol and developing a case study database. Further strategies to increase the quality of the research design are described in greater detail in the data-collection, data-analysis and compositional phases of this study.

Another concern was the massive amount of information to address "all evidence", as required by the case study research design (Yin, 2014:168). The aim in research was to produce high-quality analyses, which required attending to all the evidence collected; displaying and presenting the evidence apart from any interpretation; and considering alternative interpretations (Yin, 2014:123). The study was tremendously time consuming and required long periods in the field, with detailed observational and interview evidence.

The use of assessment to improve student learning is a journey of assessment in the service of student learning. This study cannot make it happen, but I hope it will help to develop new concepts related to student learning that can provide further steps in the iterative assessment practices of lecturers and students. There are now signs at the NWU that an increasing number of lecturers are willing to confront the challenge of assessment and look at it from a different perspective.
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ADDENDUM A: Language Certificates

28 October 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I assisted Mr S. Lundie (Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University) with the language editing of his doctoral thesis *(Re)conceptualising assessment within a Higher Education Curriculum*. I went through the entire draft making corrections and suggestions with respect to language usage. Given the nature of the process, I did not see the final version, but made myself available for consultation as long as was necessary.

I may be contacted at the number/email address below for further information or confidential confirmation.

Dr Edwin Hees (Associate Professor Emeritus)  
Drama Department [English 1979–2004]  
University of Stellenbosch  
Private Bag X1  
Matieland  
7602 South Africa  
Cell: 076 977 7742  
Email: eph@sun.ac.za
22 April 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby verify that I, Arina Wilson, SATI-accredited language practitioner, was responsible for the final proofreading and technical editing of the thesis titled '(Re)conceptualising assessment within a higher education curriculum’ submitted by Sampie Lundie in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the School of Education Studies, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Potchefstroom Campus, North-West University.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Arina Wilson
ADDENDUM B

CONCEPTUALISING ASSESSMENT WITHIN A HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM SAMUEL LUNDE

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (by full dissertation)

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION Studies, FACULTY OF

EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES Potchefstroom campus, North-west University Study leader PROF P. DU PREEZ OCTOBER 2014 DECLARATION

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use has not been made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.

SAMUEL LUNDE I ACKNOWLEDGE I wish to express my sincere gratitude to

my supervisor, my colleagues and finally to the people closest to me. Professor Petre du Preez who, with her expertise, experience and kindness, has

broadened my understanding of aspects of the research field I may not have been able to access on my own.

I am mostly thankful that she has afforded me the autonomy and latitude to ponder my own thoughts, and follow my scholarly instincts. 7 Dr Gerda Ratima as project leader of the NWU Assessment project who assisted me with the data collection and analysis. 7 Ms. Eunice Schutte for meticulously completing the word processing of the interview transcripts. 7 Ms. Nosisi Williams at the JS Gercke Library, University of Stellenbosch. Her prompt and professional processing of my requests is deeply appreciated. 7 Dr Emma Hess as the language editor has added so much value to this process – not only as editor, but also as critical reader par excellence. Thank you for your guidance and valued nudges in the right direction. 7 My parents, Robert and Babsie, who both passed away during the final stages of the writing process of this dissertation. They represent commitment, dedication, endurance and