

Assessment Matters;
Academics' orientations to assessment
within undergraduate nursing
education.
A phenomenographic informed study.

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.



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Dedication

I dedicate my study to researchers who have engaged and continue to engage in the search for the cure and treatment for the leukaemias; they include those who investigate new approaches to bone marrow transplantation.

I am alive because of that research and my brother.

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Abstract

Assessment Matters; Academics' orientations to assessment within undergraduate nursing education. A phenomenographic informed study.

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Academics are very aware of the primacy of assessment in shaping student learning in higher education. For many students, it is only when faced with completing an assessment or a deadline that their serious engagement with learning material commences. Assessment serves many purposes including as a measure of quality of teaching, student learning, institutional and programme accountability. Yet, how academics view and experience assessment has received little or no attention in research literature. Within the context of nursing education, it has received almost none.

The range and amount of assessment provided by academics, undertaken by student nurses over four years (in an Irish context) and processed within institutions provides a multitude of information about learning. It is only on successful completion of all assessment is a student deemed eligible for registration. A neglected aspect of research is how academics view and experience their assessing role in this context.

This study explored views on, and experiences of, nineteen academics assessing within undergraduate nursing education in one academic unit in Ireland. This was with a view to describe if differences in orientations to assessment could be identified. A phenomenographic informed approach, with its origins in educational research, was used to explore the topic. Three orientations were described. Within the first orientation, conventional assessment was applied within foundational human science modules to large student groups. The second orientation was depicted as using more active assessing processes to engage students more deeply with learning. How participants' relate to assessment in the third orientation was integrating assessment and feedback within a module of learning. Orientations reflect a shifting emphasis from teaching, assessment and feedback as independent activities to overlapping one's; and these findings have implications.

This study, its findings and recommendations will interest those engaged in assessment scholarship and assessment within undergraduate nursing education.

Acronyms

ABA	An Bord Altranais, the Irish Nursing Board until renamed as NMBI
CBM	Certainty Based Marking
DoES	Department of Education and Skills
EHEA	European Higher Education Arena
FC	Flipped classroom
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ISSE	Irish Survey of Student Engagement
MCQ	Multiple Choice Questions
NDA	National Disability Authority
NMBI	Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QQI	Qualifications and Quality Ireland
OSCE	Objective Structured Clinical Examination
PD	Professional Development
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
National Forum	National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
UDL	Universal Design for Learning.
WHO	World Health Organisation

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces this study. First, the rationale for undertaking this study within the context of undergraduate nursing education is provided. Thereafter the research question, aims, objectives and a brief overview of all six chapters is presented.

1.1 A changed context for nursing education-rationale for the study.

In the Republic of Ireland, from 2002 onwards, the education of student nurses was utterly transformed. This followed the transfer of pre-registration nursing education into Higher Education (HE). Completion of a four-year degree (and 4.5 years for dual registration) thereafter became the entry route to professional registration for all nurses (and subsequently midwives). Many nursing educators transferred into HE from hospital based settings where a Registration/Diploma Nursing was provided. However, in 1994, the first link with HE and pre-registration nursing education was made. Prior to this, the apprenticeship model of nurse training was offered for decades (Fealy and McNamara 2007). Since 2002, nursing education is now positioned within a multifaceted context and culture, and is subject to many more influences, than it previously was in hospitals/services. In particular, student assessment has undergone many changes from its application within hospital/service based schools. It is now subject to greater scrutiny arising from academic standards, programme approval specifications, requirements for greater transparency, expectations around giving and receiving feedback and a multidisciplinary and technological educational environment. Today, nurse education is exposed to influences and trends in pedagogy unheard of even a decade ago. One example is the flipped classroom (FC). Its application in nursing is described by Hawks (2014 p.264) as;

“a pedagogical model that employs asynchronous video lectures, reading assignments, practice problems, and other digital, technology-based resources outside the classroom, and interactive, group-based, problem-solving activities in the classroom”.

This contrasts with the traditional, lecture model. The teacher directing in-class learning and student generally unprepared in advance, to actively engage with learning material.

This research topic emerged some time ago from observing that within a contemporary teaching and assessing environment some academics appeared “better” at engaging students with module assessment tasks than others. Registering for an educational doctorate provided an opportunity to develop an understanding of the nature and factors influencing academics and their assessment practices within higher education. The topic struck a chord, as it is relevant to an academic community engaging in assessment of academic work submitted by nursing students. This opens the possibility of greater scrutiny and enhanced visibility of how the topic is viewed, experienced and practised. The research topic is likely to interest those working in similar areas. I believed that the findings could inform my practice (and that of others) of assessment as part of everyday academic activity in a contemporary pedagogical environment.

A review of literature revealed steadfast agreement that assessment serves multiple purposes and is critical to student learning and progression in higher education is integral to and directs student learning in HE (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012; Halinen et al 2014; Kantar 2014; Bearman et al 2017). Assessment does affect students’ lives, as Boud (1995 p.35).

“Students can with difficulty escape the effects of bad teaching, but they cannot by definition, (if they wish to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment”.

Despite assessment being the object of substantial research from many different perspectives, research on the differences in how academics view and experience assessment, or orientations to this activity is scant. Yet it has been applied for centuries in HE. Within the limited research published, it is possible to depict difference or variation in “what it means to assess” and that it means different things to different individuals and these have implications. Marton and Booth (1997 p.17) noted that a lack of awareness indicates a taken-for-granted assumption of

uniformity in that aspect of the phenomenon. Therefore, it appeared fitting for me to explore with academics their views on, and experiences of, assessment within undergraduate nursing education in greater depth.

Some large-scale surveys have examined teachers' conceptions of student assessment, starting in formal education (Brown 2008; Brown et al 2009; Brown 2011; Segers and Tillema 2011). Findings from this research emphasise a clear coherence between schoolteachers' conceptions of assessment in shaping their assessing practices, and a difference in teachers' conceptions of assessment within different cultures.

The central role played by academics' in assessment is inadequately acknowledged or explored. Yet in HE, they engage in complex and high-stakes responsibilities when providing for and doing assessment related work (Fletcher et al 2012). Within literature concerning academics' orientations, conceptions, views and experiences of assessment, the primary contribution was Samuelowicz and Bain's (2002) qualitative study. In exploring academics' orientations to assessment and assessment practices, they described six orientations and considered them within three groupings. Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholms' (2005) phenomenographic study explored the backwash effect of assessment, reporting a two dimensional outcome space of conceptions of the backwash effect. Postareff et al's (2012) study with pharmacy academics presented a continuum of categories of conceptions of assessment from reproductive to more transformational conceptions reflecting an increasing emphasis on the development of students' thinking and understanding. Fletcher et al (2012) questionnaire-based study explored both academic and student conceptions of assessment, reporting significant variation in how individual academics (and students) think about assessment. Halinen et al (2014) reported three categories of life science teachers' assessment discourse based on their level of reflection, pedagogical awareness, action and partnership. Kantar (2014) in exploring assessment strategies and instruction to promote higher order thinking in nursing students, found rigid adherence to assessment of learning approaches. Bearman et al (2017) described collaborative efforts in developing supports for academics in assessment design, taking into account challenges of local contexts. Commonality and differences are reported in how this topic is applied using different methods,

samples, within different contexts and disciplinary groupings. However, a clear gap in knowledge of how academics experience their role in assessment led to me situating this study with a range of academics engaged in assessing within nursing education. This meant taking into account challenges of the local contemporary educational culture and multi professional context of nursing education. Assessment including the methods, content and strategies reflect many key features and values of a programme, and exert a fundamental influence on student learning experiences (National Forum 2015a p.3).

This study explores amongst academics their views on, and experiences of, assessment as undertaken within theoretical (that is, not clinical practice based) modules offered on site within undergraduate nursing education only. It studies the key features appropriate to that context. It does not explore assessment within the clinical setting nor within midwifery nor other educational programmes offered in the study setting.

Whilst Shuell (1986 p. 429) points out that what a student does “is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does”, research and the experiences of many academics tell of their awareness of the “primacy of assessment” in shaping student learning behaviours (Bloxham and Boyd 2008). Bearman et al (2017) propose that academics hold the primary responsibility for assessment. Similarly Race (2009 p. 27) advises academics that the most important thing they do for students is “to assess their work”. Fletcher et al (2012 p.119) claims differences in” beliefs, meanings, and understandings about assessment” held by academics have important consequences for how assessment is performed, raising important issues for HE itself. A more detailed examination of how academics view and experience assessment themselves, in the discipline of nursing may find concordance with research findings exploring experiences or conceptions of assessment in other academic groupings (for example, Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012; Halinen et al 2014; Kantar 2014)

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) note that research exploring academics’ conceptions of assessment incorporating feedback have lagged behind conceptions of learning more broadly across HE. Fletcher et al (2012) locate this to traditional

public confidence in academic and expert judgement within a cognate discipline-but notes that academics may not be assessment experts. Bearman et al (2017 p. 546) remark that despite many publications outlining the features of good assessment and feedback design in HE, front line educators find many of the ideas challenging to realise in practice. They found that literature was more inclined to focus on assessment-related institutional change rather than supporting academics themselves. Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005 p.285) contends that the continuing failure to consider teachers' views represents a missing link in "many otherwise well-conceived attempts to improve teaching and learning". More recently, a focus of professional development courses is in developing academics' own pedagogical thinking and skills, providing more practice led support (Bearman et al 2017). This aligns with actions currently recommended within the professional development framework for HE educators in Ireland, now published by The National Forum (2015).

In exploring with academics how they view, experience and apply assessment, it is privileging the perspective of those actively engaged in this activity. A qualitative approach lends itself to collecting rich textual data in exploring experiences (Pajares 1992). Adoption of a phenomenographic perspective seeks to capture and describe the variation in the reality of how a phenomenon is experienced (Marton and Booth 1997). It is hoped this research will inform this activity within a contemporary nursing educational context and culture.

1.2 Research question

How do academics view and experience assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education offered in one academic department in a university in the Republic of Ireland?

1.3 Research aim

The primary aim of this study is to explore with academics their views on, and experiences of, assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education in one academic department in an Irish university.

1.4 Research objectives

The objectives are:

1. To capture variation or difference in views and experiences
2. To identify orientations towards assessment

The objective of this research is to explore academics' views on, and experiences of, assessment from a self-selecting group of participants working in an academic department within one Irish university. An objective was to discern and describe different ways assessment is viewed and experienced by academics.

1.5 Meanings of the word assessment.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2017) note the etymological root of the word assessment is derived from *assidēre* as “to sit by”. The word assessment has its origins from an idea of individuals seated alongside each other, engaged in learning. As a word, assessment is applied and understood differently internationally. The Oxford English Dictionary Online (accessed 2017) defines the word assessment as “the action of assessing someone or something”. Although this definition appears simple, complexities arise when determining what it is one is assessing of and for. Perhaps because of this, a “subject” is often applied before the word assessment to make the term clearer in scope and purpose. This includes words like “student”, “higher education”, “class”, “formative”, and “summative” “authentic”. As a result, a clearer differentiation of an action or approach applied within education emerges. It refers to an activity or range of activities undertaken by individuals in education by a student or teacher to judge, support, engage or provide feedback on teaching or learning.

Commonality and differences are found in ways the words assessment and evaluation are used internationally. In European English publications, a subtle difference is apparent in how the words assessment and evaluation are used. Both actions involve collection of information and application of judgement; but the outcome of both processes differs. In North America the words assessment and evaluation are used synonymously, thus they incorporate wide-ranging processes applied within HE. Both words are used interchangeably to refer to processes

including entry levels, attrition rates, student services, physical learning environments and student achievement (Sadler 2005 p.176). In Irish and United Kingdom literature, the word assessment in HE is understood similarly.

For many years, assessment was dominantly informed by psychometric theories, with measurement or indicators applied to determine the quality of assessment, including:

“reproducibility or reliability, (construct) validity and efficiency” (Schuwirth & van der Vleuten 2004 p.1208)

An alternative perspective is seeing assessment as an integral part of education, where questions of pass or fail are inferior to determining a learner’s strengths and weaknesses to reward or improve individual learning. Here, results are “broad and highly informative” (Schuwirth & van der Vleuten 2004 p. 1208). Both psychometric and competency based approaches have limitations and strengths, as have intertwining both processes together completely in education (Schuwirth & van der Vleuten 2004 p.1209).

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and learning in Higher Education (2016b) (National Forum) advise that an expanded understanding of the scope and purposes of assessment is now necessary. That is, given that the expectations of Irish higher education are now greater. The purposes of assessment whilst they include for determining learning, but within an expanded understanding is used to give feedback on teaching and learning and empowering a student to engage and become a better learner (National Forum 2016b). Following widespread consultation and dialogue across Irish HE, The National Forum (2016b) have defined within an Irish context what assessment means. This differentiates between assessment of, for and as learning. Of student assessment of learning; this provides evidence of achievement of learning outcomes to a standard, and is the assessment that becomes public and results in grades or symbols. Of student assessment for learning, it is used to supply feedback and/or inform and adjust teaching or student learning in response. Of assessment as learning, it is a process designed to actively engage students in their own learning, empowering them to become better learners.

In the study setting, the University Marks and Standards (DCU 2017 p.13) detail module assessment as:

“normally comprises two assessment components continuous assessment and a final examination assessment.”

This represents a narrow, statement, merely identifying two overall categories of assessment modes. Most notably absent, are references to supporting student learning and to feedback by students, peers or teacher to judge and adjust learning or teaching accordingly. Nor does it include a reference to assessment having the scope to empower students, support self-regulatory capacities or develop a sense of shared responsibility for their learning, nor of informal judgement by peers; or of oneself in preparation for future learning challenges now advocated by National Forum (2016b). Use of terms continuous assessment and examination imply they are separate activities, although undertaken at different times, making the explanation unclear. Within the scholarship of assessment or assessment literacy literature, continuous and summative assessment (both potentially examination), are considered to contribute to the learning process differently. In light of the current enhancement theme assessment of, for and as learning, adopted by the National Forum for 2016-2018, a revision of this definition is anticipated. However, given that the topic under study was explored at a particular context and time, this understanding of assessment was applied.

1.6 Overview of study chapters-

This study is structured in six chapters. In chapter two, the policy context including the national and European context that has significantly influenced assessment quality assurance and enhancement is presented. The literature review in chapter three analyses the literature on the topic and the diversity of ways it is studied. It also established that knowledge of how academics could experience assessment was limited and is not reported within the disciplinary context of pre-registration undergraduate nursing education at all.

The primary focus of phenomenography is investigating various ways individuals experience phenomena. An assumption within the approach is of a limited number of ways of understanding a phenomenon (Säljö 1997). In this research, the focus of

attention concerns an exploration of how academics describe how they view and experience assessment and not with assessment *per se*. This refers to the adoption of a second order perspective to research in keeping with a phenomenographic approach. A focus of literature reviewed is directed at how academics themselves view and experience assessment. How they relation to this activity became the primary focus of the review, collection, analysis of data and of findings.

Chapter four discusses phenomenography, incorporating discussion of the methodological issues associated with the approach adopted. Chapter five presents the findings of this study. It reveals qualitative variation between and commonality within how academics view and experience assessment within undergraduate nursing education. Following analysis, three orientations to assessment were described. They range in emphasis from the first teacher centred orientation where applying conventional testing methods within foundational human sciences modules to large student groups. A second orientation involves using more active assessing processes to engage students more deeply with learning. The third orientation is student-centred and emphasises how and in ways academics develop and support student learning is through integrating assessment with feedback as early as possible in a module. Chapter five also discusses each orientation in light of the literature previously reviewed. The sixth and final chapter offers the limitations, recommendations for further research and contribution this research makes to knowledge.

1.7 Summary

Following full incorporation into the higher education sector from 2002, undergraduate nursing education was transformed in many aspects not least in the manner, context and character in which assessment activity was managed and provided including innovations. This chapter identified the rationale for conducting this research. It emerged from a gap in knowledge relating to how academics view and experience assessment generally and within nursing education in particular. The research aim, and objectives and an outline of the structure of this study was presented. The next chapter outlines the policy context for this study, and discusses contextual, national and international factors influencing assessment in higher education.

Chapter 2 Policy context; national, european and local factors influencing assessment

2.0 Introduction.

This chapter introduces the broader policy context influencing how assessment is provided by academics and undertaken by students. First, the changing locations of pre-registration nursing education and of assessment processes applied to progress a student to registration are presented providing a contrast to the current context. The influences of broader national, local and international policy developments on to how assessment is now governed by standards are identified. In sum, they reveal the assessment of student learning for registration is utterly transformed from its historical origins, to its new positioning within a different context and culture.

2.1 The changing context for assessment in nursing education.

In the Republic of Ireland, prior to 1994, nurse training was offered as a working apprenticeship over a period of three years situated within hospital/service-based schools of nursing (An Bord Altranais 1994; Fealy 2006). Robins (2000) notes that training hospitals traditionally recruited and selected their own students and on successful completion of training, provided the skilled workforce for that setting. On commencement, trainees occupied a dual and legal role as a paid health service employee for three years with service employment taking precedence over teaching /learning (Ryan 2000). The three-year apprenticeship model was usually structured within an initial formal local preliminary training school examination first aimed at 'probationers'.

Thereafter, nationally administered preliminary examinations facilitated by the Nursing Board were undertaken at the end of the first year (Fealy 2006). A final national summative examination of theoretical content, with oral examination, evidence of successful clinical assessment and of hours completed in clinical placement rendered a student eligible for state certification/registration as a nurse (Fealy 2006). Training programmes were structured in line with standards set by the regulator of nurses, An Bord Altranais, now known as the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI), with responsibility for nurse training and processing national state registration examinations. Scammell (2016) similarly recalls in the

United Kingdom, nurse training emerged from initial preparation within an apprenticeship model to graduate entry to the profession and registration by 2010.

Whilst changes to nurse education occurred in line with regulation requirements over decades, of particular contemporary significance was the implementation of Directive 77/42/EEC. Meeting minimum requirements of the Directive required evidence that nurse training courses complied with specific requirements for theoretical and clinical instruction. Fealy (2006) highlighted that this was significant; as no longer could hospital/service-based schools of nursing provide training principally on their own terms. Now it was undertaken in compliance with explicit statutory requirements and standards.

Significantly, in 1994, the first link between pre-registration education and HE in Ireland occurred with the commencement of a pilot Registration/Diploma in Nursing (Robins 2000 p.201). By 1997, pre-registration nursing programmes including assessment activity were provided both in accordance with a third level institutional and nursing regulatory standards and requirements. Three noteworthy changes occurred alongside this development. There was an extension to the required theoretical input provided to student nurses. The link between students as full-time employees shifted to mainly supernumerary status, except for fourteen weeks paid rostered duty within the third year (Joyce 1999). The post of clinical placement coordinator (CPC) was created, dedicated to supporting student nurses in clinical placements (Drennan 2002).

Evaluation of the pilot Registration/Diploma programme undertaken in 1998 highlighted that theoretical assessment required attention (Department of Health/An Bord Altranais 1998 xiii). Recommendations included alterations to regulatory rules to create greater flexibility, rationalisation of examination procedures; greater collaboration in assessment approaches in programme design in response to developments in health care; use of a wider range of assessment strategies; greater multidisciplinary collaborative understanding in assessment design and a concentration on nursing focussed assessment within the first year. Staff development for nurse tutors (who were providing nurse education, now linked with higher education) including support for using alternative assessment methods was also recommended. The extent to which these important recommendations were

addressed by the introduction of the undergraduate award within HE in 2002, is unclear.

Published literature exploring the views and experiences of nurse tutors undertaking assessment in traditional settings was not identified. Given its new positioning in HE, it is now appropriate to consider how those providing nurse education view and experience assessment, undertaken within a contemporary environment.

2.2 Higher Education in Ireland

In keeping with international trends, Irish HE has undergone significant transformation. Stimulated by demographic trends, economic growth, state support, the policy agenda guiding decision-making across the sector set out within The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030' (DoES 2011), colloquially known as The Hunt Report.

Nationally, primary policy and legislation governing Irish Universities is contained within the Universities Act (1997) under which provisions are made for policy and planning, governance and operational arrangements. HE state policy is implemented by The HEA, with the government allocating approximately one billion euro in funding annually (HEA 2017). Walsh and Loxley (2015 p.1128) assert the strategy represents a reorientation of Irish HE, influenced by wider policy mediated through OECD and European institutions "serving broadly utilitarian objectives". The Hunt Report (DoES 2011 p.4) advocated reform and restructuring across the sector to incorporate;

1. Widening participation across the sector for students entering at differing points in their lives, incorporating improving access to adult groups traditionally underrepresented in HE;
2. Developing research capacity, in particular within high niche areas;
3. Proving a funding model that is sustainable and effective; and

4. Developing a coherent framework incorporating restructuring educational systems and institutions, driving efficiencies and effectiveness, improving governance and greater collaboration across the sector, including pursuing greater internationalisation.

Increased expectations concerning the student experience are proposed including calls for their greater involvement within a number of areas. These include, course design, planning, feedback and evaluation of programmes nationally, of teaching learning, research, and of engagement. A facet mentioned was that widening participation leading to changes in the student population will bring different influences and challenges. They are expected to impact on use and application of different modes of teaching, learning and assessment as noted below:

“The increasing diversity of students, including those from overseas, will have to be matched by teaching and assessment methods that will enable students from a range of backgrounds to discover, exploit and build on their strengths (DoES 2011 p.52).

To support recommendations A National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education was proposed. This was established in 2013. Its role and function now focuses on supporting more widespread reform and enhancement of the quality of students learning at third level whether they are full, part-time or flexible learners (National Forum 2017c) check this publication.

Alongside the above, other national policy initiatives include The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (DoES 2015/ HEA 2015), emphasising a role for HEIs in delivering on certain commitments. These include widening participation to groups traditionally underrepresented across HE, and increasing those entering via different educational routes. This is designed to:

“ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.”(DoES/HEA 2015 p. 5).

Race (2009) contends that issues, challenges and opportunities emerge in developing inclusive practices, ensuring equality of opportunity in assessment for all students (Race 2009).

Closely related, is The National Skills Strategy 2025 (DoES 2015). This targets national objectives at skilling and upskilling the existing workforce. Targets are directed at achieving skills related commitments through part-time and online educational provision. This includes a recommendation that:

“Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners”
(DoES 2015 p.11)

Nursing education has a long history in skills development assessment. In HE, clinical skills laboratories are equipped to support skills demonstration, practice and assessment. Demonstration of competence in performance of general and discipline specific clinical skills are identified within current Standards and Requirements (2005).

Additionally, clinical placement provides students with opportunities to improve clinical skills application with an appropriately registered nurse (Gaberson and Oermann 2010). Many clinical skills laboratories have dedicated instructors/ personnel, simulation equipment, integrated audiovisual information technology resources to support clinical skills teaching practice, assessment, and feedback. Despite a long history in skills development and assessment, those working in new clinical simulation environments positioned in HE require preparation for their role as teachers and nurse assessors. Not all nursing assessors are experts in nursing simulation. Kardong-Edgren et al (2017) noted poor training of nursing raters to perform skills assessment. A process of developing a standardised training method to establish the inter- and intrarater reliability of a volunteer rater group for high-stakes simulated testing was described (Kardong -Edgren et al 2017). Findings reported those academics keen to design high-stakes simulations must deeply consider scoring criteria and pilot test those criteria prior to engaging in “legally defensible high stakes testing” Kardong -Edgren et al (2017 p.67). While these aspects from the

literature relation to clinical skills education, they highlight the varied challenges facing academics assessing in simulation laboratories.

Within HE, undergraduate nursing education is now influenced by the wider HE policy agenda. It includes imperatives for reform and restructuring, widening participation, greater accountability and compliance with national policy and rationalisation that Walsh and Loxley (2015p. 1129) claim this belongs to ‘knowledge based economy’. In 2013 for the first time, a Chief Nurse was appointed to the Department of Health bringing a nursing and midwifery perspective to bear on the development of national health policy.

2.4. Qualifications and Quality Ireland

Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) is an Irish statutory body, its functions are outlined in section 44 (1) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. This sets out the functions of QQI including developing and issuing guidelines for the establishment of providers’ quality assurance (QA) procedures and those made by QQI itself. Irish universities, as providers and designated academic awarding bodies, have defined responsibilities pursuant to Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Under this Act, HEI providers are required under Section 28(1) to:

“establish procedures in writing, for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides”.

Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQ1 2016) apply to all Irish HE providers in addition to Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016 p1). How providers implement each quality assurance procedure is not prescribed. Quality assurance procedures are elaborated across eleven core areas one of these is of assessment of learners, QQI (2016 p16 3, No 6.16) guidance identifies:

“The providers assessment framework establishes the provider philosophy on, and approach to, the assessment of learners in both formal assessments (where it leads to certification) and in-house assessment. It also addresses the administration of assessment by the providers”.

Providers are expected to incorporate the processes relating to assessment; including the security and integrity of the assessment process; assessment of learners measures or infers achievement of learning, assessment is fair and consistent, undertaken with due regard for the knowledge base that currently exists. Other guidelines concern provision of feedback on, and analysis of assessment, thereby providing information for providers about programme effectiveness, teaching and learner supports; periodic review of institutional procedures, establishment of an appeals system and supports for students are further requirements outlined (QQI 2016 p.16). Periodic institutional reviews incorporating peer and independent reviewers are undertaken as an external auditing function is institutional compliance. In sum, adherence by providers and services to QQI guidelines is designed to create confidence in assuring the security quality and integrity of standards of assessment applied across Irish higher education.

QQI standards and guidelines are broadly aligned with international Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (2015) (ESG) and European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (QQI 2017). The ESG (2015 p.12) identified a standard expectation organisations and teachers should take into account concerning student-centred learning, teaching and assessment as follows:

“Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.” (ESG 2015 p.12).

Writing in medical education Scarff, Bearman and Cordery (2016) assert assessment is an important reflection of the HEI. Furthermore, in the establishment and maintenance of standards, patients/ clients are protected from students who have not yet achieved the required standard to practice.

QQI is the custodian for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Established in 2003, it provides a mechanism through which learning achievements are measured and related to each other coherently. This facilitates mutual recognition, comparison and parity of qualifications nationally and internationally (QQI 2017). A 10-level structure of generic standards are applied to develop, recognise and award qualifications. Responsibilities for maintenance of the standard and quality of

qualification rests with individual providers through policy guidelines identified above.

Central to QOI, quality assuring awards is the notion of constructive alignment. This emphasises the alignment of learning outcomes and teaching and assessment of student learning (Biggs 1996). Applying assessment in accordance with a national standard frameworks judges whether or not it effectively measures the intended learning outcomes of a programme of study in a reliable, valid way (Bloxham and Boyd 2008 p.5), thereby demonstrating accountability and transparency Constructive alignment (Biggs 2003) as an underpinning framework, is recommended in preparing programme descriptors for all QOI awards. This process refers to the learner constructing their own learning through engagement with relevant learning activities. Processes consistent with this include (a) description of intended learning, (b) teacher creating a learning environment and resources (c) applying assessment activities to enable judgment of student achievement of learning (Biggs and Tang 2007). Biggs (2003 p.28) advises assessment design should enable students demonstrate learning attainment at the highest level described within outcomes, by using verbs expressing "the very best understanding that could reasonably be expected".

Constructive alignment of programmes provide greater opportunities for mobility, transparency and fairness (Hussey and Smith 2008). Other welcome aspects include bringing greater accountability and transparency to academic efforts to support learning within programme design in H.E, more generally. Unwelcome ones include .failure to address indefinable learning outcomes, inconsistency and poorly constructed ones not aligned with teaching, learning or assessment criteria and students solely focusing on requirements necessary to pass an assessment more associated with surface learning and with unmet learning expectations (Biggs 2003; Hussey and Smith 2008; Race 2009). Biggs (2003 p.140) applied the term "backwash effect" to refer to the influence of an assessment on what is taught as well as what is assessed. He advises educators to use this with effect proactively giving considerable thought to the assessment regime not as an afterthought, but parallel to devising teaching and learning strategies.

Educational providers within HE are required, by legislation, to attend to published guidelines and criteria (QQI 2017). Types and sizes of awards, positioned within the NQF are judged on levels of knowledge, skills and competence expected of a student on completion of an award (QQI 2017). Nursing awards are positioned at level 8 on the NQF a student must accumulate 240 credits at this level. This facilitates mutual recognition of a qualification and professional mobility throughout the EU and internationally. As well as flexible progression and entry to further education arising from recognition of prior learning.

The debate on a learning outcomes approach to programme design within HE continues in particular that it represents a more complex process than fully appreciated. Joyce (2010 p.50) claims that the portrayal of constructive alignment as a way of “packaging teaching and learning into something neat and controlled”, fails to substantially account for the complexities of context and background in learning approaches taken by students. A similar argument could be made in the portrayal of aligning learning outcomes to assessment. This neatness also insufficiently accounts for the complexity of context and background in approaches to assessment taken by academics. Drawing on Joyce’s (2010) work, the contention here is that assessment in HE cannot be fully understood without connecting it to the views and experiences of important stakeholders in this relationship, including in this instance, academics.

Furthermore, in accordance with matters of good governance nursing awards must receive national approval from NMBI and comply with local higher institutional regulations prior to commencement. Each have specific requirements that concern the management of assessment within nursing and undergraduate education.

2.5 Work of The National Forum; current joint enhancement themes of assessment of, for and as learning and professional development in higher education-

Relevant work of National Forum is now presented.

2.5.1 Current enhancement themes

One of the current enhancement themes from 2016-2018 is Assessment of for as learning (National Forum 2016b). The adoption of this focus is:

“To ensure that Ireland adopts and promotes innovative, engaging, collaborative, learner-oriented and integrated approaches to assessment that take account of the complex dynamics and requirements of higher education.”

Early work of National Forum involved facilitating a national dialogue of those working in the HE sector of their “views and experiences” of assessment of, for and as learning. Prominent assessment themes arising from this dialogue relating to assessment include; its design, efficiency, validity, enhanced feedback, engagement of students, staff confidence in assessment and policy and administrative, issues.

A recent exercise involved A Profiling of Assessment Practice in Irish HE (National Forum 2017a) from 30 undergraduate degree programmes, within different fields of study, including health and welfare. It is unclear if undergraduate nursing data was profiled. The health and welfare sector is vast and includes programmes preparing students for statutory registration and those that do not. Key findings from this report include;-

1. Publicly accessible information enabling comparison and transparency about assessment differs across HE institutions;
2. There appears no common pattern of module size within programme design;
3. The number of assessments completed per European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) module is greater in single semester modules than full year modules;
4. The number of assessment per ECTS differs in differing fields of study;
5. Examination is the most common assessment method although popularity and weighting differs;
6. Assessment practices vary within differ between fields of study;
7. Student in some areas are more likely to receive feedback than in others;
8. Feedback is more likely received by students in first rather than final years;
9. Students are more likely to engage in self-assessment in later rather than earlier years.

Alongside this, questions specifically relating to assessment were inserted within the Annual Irish Student Survey of Teaching questionnaire. These were aligned with and involve a balance of assessment of, for and as learning practices (Earl and Katz 2006).

The National Forum (2016 p.1), provided greater detail about what is meant by assessment of for as learning. Each with a different focus and identified earlier, This includes assessment OF learning, to demonstrate learning; assessment for learning, a process of seeking and using assessment information to provide and give feedback on learning and teaching; and assessment as learning used to empower students to become better learners (National Forum 2016b).

2.5.2 The second enhancement theme; professional development

This enhancement means considering how developing creative engaging innovative, learner oriented approaches to assessment may be promoted. This includes building evidence across the sector whilst also taking account the complex dynamics and requirements of HE (National Forum 2016b).

A National Professional Development Framework (National Forum 2015a) is now published. This may be used to supports development of HE staff, not only those teaching, but with broader involvement in and of those associated with the education of students as follows:

“It is designed to be interpreted in a way that reflects the local priorities within which each individual operates” (National Forum 2015a)

In situating this study in a local context, it is possible to explore and more deeply understand the topic of assessment as it to reflect the priorities of undergraduate nursing education. Discipline-Based Education research (DBER) is an emerging area of inquiry, and supported by the Strategic Innovation Fund (HEA 2013). It makes capturing the views and experiences of academics within an academic discipline and award leading to registration in HE as described here, complementary to the work of the National Forum. In doing so, it recognises the significance of an academic discipline to how assessment is implemented. Just as the National Forum reports, Bloxham and Boyd (2008 p.7) assert that assessment practices are situated in the

context of an academics' experiences, traditions and expectations as they relation the needs of different academic subjects and local contexts. To this end, providing a contemporary understanding of how academics' view and experience assessment within the disciplinary based context of nursing education, is opportune.

2.6 A programme assessment strategy

The National Forum (2017b) identify a number of benefits associated with adopting a programme approach to assessment and feedback. This includes, allowing for effective and efficient use of resources, mediated through managing modular assessment load, design and positioning, and reducing competing academic pressures on students and staff. A strategy supports coherent and integrative approaches to assessment development. This occurs in dealing with different demands when assessment engagement and feedback requirements occurring within parallel modules or when scheduled relatively concurrently across a fifteen week semester.

Furthermore planning for assessment diversity addresses inclusivity incorporating universal design principles (NDA 2015). In so doing, ranging experiences of potential disadvantage socially, culturally or physically are accommodated. Examples of assessment accommodation and engagement through Universal Design for learning (UDL) include providing multiple means for students to engage in and motivation to participate in assessment; to demonstrate learning using multiple means including multimedia and group work; and for teachers using multiple means for students to represent learning material, in class or elsewhere (UDL 2017).

Dijkstra, van der Leuten and Schuwirth (2009) claim historical assessment research within medicine is mostly directed at individual measurement instruments. Whilst not denying its importance to achieve that aim, they consider it insufficient to provide comprehensive information about student competence as a whole. They reported applying what they term a programmatic approach to assessment. Making assessment fit for purpose is a principal criterion equating with quality within assessment (van der Vleuten et al 2012; van der Vleuten et al 2014). This includes addressing institutional regulations specific to disciplinary concepts relating to education within a programme assessment strategy (Rust 2002). Principles guiding programmatic assessment similarly include many aspects incorporated above,

including good governance, maximising learning, supporting decision making functions and planning for assessment methods to optimise fitness for purpose (van der Vleuten et al 2012;van der Vleuten 2015). Schuwirth, van der Vleuten and Durning (2017 p.211) recently modelled an early stage use of applying learning analytics within medical education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Using this approach each assessment:

“produces meaningful feedback to the learner or teacher. This may be quantitative qualitative or both” Schuwirth van der Leuten and Durning (2017 p. 211)

Its high value within medical education suggest Schuwirth van der Leuten and Durning (2017 p.211) is its potential to provide a “conduit where competence development is monitored and optimised.

van der Vleuten et al (2014) provides twelve tips for implementing programmatic assessment based on earlier work in this area (van der Leuten et al 2012 p.205). The model is developed from assessment principles based on empirical research in the following way:

“It specifies cycles of training, assessment and learner support activities that are complemented by intermediate and final moments of evaluation on aggregated assessment data points. A key principle is that individual data points are maximised for learning and feedback value, whereas high-stake decisions are based on the aggregation of many data points”

Imainapour and Jalili (2015 p.45) reported on implementing a programmatic approach to clinical performance assessment for student nurses undertaking a critical care internship. As an evaluation tool, it was reported as having a “positive educational impact” on student learning.

In an Irish study Brunton et al (2016) described developing a programme focussed assessment strategy to include an assessment matrix facilitating programme coherence within a modular provision model. A four phase process described included:

- (a) auditing the programme learning outcomes and assessments
- (b) consultation with stakeholders to increase variety of assessment
- (c) addressing professional development including supporting workshops on feedback, designing rubrics and assessment and feedback principles
- (d) embedding the programme-focused assessment and feedback process into quality assurance processes.

Brunton et al (2016) report ongoing iterations and monitoring processes evolve as new technologies become available. Designing an assessment and feedback strategy using deliberate and arranged longitudinal and parallel assessment activities for learning and certification, better prepares students to apply and integrate learning successfully (National Forum 2017c). Applying assessment analytics in addresses issues of continuity in learning supports a learner to analyse their own performance and develop learning goals informing learning. In particular, their use would have a high value within a distributed modular programme of learning within nursing registration where continuity of learning and extent to which students feedback use impacts on subsequent learning gains, is unknown. Using assessment information purposefully within programme mapping and or programmatic assessment are promising developments. National Forum work in supporting approaches to assessment integration, presents opportunities to consider within the disciplinary context of Irish nursing education. Exploring how a programme approach to assessment may be implemented will provide a focus and direction to the ongoing work of the researcher, in the study setting.

2.7 Local assessment context.

A five-year strategy for DCU entitled Talent Discovery and Transformation (DCU 2017) was recently launched. It maps aspirations for the next five years for students, staff and society. It highlights previously-identified graduate attributes with seven key accomplishments students are expected to acquire over the course of their education to include; creative and enterprising, solution-oriented, effective communicators, globally engaged, active leaders, committed to continuous learning. These individual attributes are acquired in addition to subject knowledge of a

discipline. More contemporary approaches to teaching, assessment and feedback have a greater capacity to support achievement of graduate attributes within undergraduate nursing education.

In the study setting, undergraduate nursing assessment is provided for and organised in accordance within institutional governance, regulatory procedures and administrative structures (DCU 2015). Academic awards are conferred when evidence of required credit is accumulated, at appropriate levels, from approved modules, and over an appropriate length of time Marks and Standards version 2017.1 (DCU 2017) and in accordance with NQF and regulatory Standards and Requirements (An Bord Altranais 2005). Compliance with university governance structures and processes for assessment enable institutions to meet their societal and legal obligations to accredit student learning (Biggs 2003; Biggs and Tang 2011).

The jointly (HEI and NMBI) approved nursing curriculum is provided for and applied within a multi professional academic environment. This incorporates requirements that knowledge of human sciences including, psychology, sociology, philosophy, philosophy, law, ethics, pharmacology and microbiology anatomy and physiology are integrated with nursing knowledge. Although, the curriculum approved at the time of the study is managed so that foundational sciences considered to underpin nursing knowledge, are positioned in early years. The vision of the academic unit in a university states it aims to be a:

“leader in education, research and community engagement with the aim of supporting practice scholarship in nursing and human science in Ireland and internationally” (DCU 2017).

Student nurses have limited exposure to clinical practice in early years when compared with the traditional registration programme but an internship is incorporated in the fourth year. A clinical skills laboratory and wide ranging access to technology and communication suites are also accessible, as required. Smaller classrooms and large lecture theatres form part of the physical infrastructure in addition educational and social infrastructure customary to a modern campus. This study was undertaken within one university school of nursing established in the mid 1990’s following initial links made with healthcare institutions and HE.

2.8 Summary

Irish higher education has undergone radical reform over recent decades, as has undergraduate nursing education recently positioned in that sector.

This chapter presented the policy context influences how assessment applied in higher education, internationally nationally and locally. It reveals the wide-ranging policy climate surrounding student entry, progression and assessment of learning in higher education. Around the time of considering exploring the topic of assessment, considerable international national and internal institutional and nursing developments had occurred and are ongoing This changed context provided a setting to consider how assessing may be conceptualised by academic staff employed in assessing within one programme of education. Recent Irish developments emanating from National Forum through its current enhancement theme is significant in terms of creating a dynamic climate for change in how assessment will be conceptualised and applied in the future. National Forum (2015a) developed a professional development framework for those widely involved in education of students. This emphasised the importance of taking the local context into consideration in supporting the enhancement of assessment through professional development activities, formal and informal. The local context to the study setting was described. The chapter emphasised that the establishment and maintenance of assessment standards within an academic programme supported by a programme or programmatic approach, within an award leading to registration in particular, means that patients / clients are better protected from students who have not yet achieved the required standard to practice nursing. This makes a study into how academics view and experience assessment in that context a timely one. The next chapter examines literature appropriate to the study topic.

Chapter 3 Literature review

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, literature on assessment, and in particular on academics' views on, and experiences of, assessment including their conceptions of, or approaches to is critically reviewed. Tracy's (2010) method for reviewing qualitative research was applied. Thereafter quantitative research literature on assessment in HE is reviewed. Conceptions of assessment of teachers in formal education is not considered. This is applied in a context and culture that differs from adult educational settings.

3.1 Search strategy applied to review literature

A literature review is conducted to gain and display a deep understanding of the topic under consideration. This was undertaken identify knowledge gaps in the area (Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan 2008). In January 2013, an initial search for published material exploring academics' conceptions of assessment within undergraduate nursing education was undertaken with the assistance of a subject librarian. This included searching databases under headings such as subject titles, author index and reviewing abstracts and bibliographies. Further reviews were undertaken in 2015 and 2017, using the same technique to capture literature published since then. Published material relating to assessment within the broader context of health education was consulted, including medical or health professional education in HE.

Using keyword search terms, a number of contemporary and historical publications on research, teaching, learning, assessment and assessment in higher education nursing and phenomenography were sourced. They were reviewed for their appropriateness for this study. Searching was conducted using subject terms in Academic Search Complete a full text journal database Education Research Information Center (ERIC) datasets with most publications peer reviewed.

The terms academic or academics and views or conceptions or beliefs or experiences or perceptions and assessment and nursing yielded 20,952 results in ERIC and 3,045 within Academic Search Complete. However, to control the search Boolean operators AND reduced the search results i.e. assessment and undergraduate education; OR was applied to link words together assessment or assessing, and NOT was applied as a limiter for example school so that pre- university setting were

excluded. Revising search terms applying no date limit yielded in total 82 (in ERIC) and 54 (Academic Search Complete). These were saved for this review. Thereafter initial abstract reading and later fuller reading indicated whether or not they were relevant in terms of the topic of interest, primary research, opinion pieces or non-research literature, or applied in settings not considered appropriate to this study i.e. compulsory school sector.

Within each database a named author search was conducted for some profile writers including Professors S. Bloxham, S. Brown, P. Race, P. Rust; all publish and are active contributors to assessment conferences and assessment in Higher Education more generally. Professors David Boud, Peter Knight, Paul Ramsden, Noel Entwistle, were known to be also publishing widely in this area.

Dr Gavin Brown was actively considered, much of his work is open source, an author search of Brown, Gavin and conceptions and assessment was undertaken in academic search premier and 12 publications were sourced with many studies conducted with teachers in the early school sector. It is interesting to note that few academics in the Republic of Ireland are associated with published work in assessment in H.E. Published material was located from Irish conferences and Universities much of which is available as open source but undertaken by visiting academics from the UK and overseas. Reports and conference proceedings where available were reviewed as were Doctoral study available as open source through DORAS, the DCU open access institutional repository and RIAN, was explored, yielding limited results. The work of National Forum was fully reviewed

Joyce's (2010) doctoral phenomenological study is accessible through the RIAN portal. It explores approaches to learning of postgraduate students within healthcare professions; placing their experiences within the perspectives of lecturers and external examiner for a programme. The findings indicate focussing on dynamic, pluralist and relational forms of curriculum development is needed to align with the learning needs of postgraduate students with differing learning agendas. This study emphasises the role of disciplinary specific approaches to educational research as a significant and beneficial arena.

Each of the qualitative studies related to this study are considered in order to consolidate the existing theoretical and empirical knowledge relating to what is already known about the research topic. In this chapter, the literature review first focuses on applying Tracy's (2010) quality criteria to research exploring orientations or conceptions of assessment in HE. Thereafter, literature on conceptions of assessment is considered. Thus the review is organised into two main sections as follows;-

1. Qualitative research exploring academics' conceptions or orientations towards assessment within higher education.
2. Quantitative research exploring academics' conceptions of teaching in HE some include a reference to assessment and feedback and some do not.

3.2 Applying Tracy's (2010) criteria to reviewing the literature on conceptions/ orientations /approaches to assessment within HE.

In considering the notion of quality in research published within the qualitative domain Tracy (2010) conceptualises eight key markers of universal criteria for qualitative quality that may be applied across the qualitative landscape. Tracy (2010 p.838) advocates relying on rules or best practice, guidelines or structures “regularly serve as helpful pedagogical launching pads, across a variety of interpretive arts”.

The eight point conceptualisation of quality within qualitative research is marked by the following criteria (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. This conceptualisation offered the researcher subtly different perspectives and opinions, throwing sometimes fresh light on each criterion leading to a deeper and more informed critique of research literature informing this study more broadly. Applying Tracy's (2010) finely grained criteria led to some overlapping of discussion points. But the opportunity to explore each criterion individually provided a more informed view of how to report on literature to defend this qualitative phenomenographic study.

3.2.1 Worthy topic for consideration

Tracy (2010 p.840) calls the first component of qualitative quality “worthiness” “This criterion considers whether or not the research topic is relevant, timely, significant and interesting. When laying the groundwork for a study, introductions lead a reader into an awareness of the importance of the topic, generally and specific to the research context. Here its parameters are established and a gap in knowledge as it relates to the topic in focus is presented making it worthy of further consideration applying the methodology chosen (Stapa et al 2013). The following literature was reviewed using Tracys (2010) criteria in the following order; Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012; Halinen et al 2014; Kantar 2014 and Bearman et al 2017 .

A consensus amongst publications reviewed for this work agree with the contention of Biggs and Tang (2006) that assessment is integral to student learning in HE yet little remains known about academics orientations, views, experiences, conceptualise or engage with assessment (or similar noun applied). Akerlind (2008), proposes when conceptions (or other noun applied) of educational phenomenon are studied in a population, variation is not only discernible, but it is found to impact substantially on student learning. A general awareness of the need to understand faculty or academics’ views of assessment was considered worthy because of its impact on the outcomes of learning as well as the topic as yet, underexplored.

Samuelowicz and Bain’s (2002) work exploring academics’ orientations to assessment was acknowledged as making the primary contribution to work in this area. They considered exploring academics’ orientations to assessment timely and fitting given the general awareness amongst the academic community that assessment powerfully influences student learning. They reported that as assessment is applied to determine different learning outcomes, by different academics, a dearth in knowledge relating to academics’ orientations or characteristic way of practising was noted. Their conjecture was it is conceivable academics assess different things in different ways because their beliefs about assessment differ. This provided the motivation to dialogue with academics and in developing orientations to assessment to broaden and deepen general understandings of this topic (Samuelowicz and Bain

2002). This study in making a primary contribution to this area makes it worthy, and of interest to academic communities.

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) proposed despite many factors known to enhance the quality of student learning in HE assessment is the principal driver of student learning. The backwash effect of assessment is best captured in the sentiment “the quickest way to change student learning is to change the form of assessment. To better understanding academic teachers ways of understanding the role of assessment in student learning, Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) applied a phenomenographic approach to exploring academics’ awareness of the backwash effect of assessment. Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005 p.293) reported that educational context impacts on the function assessment serves and concluded in certain disciplines, academics may feel compelled to test knowledge acquisition given for example addressing patient safety concerns. It is noteworthy, Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) collected data for this study, at a time when Irish undergraduate nursing had integrated into HE. This appears the first phenomenographic study, describing findings of eight categories of conceptions, positioned within a two-dimensional outcome space.

Postareff et al (2012) reported the effect of subject discipline and teaching culture on the assessment practices of pharmacy academics was, as yet, unknown. They proposed within professional programmes of registration education, teaching and learning are more frequently explored rather than deeper considerations relating to concepts and practices of assessment (Postareff et al 2012). Exploring pharmacy academics conceptions of assessment and assessment practices was considered worthy and relevant, significant and timely given their involvement in previous research exploring conceptions of teaching. This revealed those teaching in soft sciences tend to be more learning focused than those in hard sciences, where in the latter exact and factual material is found. Furthermore Postereff et al (2012) conjecture was the discipline of pharmacy has its own way of thinking and practising providing a rationale for exploring pharmacy academics conceptions of assessment and their assessment practices.

Halinen et al (2014) explored life science lecturers discourses on assessment. Their conjecture in studying the reflective talk of life science academics was founded on

the view that educational values, aims and content of professional courses in HE are accentuated in the manner students are assessed. Examining life sciences teachers reflective talk was intended to provide a greater understanding of reasons behind assessment practices applied in that disciplinary context. Drawing on McDonald and Boud's (2003) work Halinen et al (2014 p. 21) reported, persistence of hierarchical arrangements between students and teachers is found within a culture of assessment "of" learning. This was not considered to support student autonomy, ease the student learning process or support and enhance assessment "for" and "as" learning approaches. Halinen et al (2014) identify that a greater focus on assessment for and as learning requires more long-term staff development, institutional support and collaboration to promote the quality of assessment practices. These were reasons proffered for exploring the topic in the manner proposed, making it worthy of consideration.

Kantar's (2014) study, positioned within nursing education, was prompted by the contention that positioning nursing education into HE is accompanied by an expectation that it better prepares graduates to apply their reflective, inquiry and self-regulatory capacities. Using qualitative content analysis Kantar (2014) examined assessment and instructional skills applied within three pre-registration curriculae to determine their efficacy in promoting higher order thinking skills. A high preponderance of teaching content and examining for retention was apparent across the three nursing curriculae studied. Kantar (2014) reported a predominant test-driven and teacher-led curriculum with high value placed on testing only to determine learning. This contrasted with minimal application of more contemporary approaches that accompany an expectation that a student transfers learning from classrooms to healthcare practice. This research was completed within a contemporary context and culture for nursing education and of interest to that setting.

Finally, Bearman et al (2017 p.554) reported on a study exploring how university teachers design and develop assessment in HE. Bearman et al (2017) applied a qualitative approach to explore how a cross sectional group of academics design assessment as "work as done" (as distinct from idealised work) capturing insights into an area not previously explored. Qualitative descriptions revealed how educators

think about assessment design, taking into account “the nuances of their personal, departmental, disciplinary and institutional environments” (Bearman et al 2017 p.555). A framework of how university teachers design assessment presented, commenced with considering the purposes of assessment, then to its application to the contexts of assessment where it is provided, including accounting for competing environmental and personal factors in its management. Then to selection of assessment tasks appropriate to learning outcomes and consideration of feedback processes. Finally, attention to interactions needed with learners and colleagues as part of assessment activity. This recently published framework indicates the progression of assessment literature in focussing on directly developing academics individual assessment practices.

In all studies reviewed, adoption of a qualitative approach to researching the topic in question was considered fitting. Reasons included it supported capturing a perspective of individuals or groups directly engaged in this assessment on the ground, and of broadening understanding of assessment generally or within a subject discipline specifically. Engaging with the topic in the manner proposed for example, within a discipline was linked to supporting further education of academic staff in a manner fitting to their context and environment (Samuelowicz and Bain 2000; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012; Kantar 2014; Halinen et al 2014; Bearman et al 2017).

Another commonality is when introducing the topic of assessment itself, it was accompanied by an appreciation of its multi layered and multi complex nature within HE. A clear understanding conveyed in the literature presented in introductory paragraphs was that despite assessment involving the gathering of information and interpretation of evidence to determine learning; it incorporates many other aspects and influences when undertaken by adults and designed and provided by academics within HE. Apart from Kantar (2014) the work reviewed focussed directly on the academic(s) activity and not directly students in the assessment context.

Previous involvement in research exploring conceptions of teaching, where variation was identified across a range of perspectives studies, provided a rationale for embarking on a study of academics views on assessment generally (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002) and within a discipline specifically (Postareff et al 2012; Halinen et

al; 2014; Kantar 2014). A rationale not emphasised was poor ratings of assessment in student satisfaction surveys or quality reviews, despite the many local and national initiatives and policies directed at improving practice. This is emphasised in UK publications. However, none of the work reviewed here was completed within the UK third level sector.

Both Postareff et al (2012 p.85) and Halinen et al (2014 p.17) claim that discipline based academic cultures tend to have their own way of thinking and practising, presenting a challenge to assessment related improvements. Both recognised that science related teachers are recognised as more content centered than are humanities teachers, A rationale provided was that the epistemology of science is constructed on knowledges built cumulatively and that it is atomistic in nature. (Halinen et al 2014) e teachers as more likely to adopt assessment practices that examine knowledge transmission, focussing on memorising concepts and phenomena, or test superficial learning. Postareff et al (2012) found that these type of aspects concerning given pharmacists have high levels of responsibility for patient care. A similar concern understandably would be reflected in medical, dentistry and nursing education where professionals require registration to practice.

In summary, a qualitative description of academics' orientations or conceptions of assessment is a topic worthy, relevant, significant of professional interest to those working in a multidisciplinary academic grouping specifically. Despite the literature identifying how critical assessment is to student learning in HE a missing link is exploring the topic with a group of academics grounded in their practices. A worthy topic is theoretically and conceptually compelling and grow from timely societal or personal events (Tracy 2010 p.840)

This small body of assessment research is unlikely to arouse the public's interest. However not emphasised is assessment is part of everyday practice undertaken by academics' within HE. Deeper scrutiny contributes to an enhanced visibility and transparency of how this work is undertaken and explored. Opportunities to collaborate and dialogue with those engaged with the publications just reviewed, provides openings to share insights. This can support reporting, publishing and further research as professional development activities.

3.2.2 Rich rigour, nuance and complexity

High quality qualitative research, suggests Tracy (2010 p.841), is “marked by rich complexity of abundance” contrasting with quantitative work appreciating precision. In observance of procedures and methods contributing to rich rigour, Tracy (2010) asks if reports include sufficient material to enable a reader consider how processes were completed, to what extent and if sufficient time was spent in the field. These issues are now discussed together as they relation to each study reviewed.

The number of participants in the studies reported varied. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) n=20; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) n=46; Postareff et al (2012) n=28; Halnen et al (2014) n=15, and Bearman et al (2017) n=33. Apart from Kantar (2014), who undertook qualitative content analysis of curriculum documentation and Bearman et al’s (2017) reporting of using different data collection methods, data were collected once, rather have over various points in time.

The focus generally reported was on a participants’ discussions or reflective accounts of assessment “on the ground” or their” actual ” practices or “working” or “real” conceptions or “real work” or “work as done” or normal in teaching practice . This is differentiated from the “ideal assessment” or “assessment as it may be imagined”. This influenced selection of the methodology, including mostly use of individual interviews with probing, clarification and further questioning, if needed. An acknowledged disjunction between educators’ conceptions of teaching and their claimed or actual teaching practices have been identified (Murray and MacDonald 1997). This is frequently cited as a reason for exploring experiences “grounded” in the real world of practice are explored.

When interviews were applied, they were dialogic; semi structured or open ended, flexible, probing or interactive interviews indicating that participation between interviewer and interviewee was purposeful. Whole interview transcriptions provided the data for content analysis, with more than one person involved in this process. This was a facet considered to contribute to credibility of findings. Analysis process described followed the qualitative tradition of identifying beliefs, conceptions or orientations into a limited number of categories including of subcategories. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) applied a threefold approach to

delineate orientations using in combination constant comparative method of categorisation (Strauss and Corbin 1997), thereafter-implicit beliefs were extracted using “personal constructs” psychology, then overall orientations were checked against global consistency, and not against local nuance and variation. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) aligned orientations to most dominant one evident in each participants interview as more than one belief may be displayed in an interview. Findings were presented representing variation across a range in orientations within an organising framework. Categories were assigned and labelled depicting a contrast of six orientations with belief dimensions (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002). Anchored at one end they reflected a knowledge production orientation and at the other end knowledge transformation. Six orientations were considered within three groupings; the underpinning beliefs central to each orientation differentiated one from the other. A first orientation reflected commonalities of an established body of knowledge that may be reproduced- here assessment is applied to determine correct recollection of facts and information. Methods applied included knowledge, examinations quizzes calculations. A second orientation included perceptions that students must display an ability to apply teacher/ expert structured knowledge to modified situations. A nursing story provides an account of providing assessment within an applied discipline. Assessment here was considered to serve several functions; to motivate and influence learning, ensure attainment of nursing standards and entry to the profession, determining competence in knowledge and skills as a professional, incentivising hard work and acting as an external and internal reward. Negative consequences of using assessment to apply teacher/ expert structured knowledge to modified situation reported included a narrowing of learning. Assessment was also used to provide feedback and feedforward in terms of identifying student shortcomings, and informing teaching. Beliefs about what should be assessed stems from a perception of nursing as an applied discipline requiring demonstration of applied knowledge in the practical setting. Consistent with a second orientation was moving beyond memorisation and recall of information provided to a student. Integration of knowledge, as well as reorganisation of knowledge beyond what was substantially provided to them by a teacher. In application of examination questions a good answer was understood in qualitative terms requiring an adequate discussion, adopting a critical stance to issues, showing depth and breadth and linked to

professional concepts, roles and activity. A poor one merely a list obtained from lecturers and textbooks, representing surface learning.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) described underpinning beliefs within the third orientation included that students must develop their own understandings by transforming established knowledge, using it for particular purposes. Of the three orientations presented on a continuum assessment orientations reflected a knowledge reproduction and at the other end knowledge transformation orientation and in the second a partly transformational/ partly reproductive orientation.

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005 p.288) as previously reported applied a whole transcript approach to phenomenographic interview analysis. Participant data considered in relation to each other was considered “mutually illuminating”. They also acknowledged participants may not espouse the same conceptions in different context and times, but asserted variation in conceptions elicited from analysis was considered generalisable across contexts. Some significant issues worth mentioning in this study include. Persistent failure to improve assessment within the academic community is located in beliefs academics' about learning, teaching and assessment, but in particular to how one understands “basic knowledge “within a discipline; and the other is whether the relation between teaching and assessment is of an internal or external nature. Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) conclude failure to consider teachers views represents a “missing link” in attempts to improve assessment practices.

Postareff et al (2012) described using content analysis (Flick 2007a) to analyse interview data. The aim was to first identify all variation in interview descriptions and thereafter constant comparison applied to develop categorisation further comparison and to final categorisation. Postareff et al (2012) presented five categories of conceptions of the purpose of assessment and assessment practices with each teachers' conception classified within one category. The five categories were ordered on a hierarchical continuum where higher conceptions contained elements of lower ones but not vice- versa. A further arrangement of the five categories into two main groupings was provided and discussed. On the continuum anchored at one point were narrow and non-reflective reproductive descriptions of the purpose of

assessment to transformational conceptions within which were positioned more complex views.

Halinen et al (2014 p.18) notes each individual transcript was handled separately to preserve the nuance and complexity of participants' own thinking about contextual assessment. They applied Mayrings' (2000) qualitative content text analysis technique to elicit each teachers thinking about assessment. The process described included reading transcripts, developing preliminary impressions, with reflective talk analysed in accordance with the reflective processes of content, process and premise a model described by Kreber and Castledon (2009) and finally to three categorisation of life science teacher's assessment reflective discourse. A first category categorised as status quo, identified pedagogical awareness of assessment was not apparent in teachers discourse. However, whilst questioning their practice and proposing future idea regarding change, they were less keen to introduce change into their practice. In the third, they noted conscious development of assessment was found in the motivation to transform awareness into action, with the depth of assessment discourse considered multifaceted and reflective.

Kantar (2014) applied content analysis to the curriculum documentation, using Posner's (2004) criteria for curriculum evaluation and Neumann's (2006) coding system. This revealed that examination/testing was applied more frequently as the assessment strategy in nursing programmes, although some variation was noted. Kantar (2014) reported assessment to determine student nurses' higher order thinking skills was not overly apparent in documentation reviewed. The role of the teacher/educator in instruction and assessment context was test driven and teacher led. It was also reported learner centred teaching and assessing strategies were applied more frequently during clinical assessment. However, if this assessment was applied in a simulated clinical laboratory or clinical placement is unclear. A reference to tutors and preceptors applying clinical assessment using case studies, case presentations and patient education approaches was made but not explained in sufficient detail to determine if educators/ teachers assess in clinical or simulated settings. The professional background of nursing teachers / educators is neither explained nor national or local context of undergraduate nursing education

discussed. Kantar's' (2014) study highlights the value of a more nuanced reporting of the study context to make comparison of findings to similar contexts possible.

Bearman et al (2017) provided an outline of processes in developing a conceptual framework for assessment design decision- making. This drew on interview data from individuals involved on the ground in assessment decision making in HE. They illuminated the processes of developing the framework in greater depth including, drawing on grounded theory approaches of Strauss and Corbin (1990), using Kennedy and Lindgard's (2006) open coding, and Dedose (2012) software approaches. Together, these produced qualitative categorical descriptions of how university teachers design assessment. This project was to develop a resource for use by academics in practice. Illustrations of categorical schemes in findings were supported by verbal descriptions of participants' dialogue to convey their appropriate position on the continuum. They also conveyed the qualitative difference between one and the other, for a reader. They remarked on the importance of past experiences of assessment and of its impact on the current contexts of an academics practice. A value and limitation associated with disciplinary assessment traditions was noted as either supporting innovation or restricting practices. They also recommended targeted organisational support is required to support local solutions appropriate for local contexts. Finally, calls for the professional development of academics and to them valuing development of assessment, in the way research is valued.

3.2 3 Sincerity

Tracy (2010 p.841) asks whether a qualitative study is marked by sincerity, a concept understood "as an end goal can be achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency and data auditing". Closely associated with authenticity and genuineness in research conducted in the qualitative paradigm, it concerns the researchers examining their own stake in the research process. Each study was reported a format directed at an academic audience and academic developers in mind, a facet mentioned in discussing implications of each study for practice. Self-reflexivity claims Tracy (2010 p.842) is considered to be "honest and authentic with oneself, "one's research and one's audience". Engaging in self-reflexivity is considered a valuable resource within qualitative work where procedures applied are contingent on decisions made by those who are neither

neutral nor distant observers from the inquiry process itself (Houghton et al 2013 p. 15) of collecting and analysing data. Recording of ones' thoughts, actions, decisions, challenges and opportunities throughout the research process enhances credibility, dependability, transparency as well as the sincerity of the piece (Houghton et al 2013 p.15). A research study has longitudinal significance; not a once off event rather more a process engaged with from early design to conclusions and beyond (Tracy 2010). Self- reflexivity was not overtly reported in the literature reviewed. Those involved and not reported may have applied it. These issues represent opportunities lost but also challenges on how issues that arise were overcome, for other researchers completing similar or cross-cultural research. If self-reflexivity played a role in the outcome of the published piece it was not emphasised. However Bearman et al (2017) work involved documenting an explicit and reflexive shared understanding of what was significant about assessment.

3.2.4 Credibility

Another of Tracy's (2010 p.842) criteria is credibility. Practices supporting this include thick description, triangulation and crystallisation with concepts differing in intent, in addition to multivocality and member reflections. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that prolonged engagement with a study and thick description enhances its credibility. The length and extent of engagement with the topic in the field, detail and quality of reporting, enable a reader draw conclusions as they relate findings to other settings, individuals and situations. For Tracy (2010 p.842) addressing thick description provides a reader with a credible account of the cultural, social and individual or a sense of the "real" work undertaken.

Raw data from interview transcripts denoted within categorisations of conceptions showed how participants' verbal accounts were analysed and these enabled readers consider the interpretations made by the researcher (Houghton et al 2013). It also provided a reader with a clearer picture of words participants' used to convey a message in an interview. Additionally, information including tables illustrating coding and multi- participant textual data sources as well as and sometimes in addition to illustrative stories of particular groupings were well represented. Dialogic extracts conveying the distinction between conception or orientations were reported. These support a reader to judge the credibility of findings presented. No

analytic memo notes were included; if they had, they would have provided a more complete account and enhanced credibility and dependability of the publications. Although limited word counts in academic publications may leave little room for extensive additional material.

Crystallisation is a process going beyond triangulation; its intention is not in advancing one truth, but rather opening up the data to deeper understandings and complexity (Tracy 2010 p. 843). None of those reviewed reported it during analysis. Neither did they report if they used time out or suspended analysis to reflect on the conceptual categorisation and the identification of patterns or themes, or not, in transcriptions. It was noted transcription was time consuming and prolonged engagement in the process of analysis involving a number of iteration and in most cases, involved more than one person. The analysis process commenced with initial reading of transcripts progressing to categorisation and to final categorisations presented in the work reviewed .

Multivocality is when the researcher considers multiple voices in reporting and analysis and following this if relevant thereafter. The use of member/ participant reflections or checking or consideration of how findings may be reported back to participants was reported. Furthermore opening a study to this critique and to its impacts on reinterpretation are aspects of multivocality that are considered to enhance credibility. There are many challenges to member checking. They include the stage at which participants are shown findings, whether as verbatim transcriptions or after interpretation and analysis are complete; in the latter participants' responses may not be incorporated (Haughton 2013). It would appear the researchers relationships with participants' ceased after data collection.

3.2.5 Resonance

Resonance has its genesis within the psychotherapeutic tradition of “systemic constructivist approaches to the discipline”; this stresses relationships as “intersubjective co-constructed situations” (Medicao et al 20145 p.353). Tracy (2010 p.16) asserts that addressing resonance within high quality research means it must have impact with an “ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience”. Two intersecting practices are described to determine resonance aesthetic merit and

naturalistic generalisation/ transferability. The first criterion has not commonly occupied a central role in research publications. However, each publication featured certain ways of informing the researcher and this assessment study, aesthetically. Issues of transferability or natural generalisation are accounted for together in this section.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) publication was a lengthy account of the entire study in accordance with requirements of a published peer reviewed journal. This primary research indicated how orientations to assessment were developed and described as “characteristic perspectives and practices” Samuelowicz and Bain (2002 p.176), provided in sufficient detail and complexity how their findings could resonate with this current study. That is despite differences in context and time. The qualitative narrative from a nursing teacher, depicting an orientation to assessment revealed how this is grounded in practice, was engaging. Although it may not be considered an evocative publication, its “aesthetic impact” (Tracy 2010 p.845) lay in making this reader think and examine her own assessing experiences as a student and teacher within nursing education. An account of the research process indicating how orientations to assessment described as “characteristic perspectives and practices” Samuelowicz and Bain’s work (2002 p.176) was sufficiently detailed to indicate the findings could be applicable to the current study, despite differences in context and time.

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) presented this research study with findings of three general conceptions of the backwash effect of assessment. As the only phenomenographic study located on this topic, its aesthetic merit (Tracy 2010 p.845) lay in its methodological significance to the researcher. Issues of transferability resonated in particular with the methodological concepts providing helpful direction to the present study.

Postareff et al’s (2012) study was described with immense clarity and precision, presented in a manner aesthetically pleasing to read. Qualitative narratives applied skillfully conveyed to a reader how the continuum from teacher to student centered conceptions of assessment emerged from the research process. The findings were extracted from a population engaged in pharmacy teaching. A similarity in preparing graduates for work within a professionally regulated context overlaps with this

study. In particular with concerns relating to ensuring safety and accuracy of skills and knowledge. Thus, issues of transferability are achieved when a reader feels it “overlaps with their situation” (Tracy 2010 p.845). Furthermore, this study is published since implementation of the Bologna Process and creation of a European Higher Educational Arena, creating a further overlap with this current study.

Halinen et al’s (2014) work, although presented with clarity, appeared directed at biological science audience, published for that academic grouping. Halinen et al (2014) highlighted difficulties may arise in attempts to change life science teachers conceptions towards fostering assessment “for” and “as” learning. They recommended tailored pedagogic education or coaching for individual teachers, peer support and institutional encouragement to challenge existing status quo to change the focus from assessment of learning to as and for learning. They also recommend supporting trail blazing life science teachers’ assessment practices.

Life science teachers are directly involved in the education of student nurses. The potential for transferability and resonance emerges here. Halinen et al (2014) findings are valuable to another setting and population, beyond the immediate confines of the site where it was initially conducted.

Bearman et al’s (2017) recent work particularly resonated with the current study although published after data collection, analysis and findings were reported. In many aspects the study itself, as described resonated with the researcher, overlapping with this research study. Seale (2000 p.118) in considering generalisation/transferability issues argues thick description “gives a reader a vicarious experience of being there”, enabling a reader to make their own judgements as to the possibility of applying research to a setting they know. Bearmans et al’s (2017) practical and theoretical similarity was noted in the readings described; its findings and discussion with many issues addressed broadly overlapping and resonated with this current study.

Kantar’s (2014) Lebanese study published in a nursing journal was presented and although undertaken in a nursing and higher education, it resonated. In particular, the assessment context described, resonated with the current study context.

3.2.6 Significant contribution to knowledge

Tracy (2010 p.846) asserts theoretically significant research is “intellectually implicative for the scholarly community” by extending, building, and critiquing disciplinary knowledge. In terms of the significant contribution of this work and opportunities for generalisation to a wider audience, there were opportunities for researchers to do this. The application of a qualitative methodology enabled Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) to engage in scrutiny and this made a significant contribution to knowledge. It revealed for the first time subtle but distinctive variation within academic orientations to assessment. Through deeper consideration it captured nuances and complexity associated with an orientation to assessment. They uncovered differing beliefs about the nature and structure of knowledge and how academics view the student contribution as significant to having an orientation. For example, within two teacher centred orientations where knowledge transformation is not an expectation of the student, the role of assessment was viewed as motivating students to learn or as a source of feedback. Marton (2000) explained that teachers’ intentions and approaches about what students should learn and how they will learn; influence in turn the learning approach a student adopts.

It is already reported that an abundance of research is available on many different aspects and perspectives concerning assessment in HE. However, few have qualitatively explored the role of educators intentions and approaches or their relationship with assessment. This is apparent in the amount of publications accessed for this review. Five were initially sourced and one later in 2017. It may be argued that application of a phenomenographic approach to study assessment within higher education given its relational focus, has played a significant role in contributing to the drive to connect these activities in HE (Bloxham and Boyd 2008- Hagstrom and Lindberg 2013)

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005), for example, found how teachers understand the notion of basic knowledge within one’s academic discipline as well as the relationship between teaching and assessment as key factors in how teachers view assessment. Application of a phenomenographic approach enabled closer scrutiny of this topic. Both findings contribute to understandings of assessment in a significant way.

3.2.7 Ethics

In addition to addressing multivocality and researcher self-reflexivity as ethical practices, Tracy (2010 p.846) proposes ethical issues constitute an “end goal of qualitative quality itself”. The penultimate component of this conceptualisation of qualitative quality is how a researcher addresses procedural, situational, relational and exit ethics. In the studies reviewed, just two referred to obtaining ethical approval from an institutional board prior to embarking on the research, Kantar (2014) and Bearman et al (2017). Although Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm’s (2005) study was grant supported, obtaining ethical approval was not addressed. When dialogic contributions were reported, they were anonymised however academic units were identified in studies reported. Arthur et al (2012) advise a researcher of procedures when conducting interviews to listen carefully, confirm understanding of words used, rephrase questions if appropriate for clarity, monitor personal assumptions and listen and challenge expressions. This is because a qualitative researcher is obliged to be attuned to sensitive issues and potential conflicts of interests. Furthermore using dialogic interviews a researcher is obtaining an insight into the topic in focus, by accessing an individual private thoughts and so must be aware of the need to protect and maintain their right to privacy (Arksey and Knight 1999). This means that beyond data collection and analysis to respecting a participants’ contribution in reporting (Tracy 2010). Many of the studies reviewed appear situated in the researchers workplace, with researcher affiliations outlined in the front of publications. It is surprising ethics were not addressed more fully. Another dimension of ethical conduct is the relationship between researcher and participant whether as peers, or known to each other as colleagues or by reputation. Exciting ethics were not explicitly mentioned in the work reviewed. Tracy (2010 p.847) refers this as:

“beyond the data collection phase to how researchers leave the scene and share the results”.

Neither was if questioning, probing or communication was in any way modified due to the existence of researcher-, participant relationship situated in the workplace. It must also be noted, the level of confidentiality required in research is debated within the literature with some arguing it may be overstated (Wiles et al; 2006; Yu 2008). In

some contexts, participants are willing to include their names within a publication. However, confidentiality is a desired principal of ethical research and refers to protecting a participant from unwarranted intrusion of privacy (Wiles et al 2006). Finally, as insider research studies, issues of power relations between participant and researcher were not fully addressed in the publications reviewed where interviews were used. Although in some cases some of the researchers due to their academic role, were distanced from participant's and data collection. Within an asymmetrical relation, insider power may be viewed negatively but if viewed positively power may be viewed as a process of reciprocity, negotiation and dialogue between researcher and participant (Ben-Ari and Enosh 2013). In considering ethics, power is an issue with the researcher holding power of designing a study, analysis, presentation and dissemination of findings. Alternatively, a participant selects to participate, what to say, and not say in an interview. Power is an ethical issue and directly concerned with a need to preserve confidentiality. These issues may have been addressed but adequately reported on in the work reviewed.

3.2.8 Meaningful coherence

Meaningfully coherent research, Tracy (2010 p.848) claims

“eloquently interconnects research design, data collection analysis with the theoretical framework”.

Holly and Altrichter (2012) engage with the topic of coherence in social science research, given qualitative data may be captured from many different sources. A challenge then arises to ensure all data is coherently woven together. Holly and Altrichter (2012 p.43) discuss using research diaries, logs, memos, journals electronic or paper, as a tool to capture data in supporting ongoing self-understanding, reflection, interpretation and analysis. They may also be used as a tool to keep a researcher on track ensuring the research is achieving its stated purpose over a period. The use of diaries or other formats for the integrative purposes just described was not overtly apparent in reporting.

Another path in achieving the coherence component Tracy (2010) suggests is asking, “if the research achieves what it purports to be about”. In the publications reviewed, abstracts and research intentions were identified; reviewed literature situated

previous work conducted in the area. Methodologies were defended and applied congruently and findings, discussions conclusions and recommendations linked to the study purpose. They were presented for an academic audience. All but Kantar (2014), reported more than one author, each were named and institutional affiliation stated. However, these are requirements for publishing within peer reviewed journals and audiences when making scholarly contributions to a body of knowledge

3.4 Quantitative research exploring conceptions of assessment

Some studies have examined approaches to assessment using applying quantitative methods in adult learning contexts. Brown (2002; 2004; 2013) devised a self-report questionnaire to examine conceptions of assessment, a measure developed within formal schooling based on the four main goals of assessment. Measures included, school accountability, student accountability, improvement and irrelevance. Fletcher et al (2012) administered Browns (2006) abridged Conceptions of Assessment (CoA) questionnaire to measure to both academics' and students' conceptions across four universities and higher education facilities in New Zealand. On a scale, from strongly agree to disagree, participants' indicate one of six degrees of agreement or not regarding their conceptions of assessment. The voluntary sample included, 877 academics, males and females and 1224, first year undergraduate students only.

They noted that academics and teachers come to the teaching/learning process influenced by their prior perceptions experiences and personal motivations. These in turn influence the quality of learning, teaching and assessment applied by an educator. It was also reported that despite assessment serving multiple purposes in HE, the views and attitudes of staff and students separately regarding different aspects of assessment although relevant, are as yet unknown. Yet views and attitudes have wide reaching implications for both groups shaping how both engage together and with assessment in different ways. Fletcher et al (2012) notes that, knowing where points of difference exist between the two groups allows for reconciliation of perceptions, through more informed understanding of assessment practices applied within HE. In acknowledging a dearth of research on academics' conceptions of assessment to date, Fletcher et al (2012) proposed historic public confidence in academic work undertaken by experts in their cognate discipline, a likely

explanation. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that academic experts may not be skilled assessors in that discipline.

Whilst the term assessment itself was not defined, conceptions of assessment were described as “beliefs, meanings and understandings of assessment” (Fletcher 2012 p.120). These are considered to shape problems, tasks and thereby impact on assessing actions. A valuable application of the self-report inventory is of using it within professional development activities. This can be applied to support greater self-awareness of and in challenging educators own conceptions of assessment. Kuppinger and Jucks (2017) note that changes in teaching and learning practices are considered to occur only when conceptions first change. However, Duffy (2005) asserts the order of whether it is practices or conceptions that change first means exploring conceptions in developmental work lacks clarity.

Fletcher et al (2012) reported that not all academic grades or disciplines were represented in the sample, making comparison of findings across the sample, difficult. However, results revealed differences in beliefs, meanings and understandings of assessment held by academics and first year students. Academics are more likely to view assessment as a trustworthy process to assist teaching, but students viewed assessment as focussed primarily on accountability and perceived it as irrelevant or even ignored in the teaching and learning process. The findings reported that ensuring assessment policy and practices are fit for purposes, conducted with integrity, transparency understood by staff and students equally, was emphasised.

In summary, Fletcher et al (2012) expressed many concerns regarding their findings and of their implications for practice. These included; unclear institutional policies, weak academic collaboration around shared concepts for example in providing feedback; dissonance between expression of espoused values and practices; and a poor evidence base around how judgements are made. In their summation, within a climate of increased accountability for academics now, it means assessment is unlikely to continue unchallenged. They also report academics and students both need a greater understanding and expectations about assessment as it is applied in HE.

Conclaves, Frederico and Costa (2012) were unable to locate a Portuguese instrument to measure nurse teachers' conception of assessment for application in the clinical teaching context or clinical practicum. This provided a rationale for development of an abridged CoA Brown (2006) self-report measure. Conclaves, Frederico and Costa (2012) noted clinical teachers' conceptions whilst influenced by prior experiences as a student themselves, other contextual influences apply and are of significance. These include being part of a teaching team, institutional or governmental policies, and research formerly conducted and an inability to locate a study on nursing teachers' conceptions of assessment locally or internationally. Two contextual factors were considered of importance; they included developing a reliable picture of academics' conceptions of assessment to stimulate clinical nursing assessment enhancement. The other was the clinical practicum provides a unique assessment environment for students and assessors.

To provide for the cultural and contextual adaptations of the clinical assessing environment required an abridgement of the CoA (2006) measure. A number of processes were described including seeing approval to translate and culturally adapt the questionnaire, locate and contact experts, technology issues, managing five rounds of iterative interaction with experts around reformulation of the survey, maintaining confidentiality, ethical consideration to the process of piloting the abridged CoA (2006) to nurse teachers for further validation purposes. A report of this process with nurse teachers was not located. This process of culturally adapting a measure for use within an academic subject discipline was outlined.

3.5 Academics' conceptions of teaching in higher education

Academics' conceptions of teaching are more extensively studied as those of assessment although sometimes they incorporate references to assessment and feedback, as part of teachers' conceptual understandings. The quality of student learning is shown to be related to conceptions of teaching (Kember 1997). Making teachers more aware of their conceptions of teaching is a focus of many professional development courses (Kuppinger and Jucks 2017).

Kember and Gow (1994) work, made an important early contribution in developing, trialling and administering The Teaching Orientation Questionnaire. This was

applied to determine if a direct correlation could be made between orientations to teaching and student learning outcomes using a questionnaire administered within higher education departments. Two orientations were identified "knowledge transmission" or teacher / content centered and student centered/learning oriented entitled "learning facilitation" teacher content/ orientated - each with a number of subscales. An orientation or conception to teaching within a department was considered too strongly influence methods of teaching adopted, learning tasks set, assessment demands and workload specified for students. Departments focussing on learning facilitation offered mostly project-based courses, less lectures with more individual or group discussion of project work, examinations were not administered, as assessment is based on project work. In contrast, in departments where teaching is conceived as knowledge transmission, information transmission using didactic teaching methods was found.

In later work, Kember (1997) conceptualised the research on this topic and places conceptions of teaching under two broad orientations along a developmental continuum. At one end is teacher-centred. /content-oriented progressing towards a student/centred meaning oriented one. Kember (1997 p. 273) included" a transitory category linking the two "Kember 1997 was included and labelled this a "student-teacher interaction".

Prosser and Trigwell (1999) applied the Approaches to Teaching Inventory, also broadly categorising teachers' approaches to teaching into two different types, an information transmission/teacher-focused approach and conceptual change/ student-focused approach. In more contemporary academic settings Postareff and Lindblom Ylanne (2008), Stes and Van Petegran (2014) and Kuppinger and Jucks (2017) revealed similar type results and findings broadly subsuming approaches under two broad categories a teacher / content focussed and student learning focussed of the aspect studied. These studies reveal when conceptions or approaches to teaching within academic cognate disciplines are explored, findings are more commonly grouped in accordance with disciplinary epistemological assumptions. For example Kember and Leung (2011 p. 279) report when student ratings data is studied it reveals

“research into disciplinary differences in ratings has most often drawn upon the hard versus soft distinction”.

Examples of latter disciplines include arts, the humanities, social sciences with science and engineering encompassing the former. They reported that other disciplines tend to be less consistent in reporting.

Another commonality when describing conceptions of teaching is a tendency not to link assessment methods applied to the aims of a course of studies. Postareff, Lindblom-Ylännä and Nevgi (2008) consider that this reflects a view that teachers see assessment as something that occurs separately from teaching and not an integral part of teaching. They also reported the idea of internal - external relation as an important factor in a finding that the teaching and learning were separated, assessment measured what was learnt; or within an internal relation, teaching and assessment processes were overlapping and interacting. Furthermore, they also reported a teacher's focus is directed at the aims of education not at assessment per se when describing teaching. The same argument may be applied as to why feedback is not explored in greater depth, when conceptions of assessment are described.

Stes and Van Petegem (2014), in profiling approaches to teaching, reported that a low focus on testing and use of alternative assessment methods was accompanied by a teachers' desire to change student conceptions. In contrast, when a low or moderate desire to change students' conceptions was found, testing was more commonly reported.

When parallel study of students conceptions of teaching is reported, the joint focus leaves little space to explore aspects such as assessment and feedback issues in depth within publication guidelines. A commonality noted is a lack of focus in the research instruments administered exploring assessment and feedback measures.

3.6. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Although the work of National Forum was considered earlier additional factors are worthy of incorporation here.

3.6.1 Profile of assessment practices in Irish HE

A recent exercise involved profiling current assessment practices across Irish higher education (The Forum 2017a). This reported variation in information available on assessment activity. The National Forum reported on the publication of Irish Study of Student Engagement (2017) (ISSE). First and final year students complete this questionnaire. In November 2017, an insight providing an overview of how ISSE (2017) data may be used best by this working in HE as published (National Forum 2017c).

Another output was Key findings of the profile of assessment practice in Irish H.E (2017a) providing a snapshot of assessment practices nationwide. Assessment data from 30 undergraduate degree programmes within different fields of study, including health and welfare were captured. It is unclear if pre-registration nursing data was profiled within this activity. The health and welfare sector is vast and includes programmes preparing students for statutory registration and those that do not; making contrast within the discipline of nursing difficult from national data profiled. This reported no common patterns of programme design regarding module size - the most common being five ECTS; more assessment was undertaken by students in single rather than full year modules, assessment load per ECTS module differing generally nationally and in various fields of study; examination remains the most common assessment applied; differences in assessment within academic fields with students in some fields receiving feedback more than others and students more likely to discuss and question assessment in later, rather than early years.

The profiling exercise also explored other aspects. Modularisation is applied in course development internationally facilitating student transfer and flexibility in learning. It is routinely criticised for compartmentalising learning and assessment to a period of determined weeks. Criticisms of feedback within modular programmes

often relation to its provision long after the teaching cycle is completed and assessment work submitted, graded /marked.

Capturing assessment related information provided a first and national best insight into assessment practices across HEI's. This provided an objective evidence base and supported follow-up critical conversations across the sector from which an expanded understanding of assessment of, for and as learning emerged.

3.6.2 Professional development (PD) and assessment.

A wider national focus on expanded understanding of assessment of for as learning creates a backwash or (wash back) effect for most H.E workers across this sector. It incorporates developing other stakeholder's competencies including educational/learning technologists, educational/academic developers, research staff, library staff; support staff within various disciplines. Thus, the model of PD promoted is tailored to the Irish H.E climate (National Forum 2016a). The underpinning values of PD include inclusivity, authenticity, scholarship, learner-centeredness and collaboration. These values guide individual staff, departments and institutions to recognise, inform, enhance and sustain PD.

A typology of PD activities proposed range along a continuum of informal collaborative non-accredited to unstructured non-accredited to more structured learning ventures. It progresses to accredited learning opportunities that may align with an professional requirements and career stages. Integral to the development of the model is the extent to which an individual in their role engages across an institution with the scholarship of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback.

Current work involves guidelines to implement the model to facilitate PD across the sector as well as developing strategies to recognise prior learning. With a more expansive teaching learning, assessing, feedback environment now proposed, and a PD model now conceptualised to support this, some aspects are not yet fully developed.

For example, Bloxham and Boyd (2008) assert particular constraints are apparent within academic departments drawing them towards restrictive practices. For example, the competitive element of academic practice is one; the potential for an

increased workload is another and institutional accountability climate within which academic work is judged. These are issues less developed in current proposals for PD-but should be addressed in that context.

A particularity situated within pre-registration education is the profile of nursing academics'. Many entering HE in 2002 were registered nurse teachers (RNT), holding both a higher academic and professional award, coupled with specialist nursing qualification (s). A 1-20 nurse tutor/ student ratio remains a programme requirement stipulated by NMBI.

3.6.3 Authentic Assessment

This was considered as a topic of importance by the (National Forum 2017c).The notion of authenticity is based on David's Boud's work, initially presenting five and later seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education (Boud and Associates 2009). The notion aligns with problem based learning approaches or assessment as and for learning. It aligns with intentional use of assessment inside and outside the classroom to promote wider learning competencies for short and long-term use.

With the benefit of engaging student nurses in deeper approaches to learning and supporting, their transition as a registrant into a complex healthcare environment, authentic learning and assessment is a popular development. It finds popularity with health care employers who value a new registrant's ability to transfer knowledge and integrate complex concepts, content knowledge and skills into healthcare contexts and learning. Authentic assessment is associated with greater applicability and transfer of knowledge and skills for their work, personal, social life of immediate and long-term relevance (Ashford-Rowe Herrington and Brown 2014). Students value it; they are supported to learn through provision of clear assessing criteria. Its validity is found in close alignment to learning criteria determined by an authentic assessment event, one constructively aligned to core subject/ disciplinary mastery (Brown 2015). For educators engaging with authentic assessment involves developing student real-world skills, supporting knowledge transfer and integration, including active collaboration with peers and construction of creative responses to meaningful situations in a professional context. A benefit is "designing out"

opportunities for plagiarism (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall 2009 p.135; Swaffield 2011). It is more related to supporting students' academic literacy skills than detecting plagiarism. Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown 2014 p.220) found students clearly valued and understood the workplace benefits of producing authentic learning outcomes within authentic environments and applying authentic tools as part of learning assessment. The relevancy of the assessment process is associated with greater engagement and contextualisation of knowledge and positive association with increasing student motivation of attending to time on task (National Forum 2017c). When applied to nursing education, assessments deemed authentic are "meaningful beyond the assignment score and have intrinsic value as representing legitimate professional work" (Poindexter, Hagler and Lindell 2013 p.36).

Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown (2014) established eight critical elements of authentic assessment providing a set of guidelines for educators to apply in order to develop and enhance this approach. Familiarity with using supportive technology and resources are more frequently found with educators applying authentic assessment. Mueller (2016) provides a range of examples of an authentic assessment activities including of rubrics even commencing in elementary school. Adult learning examples include fitness analysis, comparison food labels exercises, personal diet analysis, breaking news exercise, scientific thinking paper and stress and coping group exercises. Poindexter and Lindell (2013) provide a number of examples applied within nursing education. Examples include portfolios, OSCE, concept maps, videotaped scenarios; peer review of assessment, case studies measurement of patient outcomes and simulations all may be developed to reflect the situated complexity of clinical practice. Web based tools including video clips, webinars recording student engagement in actions or skills, gaming, recording collaborative discussion problem solving scenarios may support and judge intra-student collaboration and communication skills, as well as integration of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, blogs, wikis, recording of skills performance, using publishing and presenting software, providing opportunities to reflect on personal and peer performance. Altogether, this focus supports and encourages students to be more fully engaged in personal learning (Brown 2015).

Authentic assessment or learning has a long association with vocational awards and application of knowledge and applied routinely in clinical skills laboratories and healthcare settings and work based assessments, case reports and projects.

Contemporaneously it is associated with diversifying assessment a move aligned responding to both the increasing diversity within the student population and award types now offered. Furthermore, the notion of inclusivity is encompassed in its design (National Forum 2017c).

Criticisms of authentic assessment are uncommon. Tanner (2001) challenges the rationale for applying authentic assessment and interpretation of the notion of authenticity itself. He considered pragmatic and economic costs associated with completing and applying judgment in authentic assessment activities, including for large groups reliably, effectively and efficiently. Tanner (2001) proposes educators identify ways of integrating elements of both authentic and traditional assessment within their educational plans, in preference to adopting authentic assessment in its entirety.

3.6.4 Feedback

How the term feedback is interpreted in the literature varies, but it is known to have a large influence on student learning, more recently enhancements in its use by students have been noted using multimodal methodologies (Zimbardi et al 2016). Increased variety and flexibility is found when the topic is described including, assessment feedback, feed up, feed forward, as an endpoint, integrated with learning and as a supportive sequential process (Evans 2013). In distinguishing two main types of feedback in academia (i) feedback from lecturers to students on their academic work as part of course requirements; it is used to modify learning (ii) feedback from students to lecturers on module content and teaching performance and may be used to modify teaching. The terms assessment feedback and formative feedback are used interchangeably referring to actions generated by academics, mentors or students on their performance to improve and increase learning. Feedback on student performance is considered one of the most influential and effective learning paradigms (Hattie and Timperley 2007) .the amount of time students spend

engaging with feedback is significantly relations to the rate of improvement subsequent assessment tasks (Zimbardi et al 2016). The HEA (2012 p.9) advise the starting points for improving learning across HE is improving assessment feedback as follows-;

“Assessment feedback therefore includes all feedback exchanges generated within assessment design, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context, being overt or covert (actively and/or passively sought and/or received), and importantly, drawing from a range of sources”

Many theoretical guides are available on how academics' may improve feedback provision (Sadler 1998; Hattie and Timperley 2007). However Nicol and Macfarlane - Dick (2006 p.209) re-interpreted research on formative assessment and feedback revealing its use by students proactively to self-regulate their learning. Seven principles of good feedback practice should;-

1. help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);
2. facilitate the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
3. deliver high quality information to students about their learning;
4. encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
5. encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
6. provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
7. provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching

Sadler (1998, 2010, and 2015) publishing for many years on feedback endorses the view that giving students quality feedback enables them to appraise what counts as excellent work. It also help them to recognise what is good performance and how their current performance relations to good performance and how to close the gap between current and good performance using appropriate actions. These issues are accommodated within Nicol and Macfarlane - Dick (2006) reformulation of feedback principles as identified above. These reformulations also align with Evans

(2013 p.72) comprehensive work on feedback, in which she reports a distinction between a cognitivist and a socio-constructivist perspective of feedback. She considers a more recent emergence is the latter perspective Nicol (2010) highlights feedback interventions remain troublesome and note results of national surveys internationally reveal students are less satisfied with feedback, than with other features of coursework. Kowalski et al (2017 p.395) writing in nursing education consider it essential, in all contexts where learning occurs, adequate thought is applied to provide learner feedback to improve “decision-making skills and clinical performance”. The sustained nature of clinical placement and close proximity to clinical nursing staff provides student nurses with direct access to prompt feedback to inform their practice.

Within the Republic of Ireland more than 27, 000 students from 30 HE institutions nationwide participated in a survey exploring aspects of staff students’ interaction/engagement. This is within the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (2017), (ISSE). The most recent data was reported from 2016. The Irish research reveals overall interaction between students generally and academics was low. Surprisingly, 32% of students reported they never discussed grades or performance with academic staff with 23% reporting they did so “often” or “very often”. When asked whether feedback on academic performance is provided to them in a timely manner 38% reported favourably to this question. Just under half (45%) of students reported they had “often” or “very often” discussed their grades or assignment with teaching staff; though 23% reported they did so more frequently. Given this is contemporary Irish research, a substantial body of respondents had not yet engaged in feedback with their teachers and this represents many lost opportunities for improving learning and teaching. Large cohort size, teaching and feedback is often provided to students by multiple teachers and markers. How technologies support multimodal feedback, learners interaction with it and of its impact on subsequent academic performance, is unknown (Zimbardi et al 2016). Using a feedback analytics capture system with a “rich media marking system” provided timely, situated, detailed feedback with learning analytics integrated into the feedback process. The potential for sustained interaction by learners with feedback provided by markers was increased when immediacy of usefulness was primary motivator for their engagement. Zimbardi et al (2016). This supported vertical integration of successive tasks within and across

semesters. This illustrates the potential for applications learning analytics in providing useful data to teachers, students and markers on use of feedback in addition to guiding regulation or adjustment of teaching, in response.

Assessment is a key aspect of academic success in H.E and is an activity influenced by student responses to the feedback received to regulate or adjust their learning on work submitted (Tett et al 2012). The effect of larger class sizes and a lower unit of resource means issues of staff effort and workload arise when managing alone. This can in turn impact on the amount and manner of how feedback is provided (Hounsell, 2008). Furthermore, academics' are not always aware of the assessment load of the student, including how it fits with the effort hours per module and the time needed for learning including reading and preparing for exams (Palmer 2016). The shift to a 15 week semesterised and modular structure and resultant compressed timetable impacts on timeliness of feedback provided to student to regulate or adjust learning. The decision to provide feedback orally, written or both, or applying technology or using peer feedback, how it is framed, its timeliness are actions determined by a teacher. Feedback is only useful if students access and act on it.

Feedback may be managed more effectively; using peer dialogue through feedback (Race 2009). Viewing a peer's work supports the development of a common understanding of what constitutes as achievement. Peer discussion groups following in-class feedback, classroom technologies, criterion specific marking using pro-formas, showing 'on-display' assignments, e.g. oral and poster presentations and podcasting (Nicol and MacFarlane- Dick 2006; Bloxham and Boyd 2008; Hounsell 2008; McSwiggan and Campbell 2017) provide contemporary approaches. Related challenges to providing feedback include scheduling academic work on completion of a module leading to "bunching of call in dates". Furthermore scheduling of institutional feedback day's scheduled long after examination are minimally beneficial (Gibbs 1999; Yorke, 2001).

The role of educators is key to reforming learning practice across H.E, with a conceptual module for professional development proposed by the National Forum currently drafted to support this reorientation. It is clear a reformulation of feedback is now needed to meet challenges like developing students as self- directed autonomous learners capable of judging their own learning and that of others, of

engaging in self monitoring and developing a shared responsibility with teachers and others for their own learning.

Finally, Race (2009) cautions that over focusing on designing assessment within a curriculum can lead to provision of more assessment of poorer quality. It may be lacking in diversity unaccompanied by adequate or sufficient or timely formative feedback for the student to regulate learning or teachers their teaching. On that basis both assessment and feedback together are critical to supporting better quality learning is it is timely to .explore how academics' view and experience this aspect of their role.

3.7 Summary of literature review

The search strategy used to examine literature at the initial stage and more comprehensively following completion of interviews and transcription was highlighted. This revealed whilst an abundance of literature is available on assessment in higher education what is known about the relationship between academics' and their views on , and experiences of assessment is scant. Of studies exploring conceptions of assessment and assessment practices, six qualitative studies were located. Tracy's (2010) qualitative criteria for reviewing them were applied similar type findings but also ones of nuance and complexity not previously emphasised in general or specific to academic disciplines was noted.

Whilst variation in how each study was conducted it was possible to report orientations or conceptions of assessment if positioned along a continuum are represented as contrasting. At one end point are reproductive conception of assessment and at the other a transformational conception. Gradients of variation may be positioned somewhere between these endpoints. Wherever conceptions are positioned on a continuum they are found to impact on and shape the focus and direction of the academics' assessment practice (s).

Research on academics' and students' conceptions of assessment gathered by large surveys was reviewed. Results revealed differences in perceptions in all aspects measured between the two groups except for assessment for improvement factors. A rationale proposed for this factor is a student may not have the assessment returned to them in time to discuss how it may be improved. This, finding it is suggested

means students want assessments to contribute to their educational improvement, but this may not be possible due to the practices of teachers. In summary, the findings emphasise the importance of stressing to students the vital role assessment plays role in their learning.

Research on conceptions of teaching was reviewed also revealing when the relationship between conceptions of teaching and teaching practices are studied, conceptions greatly influence how teachers go about teaching. Conceptions are found to range from reproductive conceptions to transformational ones in turn influencing teaching practices and quality of student learning. A commonality noted is when conception of teaching are studied, they tend not to focus on assessment or feedback and if they do it is reported briefly.

Thus quantitative research exploring “what is known about academics’ conceptions of assessment” reveals it is generally undertaken on completion of a teaching cycle; or as an addition to teaching (Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012), or taken for granted aspect of a teaching role (Ramsden 2003 p.173). Or, no awareness indicates a taken for granted assumption of uniformity in that aspect of the phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997 p.17). It is proposed in the studies above, that there is shared meaning and perspectives of how academics understand each other when inquiring into aspect of their work, like assessment.

The small body of published work of what it means “to assess” suggests that it means different things to different individuals. Variation in conceptions and context in turn influences how this academic activity is approached and practiced (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005; Postareff et al 2012; Halinen et al 2014; Kantar 2014; Bearman et al 2017)

Knowing what individual academics' orientations to assessment in one academic department and nursing programme may broaden and deepen understanding of the scholarship of assessment within undergraduate nursing education. In that context, it may or may not highlight an institutionally preferred orientation to assessment within undergraduate nursing education. Furthermore, knowing academics' orientations of assessment is also useful in terms of illuminating areas of dissonance if orientations are not matched to the setting or context where they are applied.

Furthermore an awareness of orientations to assessment provide a basis for dialogue about this topic in general. Finally, having this information is useful information for students to be aware of in terms of the student experience. If there is a preferred academic orientation of assessment it would make students aware of the learning experience of undergraduate education offered at academic department in an Irish university. Furthermore, illumination of variation or difference provides a rich ground for targeted professional assessment development or enhancement by joining individual learning to organisational learning more broadly. The next section presents the methodology to complete this study.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes how this study was designed. The research aim and purpose are stated followed by explanations of why a qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore the topic under study. The rationale for a qualitative approach, phenomenography, selected to guide this study, is then presented. How this approach shaped investigating academics' views on, and experience of, assessment is discussed. Obtaining ethical approval, accessing participants, the conduct of interviews and processes involved in analysis of data and generation of findings are then addressed. Issues of qualitative quality considered central to this workplace research are finally reviewed.

4.1 Research aim

The primary aim of this study is to explore with academics their views on, and experiences of, assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education in one academic department in an Irish university.

4.2 Research question

How do academics view and experience assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education offered in one academic department in a university in the Republic of Ireland?

4.2.1 Research objectives

The objectives are:

1. To capture variation or difference in views and experiences
2. To identify orientations towards assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education.

The purpose of this research is to apply a phenomenographic informed approach to explore, through interviews, academics' views on, and experiences of, assessment within undergraduate nursing education. This involved engaging in inductive analysis of interview data to discern if qualitative differences are apparent and

present findings as academics' orientations to assessment. The relationships between academics and orientations to assessment are the focal point of the findings.

4.3 Appropriateness of a qualitative approach to explore academics' views on, and experiences of, assessment within undergraduate nursing education.

Quantitative and qualitative research approaches are two dimensions in which scientific and social inquiry may be positioned to gather and report on information. Either approach may be applied in different ways for different reasons and even together to offer different types of perspectives on an aspect of the world.

This exploratory study aimed to gain a primary understanding of an aspect of the world not heretofore available. The focus here was not with processes and meanings experimentally examined or measured. It is on the relational focus between the researcher, the research participant and their views on, and experiences of, assessment within undergraduate nursing education. The adoption of a qualitative approach to study this topic was guided by characteristics identified by Miles and Huberman (1994). These are now considered in addition to other factors, in the context of their appropriateness for conducting this study.

A distinct characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its ability to provide for a more holistic or integrated understanding of the context under study, its logic, arrangements, implicit and explicit rules (Miles and Huberman 1994). The most compelling reason for selecting a qualitative approach was because it is internally consistent with the aim of this study (Miles and Huberman 1994). In this inquiry, the research emphasis was concerned with exploring the experiences and personal perspectives of and with participants directly engaged in assessment within one academic disciplinary context and describing them. Adoption of a qualitative approach supported the generation of a deeper more holistic understanding of this concept. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggests a qualitative researcher recognises that of any event, there are many things occurring simultaneously, different individuals in similar contexts will view and experience things differently. The adoption of a qualitative approach supported achievement of more integrated understandings of this topic made possible by delving into issues that emerged using methods congruent with a qualitative approach. The researcher selected an approach and

methods so participants described and presented how they understood took account, took action and managed their day-to-day situations (Miles and Huberman 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (2005 p. 3) emphasise qualitative research approaches are naturalistic, since data is usually collected in real world settings:

“a situated activity that located the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible.”

Another rationale for selecting a qualitative approach was guided by explanations of the need for educational research and theory to translate into practice. Bloxham and Boyd (2008 p.7) assert academics’ knowledge of assessment is situated:

“in the context of their own experiences and particular traditions, expectations and needs of different academic subjects”.

Research findings emerging from this qualitative educational study were generated from academics’ own experiences. Thus, findings have direct application to a local context of assessment. They are situated in a common context for all academics engaged in assessment where institutional policy, accessibility to resources including technology, library and information systems, simulation facilities, are contextually unique influences. Although a valid criticism in this respect, is the applicability of these findings and in which qualitative studies are undertaken into a wider social and cultural milieu.

The suitability of a qualitative approach to this study was considered to align with Kvale’s (1996 p.105) assertion that;

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their life why not talk with them”.

Engaging individuals with direct experience of this issue. Applying a deductive theory driven approach to explain relationships, confirm a prediction from theory, verify phenomena and investigating the systemic interdependence of variables (Horsewood 2011), considered hallmarks of a quantitative approach, were considered incongruent with aim of the study. A related characteristic making the approach adopted suitable for the study concerned the literature review relating to

the phenomenon of interest. An *a priori* hypothesis study relating to this study topic was not uncovered. Applying a quantitative experiment within a laboratory setting or a measurement to enable production of reliable outcomes that are “precise quantified and reliable” (Somekh and Lewin 2012 p.325) was not established. Qualitative methods for example interviews was considered appropriate as they “extend practices that are normal part of everyday life” (Walker 2012 p.76). However, qualitative interviewing and analysis were complex and conceptual and required methodological and ethical considerations.

4.4 Phenomenography; origins and definitions

The word phenomenography is derived both from the Greek “phainemonon” meaning “that which is manifest” and “graphein” meaning to “describe in words or pictures” (Marton and Booth 1997 p.110). Marton (1986 p.31) defines phenomenography as:

“The empirical study of qualitatively different ways which various phenomena and aspects of the world are experienced, understood, perceived and or apprehended”

Development of the theoretical foundations of phenomenography emerged in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. It originates out of an approach taken to a study student approaches to study or learning within higher education applied by Marton and Säljö and colleagues in the University of Goteborg. The original study undertaken in the 1970’s was not only to describe qualitative differences amongst individual students, in terms of different levels of learning outcomes, but also to derive a “commensurable description of the levels of processing employed in student learning” (Richardson 1999 p.55). This ultimately led to the identification of deep and surface approaches to learning. It was a novel way to research a topic within the discipline of psychology, dominated by the positivist paradigm. This was considered a more holistic way of answering the question why some students appear better learners than others; and to describing an identified relationship between ways of experiencing to outcomes. Thus, phenomenography is concerned with the content of human thinking. It also represented an alternative approach to exploring the relations formed between research subjects and an aspect of their world (Bowden 2000).

Tight, (2016) notes phenomenography is the only approach substantially developed within higher education making it appropriate to use in the current study. The main objective of phenomenographic research is to find out ways individuals experience a phenomenon and to delimit this variation. This assumes a limited number of ways of experiencing a phenomenon (Brew 2001a). Säljö (1997 p.175) one of its original developers describes phenomenographic research as:

“finding and delimiting the variation in ways of experiencing reality. It is assumed that there are a limited number of ways of experiencing reality and the description of variation, in this respect is the main aim of phenomenography and makes it a worthwhile exercise”

Phenomenography informs the approach to interviews and analysis in this research. In interviews and with a self-selecting group of academics the aim was to capture their views on, and experiences of, assessment. In data analysis the intention is looking for variation between views on, and experiences of, assessment and describe this variation within qualitatively distinct orientations to assessment. The outcome is a representation of academics' orientations to assessment within undergraduate nursing education, informed by phenomenography.

4.5 Phenomenography and Phenomenology

Research is an approach used to answer questions and discover unknowns. Many researchers provide a clarification of the relationship between phenomenography and phenomenology as areas of commonality and difference are apparent. Marton (1981; 1986; 1988) acknowledge both approaches to researching human phenomena are relational, experiential, content oriented and qualitative; with commonality of methods applied including individual interviews and open- ended questions. These techniques were applied in this study. However differences are also apparent between both approaches and their significance to this inquiry are outlined below.

Phenomenographic research captures reflective rather than pre-reflective experience (awareness we have before we do any reflecting on our experience) and conceptual thought. In this study academics' reflections on their views on and experiences of assessment within undergraduate nursing education are being studied. However, in applying phenomenology, a researcher would examine the cognitive processes or

pre-reflective assumptions in verbalised experiences, as described by participants (Greasley and Ashworth 2007). This in turn, would lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of e.g. assessment itself, and not the focus of this study.

An underpinning assumption in phenomenography is of a finite number of qualitatively different understandings of a particular phenomenon (Marton 1981; Bruce 2004). Its purpose is to describe variation in experiences through interviews and analysis. Findings emphasise collective meaning; they are presented within an outcome space containing “all conceptualisations of a particular concept” in a structured format (Greasley and Ashworth 2007 p.821). The outcome space does not represent an individual conceptualisation but rather constructions of the different ways people can experience the same phenomenon (Assarroudi and Heydari 2016). In phenomenology, its main purpose is to recognise a singular “essence” (or meaning units) of a phenomenon (Giorgi 1985 p.2000). This is derived from exploring and analysing various human experiences of a phenomenon.

Phenomenography adopts a second-order research perspective. This aims to explore peoples’ ideas or experiences about (the world) and make statements about it (Marton 1981). It does not engage in the psychological reduction of data to determine experience (Barnard, McCosker and Berger 1999). Phenomenology adopts a noumenal, first-order perspective and attempts to establish reality or make statements about the world, as is (Marton 1981). Phenomenological analysis leads to the identification of meaning units (Barnard, McCosker and Berger 1999); findings are revealed as a lived understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Phenomenography is a relatively recent approach, emerging from empirical studies undertaken within higher education, to investigating student experiences of and approaches to study (Marton 1975; Säljö 1975; Marton and Säljö 1976a & b and Svensson 1977). Deep and superficial levels of processing data were identified (often terms deep and surface approaches to learning). Phenomenology is an older interpretive approach to research attributed to Edward Husserl (1859-1938). It is premised on epistemological concerns, the starting point of his framework is “the separation of a conscious actor in a world of objects” (Somekh and Lewin 2012 p.124).

4.6 Phenomenography as a qualitative research approach

Different terms are applied to describe the knowledge interest in phenomenography, including conceptions, ways of experiencing, seeing and understanding (Marton and Booth 1997). The original proponents constructed a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions about humans, science and how humans acquire knowledge about the ways others experience the world (Sjöström and Dahlgren 2002; Svensson 1997). Following on from the original study, Marton and colleagues hypostudied that if students had a finite number of qualitatively different understandings of learning, then it was reasonable to expect humans may hold finite numbers of qualitatively different understanding of other kinds of phenomena (Marton 1986). Sampling of participants aims at capturing the breadth of perspectives within a targeted population (Bruce et al 2004). Typically, the numbers of qualitative understandings of a particular phenomenon are relatively small and based on a relatively small number of interviews (Tight 2016). Debates and discussions on phenomenography and its assumptions have taken place in academic journals only from 1981 onwards (Ashworth and Lucas 2000). As a result, assumptions underpinning phenomenography are reviewed and re-reviewed in light of continuing clarification and counter clarification (Ashworth and Lucas 2000).

4.7 Theoretical aspects of phenomenography; a first and second order perspective and relationality.

As an interpretive approach it seeks to discover and describe phenomenon within the world as seen by others. Phenomenography adopts a second order approach to research. Marton (1981 p.177) distinguishes between research undertakings between the two as follows. A first order perspective;

“is an attempt to establish reality or make statements about (the world) and second order aims at exploring people’s ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and ...make statements about people’s ideas about the world (or their experience of it).

Marton (1981 p.171) reports a first order perspective one is concerned with how something “really is” or from the “outside”. It is differentiated from a second order perspective where the primary interest is in describing how something “is conceived

of’. Phenomenography adopts a second order perspective. Taking a second-order view of knowledge development, a researcher is not making statements about a phenomenon directly, but rather of a person’s ideas of that phenomenon (Collier-Reed 2006).

Another assumption within phenomenography, is that the perspective taken is non-dualist (Marton 2000 p.105) describes this as follows:

“There are not two worlds; a real, objective world, on the one hand, and a subjective world of mental representations, on the other. There is only one world, an existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective”

Säljö (1997) posits a non- dualist ontology implies ‘the internal (thinking) and the external (the world out there) are not isolated entities. A non-dualist stance implies a relational view of the individual and their world (Bowden and Green 2005). Within a non-dualist perspective the object and subject are not separate or independent of each other. As such, the world is not constructed by the individual, nor imposed from outside but rather is constructed “as an internal relation between them” (Bowden 2005 p.12). In accordance with a non-dualist assumption the only world we can communicate about is the one as experienced (Marton 1986). A phenomenographic researcher is not concerned with describing a phenomenon *per se*, but rather their interest lies in description of the variation within how a group of individuals experience a phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997). The focus of research lies with the relation that occurs between the phenomenon of interest and a research participant. This is why phenomenography is frequently referred to as having a relational focus.

4.8 Epistemological assumptions

Svensson (1997 p.167) maintains description is characteristic of phenomenography. The importance and need for description is related to an:

“understanding of knowledge, as a matter of meaning and similarities and differences in meaning.”

The epistemological assumption that individuals differ as to how the world is experienced is crucial. Marton and Booth (1997 p.125) describe the result of a phenomenographic inquiry as:

“a hierarchical structure arranged as a diagrammatic representation of the link between descriptions.”

That these differences may be understood, described and communicated by and to others and constitute what Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002 p.340) claim is an “essential outcome” of phenomenographic research.

4.9 Methods applied

Whilst variation is found in how phenomenographic methods are selected, applied and altered, the interview remains a primary method of data collection. Its design is usually based around a particular group of people and in describing their relationship to a phenomenon within a particular context (Barnard McCosker and Gerber 1999). Interviews are characteristically semi-structured with just a few key questions predetermined. The differentiation between the first and second order perspective provides a pragmatic way of influencing how research questions are formulated to collect data. Unstructured questions such as “how” and “what” rather than “why” are more frequently applied in data collection. This is required to provoke the content of thinking, central characteristics of variation or internal relation between the object of research and participant/subject to be elicited (Yates, Partridge and Bruce 2012 p.99).

Phenomenographic analysis aims to arrive at a description of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon is understood by a group of individuals. Phenomenographic analysis procedures incorporate multiple readings of transcripts, with utterances of interest to the study based on criteria of relevance “selected and marked” (Marton 1986 p.42). These collectively constitute a data pool. These selections become a pool of meaning with boundaries separating individuals abandoned, to focus on meaning embedded within quotes. Attention is directed at bringing together utterances into categories on the basis of similarities of what is meant. Categories are differentiated from one another in terms of the differences and displayed in an outcome space as the product of the research.

Bowden (2000 a) reports that researchers take issue with a decontextualized pool of meaning approach where difficulties are apparent in separating utterances from transcripts whilst at the same time retaining meaning. A phenomenographic conception (or way of experiencing) and its relation to a category of description can often be a source of confusion (Yates, Partridge and Bruce 2012 p. 99). Johansson, Marton and Svensson (1985 p. 249) define a phenomenographic conception as:

“A conception refers to the whole qualities of human world relations they also refer to the qualitatively different ways in which some phenomenon or aspect of reality is understood. When trying to categorise these conceptions we use the terms categories of description. Categories however are not identical to conceptions – rather they are used to denote them.”

Marton (1986) maintains that categories of description represent the most important results of the research enterprise. Bowden (2000) reports categories of description must be described as faithfully as possible to the individual or collective ways of experiencing. Though conceptions represent individual expressions of ways of experiencing or particular aspects of reality, categories of description acts as a label for the ones it represents.

4.10 Depicting an orientation

This section explores why views and experiences following analysis are depicted as academics' orientations to assessing. How and why this decision was made is now presented. The motivation for this research was to capture rich textual data as it relates to the widest range of views on and experiences of assessment from an interdisciplinary perspectives a topic not investigated previously. On more detailed examination a structured or semi-structured interview, with predetermined questions, a format favoured within a phenomenographic interview, was not as aligned to this research intention and purpose. Bruce et al (2004 p.146) provides some examples of the type and format of phenomenographic questioning posed to participants about their experiences of learning to programme as follows;

1. “How do you see your current ability to programme?”
2. What takes you say that?

3. Can you describe for me how you go about that?
4. Can you write a programme that works?
5. How do you know?"

Chavez (2008 p.474) advises researchers to think critically and reflect in relation to the advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality within the field. On reflection, those engaging with this research are work colleagues I engage with regularly. The questioning technique for this researcher did not appear the "best fit" for a workplace study.

Following reflection, the decision taken was to adopt a less structured open-ended interview format enabling participants to expand on their views and experiences of assessment with unstructured questions or probes used as follow up. The intention of the interview was to stimulate conversation to expand the researchers' awareness of the participant perspective, to encourage "the flow of dialogue", an appreciation of no right or wrong answers (Bowden 2005). Thus, a less structured more open ended approach appeared congruent with the research question and purpose. Importantly in doing so also, it was privileging the central role and voice of the participant dialoguing in relation to their views and experiences of their assessment work.

Furthermore, phenomenographic analysis itself is criticised for attempting to decontextualize the "findings" from their actual social and cultural milieu. In analysis what is lost is the notion of an individual "as hermeneutic beings making sense of what they see hear and read" (Bowden 2000 p.3). Thus, using analysis to depict an individual's orientation appeared more in keeping with a non-dualist view of an individual and their world as not separate.

A further criticism of phenomenographic research findings is they are drained of context. In this study, it was the intention to incorporate the social milieu into how findings are presented. Thus, making them relevant to that setting, in keeping with the research aim.

An adapted description of an orientation as provided by Samuelowicz and Bain (2002 p.176) is applied as the understanding of an orientation as follows:

“a coherent pattern of views and experiences inferred from and grounded in academic assessment practice and their explanation from those practices.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002 p.176) similarly chose to study orientations to assessing not conceptions. A reason proffered was conceptions report the “possible ways a phenomenon may be experienced” not the “characteristic” way. They reported as conceptions are contingent on context, an individual may express more than one conception over the course of an interview, thus it is inappropriate to align conceptions with an individual.

How an orientation is described in this study differs somewhat from Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) description of how their orientations were arrived at and in the way questioning was applied to elicit data. Their study explored, beliefs and characteristic perspectives and practices and not local variation. Whereas this researcher is interested in local variation of views on and experiences occurring within a specific disciplinary context i.e. undergraduate nursing education also beliefs were not expressively elicited other than if they arise in dialogue. Khan and Markauskaite (2017) similarly applied a phenomenographic perspective and similarly reported development of teachers orientations within approaches to information and communications technologies. The depiction of an orientation, included strategies applied by teachers, extending the awareness of teachers of the concept explored.

4.11 The research setting

This research was conducted within one school on a large university campus. The academic unit was established when links were made with nursing and higher education. Approximately 220 student nurses enrol each year on nursing awards. All nursing academic and professional awards are approved in accordance and in accordance with Marks and Standards version 2017.1 (DCU 2017 p.13) and Requirements and Standards for Nurse Education Programmes (An Bord Altranais 2005). For the cohort entering in 2018 new Standards and Requirements for Nurse Registration Programmes (NMBI 2016) apply.

A broad range of academic staff are employed in the study setting, drawn from a range of disciplinary groupings as well as administrative and technical support staff.

Many nursing academics have a Registered Nurse Tutor qualification with the NMBI but not captured.

A number of educational facilities are accessible in a purpose-built school on-campus, including classrooms, small teaching suites. A large computer suite for students is available. Information technology/ learning technical support is available to staff. The online learning platform, Moodle now Loop, is widely used. Professional support for assessment is facilitated through the LIU. DCU library has a nursing/related subject librarian and wide accessibility to print and electronic learning material.

The undergraduate nursing four-year full time undergraduate nurse education, nursing awards are learning outcome based semesterised, modular and with attached credit. Clinical practice is integrated across four years as placements and internship service within the final 40 clinical weeks. Each award now has a designated Programme Chair, though a recent development. The four undergraduate nursing programmes are based on a large degree of commonality and designed as a single framework but reflect distinctive aspects of four separate registration awards. Some modules are shared, some partially shared and some are nursing “branch” specific. Large human science modules are positioned mostly in year one and two. Class sizes vary considerably depending on the module content. In foundational years other academic awards feed into some human science modules.

Assessment of theory is identified within programme documentation and is submitted for accreditation internally and externally. Assessment of clinical competence in practice is managed in a different way and is not the primary concern of this study. Although in third and fourth year academics' are engaged in marking clinical/academic material as portfolios. A rich variety of methodologies are applied to assess module outcomes and identified in curriculum documentation. These are accessible to External Examiners prior to distribution to students. Submitted and marked assessment material is available for the External Examiners to consider in year 3 and 4 in advance of summative examination boards. Variation in arrangements for consideration of marked assessment material is applied, although all failures are reviewed by a second academic. A standard undergraduate nurse education marking template is applied.

A programme approach to assessment scaffolding assessment types to award and module outcomes embedded within institutional quality assurance processes is not apparent. Although, parts of this work are managed as separate actions. As an example, scheduling of continuous assessment submission dates to avoid bunching at particular times in the semester. Changes to how module assessment is applied must be submitted and approved yearly in line with university approval mechanisms for awards.

4.12 Sampling issues considered

A first consideration was to seek approval to access a sample in the study setting through procedures required by the Research Ethics Committee, DCU. Following submission of a proposal, approval was given to collect data for a six-month period only (Appendix A). Qualitative research studies typically use small samples selected purposefully permitting deeper exploration and to a greater understanding of a topic (Patton 1990 p.184). Because I was exploring a range of perspectives, sampling was broad enough to permit inquiring into the full range of perspectives from all those engaged in assessment.

This sample plan was to explore the perspectives of self-selecting academics who volunteered to participate in this research following a recruitment drive. In effect, those eligible to participate constituted a purposeful and included all academics engaged in the assessment of student nurses onsite in the study setting. This incorporated all academic grades involved in assessment in all years of all four nursing programs. This broad perspective provided a greater chance of exploring a variety of ways the phenomenon is experienced (Bowden 2005).

Convenience sampling is a technique involving selecting the most accessible participants and is frequently used in qualitative research (Martens 2005 p.322) often in combination with other approaches. It is the least costly in terms of time, effort and financial resources for a researcher but may yield poor quality data. Some consider it to lack intellectual credibility and for this reason, it is considered less rigorous (Marshall 1996).

In addition to convenience, sampling purposive sampling was applied. Patton (2015 p.264) describes purposeful sampling as:-

“The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry...Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding”.

Charles et al (2015) report purposeful sampling is probably the most commonly described means of sampling in the qualitative methods literature, with many authors arguing all sampling strategies are in a sense purposeful. In qualitative research purposeful sampling is used for identification and selection of “information-rich” cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al 2015 p.533). The decision to use both purposeful sampling and convenience sampling meant all academic grades assessing across all academic subjects in the study context were eligible to participate as all were considered to be “information rich” relating to this topic in greater depth in keeping with a phenomenographic approach. This enabled inclusion of nurses and non-nurses, those assessing across the four branches of nursing, those engaged in assessment in the clinical education centre, those engaging with large and smaller cohorts of students, those recently appointed, those employed for some time and male and female participants. However, it did not include non-academic grades for example, administrative staff or student nurses. Within phenomenographic research variation is reported as a reasonable number of participants needed to elicit critical variation within experiences and across different participants. Trigwell (2000a, p.66) maintains between fifteen and twenty participants is the ideal number, with a minimum of 10-15. This is necessary to create a reasonable chance of findings variation in the range.

4.13 Sample

A sample of nineteen academics comprised those volunteering to participate in this study following a recruitment poster displayed in a prominent area of the academic unit (Appendix B). Those recruited represented most academic grades including senior lecturers, nursing and non-nursing academics, those with particular

disciplinary expertise and registered nurses employed in the clinical education centre to facilitate clinical skills teaching and assessment. Some had completed a teaching qualification others did not, the University employed some for some time, and others had short contracts. Specific employment data was not captured as comparisons between academic grades or length of service in nursing, education or other factors was not applied Both males and females were represented. Although more females than males participated. This sample reflects the representation of females employed in the unit of a ratio at the time of approximately 5-1. The sample size is also in keeping with many other phenomenographic studies reported.

4.14 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles are identified by many authors and the major principles include respect for persons/autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice/fairness, veracity, fidelity and confidentiality (An Bord Altranais 2007; DCU 2012). These principles were part of the researchers' awareness over the course of this study.

Ethical approval was obtained to complete this investigation was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee, prior to undertaking it. Although not physically invasive research, participants were asked to disclose private views about and experiences associated with an aspect of their work. Their views and experiences were both private and unknown at the outset of this study. Guidance to Nurses and Midwives on Ethical Conduct of Nursing and Midwifery Research (An Bord Altranais 2007). This was reissued in 2015. In the conduct of research, human rights needing protection include;

Respect for personal autonomy; means respecting the individual's right to self-determination during all phases of the research process. This includes freedom to become involved, the right to disclosure, and includes the right to voluntarily withdraw at any point, without prejudice. Collectively these principles are the major pillars upon which the notion of informed consent, originally articulated in the Nuremberg Code (WHO 2007). The purpose of informed consent is to enable prospective participants to make informed choices about participation (An Bord Altranais 2007).

Nagy Hesse- Biber and Leavey (2011 p.67) claim within a qualitative study there is both a principal and reality regarding informed consent. It is difficult for a researcher to approximate full disclosure particularly at the outset of a qualitative research project because by its very nature, it is difficult to anticipate. Research goals may change and it may be difficult for “all of the happenings in the research setting to be accounted for”. However, qualitative researchers must supply prospective participants with sufficient information regarding a study to make an informed choice whether or not he or she wishes to participate.

An Bord Altranais applied Beauchamp and Childress (2001) ethical principles to guide nurses in the conduct of research. These include respect for a person autonomy, justice, fairness, veracity, fidelity, beneficence non-maleficence and confidentiality.

4.14.1 Respecting autonomy

Those agreeing to participate in this research were self-selecting. In identifying procedures for protecting basic human rights, Informed consent to participate is closely related to the ethical principle respect and right to self-determination. (LoBiondo – Wood and Haber 2014). An email sent-to all staff inviting participation. If approached I provided information about the study topic and appointment made for the interview, if appropriate.

A plain language statement as a requirement for ethical approval by the DCU, REC.was discussed This identifies the aims; methodology, anticipated risks and benefits in terms of the recorded data gathered, anticipated inconvenience and a right to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice. This was discussed and provided to prospective participants.

Prior to interviews, a consent form was discussed (Appendix C) and after consideration was signed. This contained written explanations regarding the study disclosing the purpose of the study, study design, data collection, and potential benefits and risks and the voluntary nature of participation. In this way, the researcher was respecting the decision to participate in the study

4.14.2 Beneficence and non-maleficence;

In essence means “we should do well to others rather than harm” claims (Clamp, Geogh and Land 2001 p.74). Participants have a right to be protected from discomfort or harm when participating in a research study (An Bord Altranais 2007 p.8). Qualitative research, by its very nature, involves an study of participants’ experiences of a given phenomenon, as a result researchers are regularly caught in and must resolve a number of dilemmas claims (Baez 2002). On the one hand; a researcher must ensure contributions are presented accurately, ensure honest dialogue possible and avoid causing harm to participants by providing reassurances regarding confidentiality or anonymity. Equally, a researcher must put in writing their understanding of participants experiences of the phenomenon in question. This raises some questions regarding balancing risks and benefits, safeguarding participants and presenting the findings of a study accurately. These issues are particularly pertinent when undertaking a workplace study where a researcher must reconcile their conflicting responsibilities of researcher/protector and/ activist/ exposure (Baez 2002). A related concept is one of fidelity involve issues of trust by participants in the conduct of researcher, including during collection, analysis reporting and dissemination of findings. The principle of veracity is manifest in respecting contributions of each participant and concerns absence of deception, by the researcher to participants during the conduct of research.

4.14.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity are closely related to each other and to the above. Issues arise as it relations to anonymity of the institution, academic department and identity of participants. These were issues discussed at the outset of interviews and information relating the research was included within an informed consent form. It is not possible to offer an absolute guarantee the identity of a participant will not be recognised within presentation of findings. It is unlikely participants are identifiable outside the Faculty, or outside the HEI. In the recruitment of participants and dissemination of information relating to the study, individuals’ names are not used. Signed consent forms are stored safely. In the reporting of findings in a research study no names are used. In reporting findings academic titles such participant / nursing academic / human sciences academic greater protects their identity and

contributions made. Absolute confidentiality as an expectation is difficult to assure, but a researcher has a responsibility to uphold confidentiality.

The unit and institution are recognisable as the research site. A different research design and individual interviews or interviewing academics' within multiple third level institutions offering nursing education - confidentiality would be more readily assured. I endeavoured to treat their contributions with respect. Personal information i.e. specific subject discipline, if referred to, was redacted from narratives used in exemplars. This I considered complied with meeting the justice principle of treating people equitably and fairly during the research process.

The reporting of research ultimately involves making choices and researchers are advised to consider the distinction between protection of participants and reporting the findings of a qualitative study faithfully. Baez (2002) remarks secrecy and confidentiality are in fact “secretly linked”. Baez (2002 p.46) continues that “secrecy implies concealment and confidentiality denotes the methods used to conceal”. It seems the same arguments used to conceal information are also used to maintain confidentiality; therefore assuring confidentiality within a research study may be considered a strange paradox.

4.15 Accessing the site

Access to a research site is usually predicated on having ethical approval to undertake a study. Institutional approval to complete this study is granted in 2011. The project fell into the category of a low risk social research project. In respect to this “personal information that is deemed not sensitive is being collected by interview, questionnaire, or other means” (DCU 2012). Following receipt of approval, the researcher spoke to the Head of School regarding the study and accessing the site. (Appendix1)

4.16 Data collection process

In keeping with the research aim face to face interviews was considered appropriate (Bruce and Gerber 1996; Booth 1997). Accordingly, audio-recorded open ended individual interviews were undertaken .This enabled participants to exercise personal choice, individuality in describing their views, reflections, and experiences and to

follow their own line of thought associated with the topic in focus. This was congruent with a phenomenographic informed approach. Nineteen individual interviews were undertaken at the unit between August 2011 and January 2012.

4.17 Developing the research questions

In framing a qualitative research question, Nagy-Hessey -Biber and Leavey (2011 p.10) claim they typically begin with words like “who, why and what”. Following review, consideration, reflection and discussion with a supervisor the overall research question to be posed to participants was an open ended one “I am interested in hearing what are your views on, and experiences of, assessment within the undergraduate nursing. This is augmented by unstructured questions or prompts refined over time i.e. “tell me more” “explain that” almost the same research question is phrased to all participants with direct experience of the phenomenon. This is in a category considered inductive exploratory research, which Nagy-Hessey-Biber and Leavey (2011 p.10) suggest:

“considered appropriate for use when an area is under-researched as data garnered is often preliminary and shapes future research”

This is an under researched topic. Undertaking qualitative interviews with participants enabled the researcher to generate data within their natural environment in this case the workplace.

4.18 Pilot work

Examples of pre-pilot work and revisions to the original research idea took place at a number of junctures. A first occurred following an opportunity to present a plan of the research project to Educational Doctoral classmates and supervisors one year prior to its commencement. Further pre pilot work was undertaken over this period following consultation with the academic supervisor to clarify sources of biases, clarify feelings, reactions, design issues, project development manageability, interpretations and insights (Miles and Huberman 1994 p.66). Polit and Hungler (2014 p.387) refer to pilot work as:

“small scale study or trial run in preparation for a major study or to assess feasibility”

Pre-pilot and pilot work does not mean problems in the main study will not arise, but the pilot is an opportunity to address practical issues in the research project. In this study two interviews were conducted in an undisturbed office first with individuals expressing an interest in discussing the topic. These provided the opportunity to consider interview timing, interview guide particularly to see if the main question was understood if prompts were sufficient and test the recording equipment. Following these - two recorders digital and tape were used, reductions of background noise, blocking a door window, turning off phones. The issue of interview bias arose over the course of reflecting during this stage. Bias is defined as Clamp, Geogh and Land (2004 p.3):

“when there is a preference or predisposition to favour a particular conclusion”

In describing many types of bias including, detection, methodological quality, observational, performance, research, and selection. In this study, the researcher was concerned with in interview bias occurring because of a power differential. The researcher with knowledge on the topic area and participants as providers of personal information about the phenomenon of interest. Bearing this in mind, participants were engaged with the research process for example always being available at the time, date and venue as indicated. An additional consideration is some participants had vast research experience and expertise and in this regard, the researcher is conscious of inexperience. Being an insider and outside in a research scenario is what Polit and Hungler (2014) refer to as researching in a group by a member that group. Another concern was to ensure, the focus of the interview was on the research question and participant and not researcher.

4. 19 Timing, location and starting out

All interviews were undertaken at a time convenient to the participant. On occasion the time lapse between interviews was up to a fortnight to three weeks and at other times it is a few hours or days. The location is chosen by the participants. The location, time, length of the interview was guided by the availability of the participant. Interviews were concluded when participants chose to finish. Prior to each interview commencing each participant is thanked for their time and impending

contribution and then a short précis of the study is given. The plain language statement was discussed and questions and clarifications invited. Permission is sought to use a recording device and was sought and in all cases, given.

Participants were informed of the structure of the interview, an opening question in line with the study aim. Use of unstructured questions or probes using words like tell me more, explain that further can you describe that or implications of that or others etc. were mentioned. Thereafter, the consent form was signed, countersigned and dated by the researcher in the presence of the participant (Appendix D). This enabled an early rapport with participant, reduced anxiety and facilitated comfort. Just prior to the interview commencing proper, the aims of the study, discussed the issue of confidentiality were outlined. I also highlighted that the unit is identifiable as the research site.

4.20 Interviews

In sum, nineteen (n=19) individual direct contact ‘natural’ interviews were conducted with willing participants lasting between 35 and 55 minutes. They were undertaken in an undisturbed room onsite at the unit. Variation and commonality are found in approaches to phenomenographic research approaches, including of interviews. For Trigwell (2000) in discussing how he goes about a phenomenographic interview, he recounts his engagement in them as follows;

“I arrange to interview fifteen twenty people about the phenomenon. I ask specific questions about the case or situation because of the relational nature of the conceptions which emerge from this work.”

In keeping with this assertion, on the interview continuum, the style and format of interviews conducted for this study were more open ended, rather than closed and structured. The less structured format and style of interviewing was intended to provide sufficient amount of flexibility to capture spontaneity, elaboration and concrete illustrations of a range of views and experiences of participants’ on the same phenomenon. It was also designed to produce an appreciation of the circumstances surrounding each individuals assessment practices.

Akerlind (2005) describes different types of questioning methods applied within a phenomenographic interview, structured and unstructured. Opening structured contextual questions are followed by unstructured ones. In this study, the same structured question opened all interviews after the preliminary events described above, concluded. It set the scene for the formal commencement of each interview. The structured contextual question posed in this study was “*Can you tell me about your views on and experiences of assessment within undergraduate nursing education*” Thereafter, unstructured relevant follow up questions were worded like “*tell me more*”, “*explain that*” were included. Unstructured questions were based on the immediate understanding of what participants were expressing at that time. They invited a participant to reflect on the topic further. Akerlind (2005) advises a researcher to ask for situated examples of an event as described. This she considers is needed, because a participant’s experience is always embedded in particular context. So using unstructured questions as follow up is important as the context the participant has in mind, must be clarified for a researcher. Bowden (2005) proffers greater interaction is more likely in an interview setting when individuals are asked to describe personal experiences of an event, rather than produce deep personal insights on a topic or are expected to produce right and wrong answers to an issue posed. In this study, the researcher was also attuned to allowing participants’ awareness to shift over the course of the interview. This enabled them to develop the topic in focus, as they understood it at the time and if appropriate, unstructured questions were applied providing for greater clarity. Each interview concluded when the participant indicated they had no more to say. The researcher thanked them for their contribution.

In January 2012 the interviews were concluded. This occurred for two reasons. Further invitations to participate were posted in a prominent location but no approaches were made by potential participants. Furthermore the period for which ethical approval was given had lapsed. The process of analysis then commenced.

4.21 Data Analysis

Analysis commenced after all data were captured (Bowden 2005) so that findings are related to a set of inputs across all interviews. Each transcription took a considerable amount of time to complete; the lengthiest was the first interview completed in 22

hours. Becoming more familiar with the recordings it took less time. Each recording was labelled using a pseudonym, timed and dated. Bowden (2000) advises analysis should commence and continue at one time rather than after each interview so as to keep the nature of the interview constant and avoid alteration of the data in some way and to this end influence the credibility of the outcomes.

Phenomenographic analysis is described by a number of individuals Collier –Reed (2009) suggests that pattern of Swedish individual transcript analysis and Australian whole transcripts analytic processes appears to have emerged, both impact on outcomes. Formats considered included Marton 1986; Booth 1997; Akerlind 2000; Bowden 2000, Prosser 2000, Trigwell 2000; Sjöström and Dahlgren ; Collier –Reed 2009, descriptions of consecutive type steps for data analysis of transcripts within nursing research was applied. Although the steps are not as sequential as Sjöström and Dahlgren, (2002) describe, due to the mutual relationship between steps within the process. This approach was adopted similar to Jokelainen et al (2013 p.62) to identify “all possible ways that academics conceived, viewed, experienced and understood” assessment within pre-registration education, How it was applied is now described. Analysis was conducted alone using the following steps.

Step one is familiarisation. This meant listening to and transcribing recorded material. Listening back and re-reading transcripts simultaneously meant corrections were made in real time, aiding the familiarisation and clarification process. Here the focus is becoming aware of the how participants described their own experiences and views of assessment.

The second step involved compilation of answers from participants to certain questions around the topic. This was to obtain maximum variation and characterisation of the topic. Here dialogic material considered irrelevant to the topic in focus for example personal information, non-nursing assessment, clinical assessment in the practice setting were set aside This was to reduce the volume of reading and focus on the topic of interest.

Through reading, and reflecting Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) advise the analyst consider three issues indicating significance in interview data. They include (a) frequency, (b) position and (c) pregnancy. This meant considering (a) the frequency

with which statements are articulated in and comparing them with how or if they occurred within other transcripts. Another is (b) position, often the most significant elements of dialogue occurs in the introductory part of a text this provided an interesting insight when looking at transcripts and finally (c) pregnancy where certain aspects are emphasised more than others.

The third step is condensation, or reduction, of the individual answers to find the central parts of dialogue. Again taking a whole transcript approach to reading and analysis, the central or key aspect of participants dialogue were examined in detail and compared and contrasted bearing in mind the issues of significance described above. The significant indicators that emerged as a result of this process included topics like (a) academic subjects and module learning outcomes assessed in the nursing programme (b) the location of modules of learning/ assessment in the programme (c) where the focus of the participants attention is in the assessment context on what the student is doing or what they are doing (d) what types of assessing methodologies are applied, how and why do they apply them and issues arising (e) how and when is assessment feedback discussed (f) were learning technologies described and applied for assessment and feedback (e) were particular approaches to learning described (f) what size were the class groups (g) other academic responsibilities and history of work in the school.

The fourth step is preliminary grouping of dialogue. Using a whole transcript approach and based on the significance indicators as described above a good familiarity with transcripts was emerging. Preliminary groupings based on the significant indicators identified above were made. This led to the preliminary grouping of whole transcripts of views and experiences into one of three groupings based on similarity within and difference between them.

Of the three groupings, the first significant indicators included a clear focus on human science education, applying summative assessment methods, large classes, what is happening with the participant/ student, foundational years of the award, being available for feedback, experience in higher education, other work, managing alone.

Within the second grouping significant indicators included use of a variety of assessing methods, encouraging student engagement, preparing student for assessment, providing feedback variously, use of technology variously, class groups, and assessment across all years of awards.

Within the third grouping was a clear and present focus on providing assessment feedback on a continual basis throughout the module, use of technology to support assessment and feedback, use of problem based approaches, an openness to being creative in assessment.

A related and fifth step incorporated contrast and comparison of within and between preliminary groupings. Adjustments and data review continued until the three groupings appeared internally consistent in line with the indicators identified above. These groupings were then tentatively labelled. These labels were modified and reviewed until the best fit was identified. Each transcript was reviewed in line with a label to determine if it was correctly positioned within the grouping it was assigned to.

The sixth step is naming; this took time to ensure the labels assigned were to the three orientations were sufficiently inclusive and internally consistent. This was a difficult step and took time to ensure each label depicted in an inclusive way, each orientation.

The seventh and final step is termed contrastive comparison. A description of the character of each orientation and variation between orientations was identified to remind the researcher of aspects to include in the presentation of findings

A question arises as to the effect various forms of analysis has on the effect of and on research outcomes. Classical Swedish phenomenographic analysis favoured by Marton (1986; 1994) advises an individual approach where selection of sections of the transcripts where the participant has reflected on their experience, are placed in a decontextualized pool of meaning and thereafter considered for further analysis. Akerlind 2000; Prosser 2000; Dahlgren and Sjöström 2002; Collier- Reed 2009 favour a whole transcript approach where parts of text are colour coded and analysed in relation to each other and in relation to the categories constituted. Using this process there is no pool of meaning as such, rather coloured coded text, highlighting

the interview transcripts reflecting the category as constituted thus contextualised from where it came.

A further issue of consideration is to whether categories of description are constructed or are discovered in the data. Bowden (2000) provided an explication of both approaches when developing conceptions and categories of description and to their impact and outcomes on this of analysis as follows;-.

Those holding the perspective the data are constructed view their emergence out of a relationship between the researcher and the data. The raw data represents a relationship between the interviewer and the data, which in turn, influences the outcomes of analysis. The construction perspective implies a number of issues (Walsh 2000). This includes an impression the researcher has a better grasp of the world than the interviewee, that categories “fit into” a predetermined framework constructed by the researcher and in developing a set of tidy categories logically related, some categories may be omitted and others discounted.

On the other hand, the discovery perspective implies categories emerge out or are discovered in the data, independent of the application of the researchers’ analytic processes. When viewed like this, concerns are expressed that the wider analytic process itself is circumvented and as a result, the meaning of the transcripts overall is likely to be diminished (Walsh 2000 p. 26).

In this study, both construction and discovery are applied for pragmatic reasons as similarities clearly emerged. In practice, applying the indicators of frequency, position and pregnancy, assisted the researcher to decide the aspects that appeared to have a greater emphasises when compared with others.

The final three orientations that emerged describe how participants relation to assessment when their views on and experiences are explored. It is duly acknowledged these emerged following analysis undertaken by a lone researcher and remains open to further interpretation. A final issue in this regard is findings represent how assessment is experienced by a self-selecting group of participants in relationship with the researcher at one point in time (Marton 1986).

4.22 Summary

Having identified a gap as it relates to academics' views on and experience of assessment within undergraduate nursing education, this chapter has explored the processes the researcher applied to address this gap in knowledge. The aim and research questions guiding this study were identified, thereafter an exploration of phenomenography as the theoretical approach informing this study. This guided the methodology, adapted and adopted based on the research aims and purpose.

Thereafter, negotiating access to the research site including ethical approval, accessing participants, conduct of interviews and processes involved in analysis of data and generation of findings and qualitative quality addressed. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings.

Chapter 5 Presentation and discussion of findings

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of interviews and analysis, using a phenomenographic informed approach to answer the research question of “How do academics view and experience assessment across programmes of undergraduate nursing education offered in one academic department in a university in the Republic of Ireland?”. First, an overview of findings is presented to guide a reader through this chapter. Each orientation is then presented supported by dialogue taken directly from the transcripts. Thereafter each orientation is discussed in light of literature previously reviewed.

5.1 Overview of findings

The answer to the research question above is; it may be described within three orientations to assessment with each orientation depicting an expanded awareness of how and in what ways this activity is provided.

Within the first orientation, conventional assessment is applied within foundational human science modules to large student groups. In providing a more comprehensive insight into assessment occurring within undergraduate nursing education, it reveals how three participants' relation to assessment. Here, participants are aware of the importance of human science knowledge as underpinning safe and effective nursing care. Because of this, they are more likely to apply conventional assessment to determine learning. Efficiency is also a motivating factor in administering assessment to large groups of students. Providing feedback to students to improve learning and to support more effective teaching was not overtly apparent in dialogue represented within this orientation. Here also, teaching assessment and feedback are viewed as separate activities.

The second orientation contains descriptions of an extended awareness of assessment in using more active assessing processes to engage students more deeply with learning. Here participants' described experiences of applying a richer variety of teaching and assessing methods and using more feedforward than feedback to improve students engagement with learning. How participants' relate to assessment in the third orientation is engaging nursing students in assessment and feedback as

early as possible in a module. It is the first student centred orientation and is reflected in a participant primary concern for what is happening to the student and their learning over the course of the module. This occurs through any manner and means but with an emphasis on using technology. The three orientations also reflect a shifting emphasis from teacher centeredness to student centeredness towards increasing engagement together through assessment and feedback. The findings of three orientations parallel assessment of for and as learning themes (Earl 2013) and National Forum current enhancement theme 2016-2018. This appears the first study revealing how and in way ways academics relate to assessment within undergraduate nursing education providing a valuable insight into this activity. The figure below depicts findings graphically.

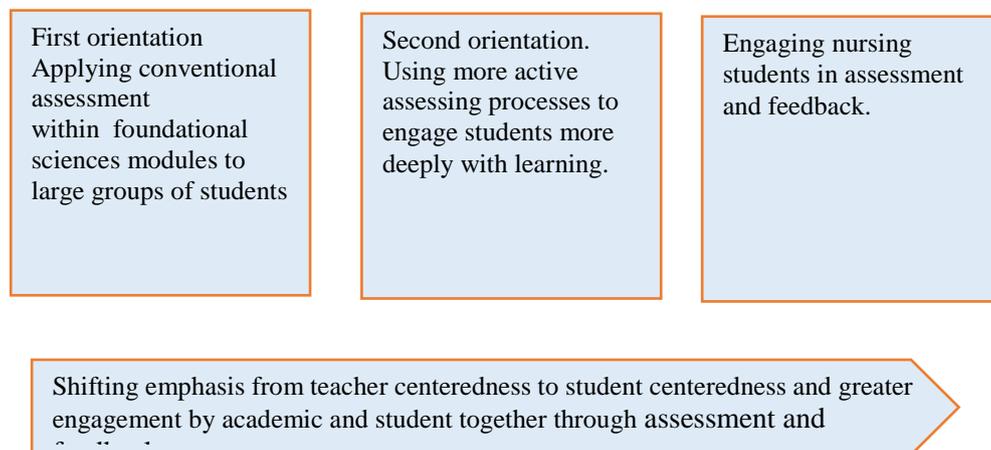


Figure 1; Three orientations to assessment within undergraduate nursing education.

First orientation; applying conventional assessment within foundational human science modules to large student groups

Three participants' dialogue analysed from views and experience describing how the related to assessment are positioned within this orientation. Wide-ranging variation within the interview data of views and experiences of assessment, was not apparent. Participants' coordinated teaching and assessment within foundational human science modules positioned mostly in first and second year. Teaching and assessment was managed mostly alone, to large student groups. This is a teacher-focussed orientation. Participants' focus was predominantly directed at what they, as teacher, were doing in this context. What was happening to the student was not explicitly

attended to within the teaching /learning situation. Assessment was applied to determine students' knowledge of learning material provided in class, selected readings, or clinical activities. A concern that students display a basic knowledge or understanding of human science material, considered to underpin or complement nursing knowledge later, this shaped assessment activity, as reflected below:

“Their assessments in relation to that would be more about what is human science , what are the theories of human science , what are the principles of human science and just a kind basic understanding. It’s like any other first year study module which, having to know something about the topic area before you can apply it” (5337).

Here, assessment strategies were designed and applied to test, judge and motivate students to learn particular material viewed by some use the word “basics”, as reflected here:

“So what I have done with the pharmacology is to get 50 short questions (2 marks per each question) so it’s very objective there is no room for subjectivity so I can see what is the right or wrong answer” (6001).

“In that particular study module, they have to learn the basics of the microbiology, cell biology, genetics, chemistry and I feel also we do an overview of the body and by focussing a bit on cardiac and immune cells and nervous tissue so the assignment is a 100% exam and the reason I do this is because students need to learn the basics” (5656).

In this extract, the participant viewed human science knowledge as core to the development of nursing knowledge and practice. However acknowledged student nurses may not share that view of its importance:

“I suppose I come from a particular perspective ...I would have been involved in would have been exclusively year one and year two, so it wouldn’t have been year three and year four. ...I would see it as very core to what the students are doing but the students would see it as more complementary” (5330).

Assessment was relatively one dimensional, applied to determine factual learning. In-depth knowledge of learning material are not module learning outcomes in early years. Conventional summative testing methods reported here included time constrained, unseen written examination, or exam questions on major human science perspectives applied to nursing. Multi choice questions designed to test basic factual understandings, e.g. differentiating between a bacteria and virus, short answer questions on anatomy or physiology or mathematical calculations for e.g. pharmacology, as illustrated below:

“I teach mainly anatomy and physiology and basic bioscience, immunology; when assessing biosciences unless they have a really in-depth knowledge of something the best way to assess them is by exam. So most of my experience is around giving students exams as a form of assessment usually 100% exams” (5638).

An exception was summative observational assessment of performing a psychomotor skill. It incorporates some assessment of theoretical knowledge necessary to complete psychomotor skills competently. This was undertaken in the clinical skills laboratory with clinical nursing staff employed for that purpose and other academic staff. Whilst assessment of clinical skills occurred in clinical placement, a students ability to perform this first. is assessed in a simulated setting, in accordance with module learning outcomes.

OSCE was often accompanied with a short answer questions /MCQ. In OSCE a skills based checklist was applied as the grading criteria. The function of OSCE is to test, check and ensure students displayed sufficient knowledge, skills of nursing skills as they relation to human sciences to an acceptable standard i.e. injection technique/ drug calculations. Also assessing basic mathematical calculations within a pharmacology module was designed and administered to check understanding of this material. This assessment was linked to a concern for patient safety, as conveyed below:

“It is worrying potentially if you have nurses who cannot do basic drug calculations because if you do not know the basic safety components about the medicines that they are working with is very poor and would not happen

in other fields of medicine. Doctors would have a higher level they have to reach to pass and so on” (6020).

Participants’ acknowledged with large groups assessment must be managed efficiently. They were also aware assessment methods applied influenced students learning in a particular direction. They also acknowledged “rote” learning material as a realistic possibility, as conveyed here:

“So you assess very quickly, It does display understanding very quickly what the student is thinking hopefully it's not all rote learning but some of it is an exam but what you find it is” (5674).

Teaching large groups of students’ human science material was not viewed to favour those who struggle and those who do not, in different ways. For some students module content and assessment was reported as not “sufficiently challenging”. But those with limited exposure to human science education before entry to third level it was acknowledge as “difficult”. Analyses of summative results revealed wide-ranging student abilities within human sciences classes. A concern expressed was of some students progressing through the module with “weak passes” in human sciences. This was associated with application of compensation arrangements in accordance with institutional rules and regulations to enable progression. This practice was viewed to lead to a students weaker understanding of human sciences overall and concerning, as participant are aware of how human sciences concepts underpin nursing as here:

“I was personally very unhappy with that they only had to do 2 questions that meant the student could pick two systems and that was all they had to study and that ultimately reflects in the feeling in the student when they get to higher years and out in the community in their jobs that they feel that they are not that competent in that bioscience type competencies because they were let off , or had been let off, and I am a firm believer in setting high bar because of the impact of these in the decisions they may make.”(6062).

A unifying theme was managing teaching and assessment within large classes. Student class sizes of between 120 up to 400 were reported. This large class sizes occurred because foundational human science learning outcomes are common to other programmes in the Faculty Teaching was reported as more challenging in these circumstances than assessing, for some. However, it also means devising assessment including making assessment instructions if necessary, applicable to all students. This was reflected their awareness of how institutional guidelines impact on assessment design. Here, foundational learning outcomes must accurately assess learning outcomes for all students enrolled on the same modules across programmes. With large group teaching and assessment, participants' reported having less time to "know" individual students. On the positive side, it led to utter objectivity in marking. Efficiency in managing large group assessment meant administering short answer questions capturing a breadth of facts and detail and was marked quickly, as extracts conveyed below;

"If they get less than 40 % they do a resit that's the primary assessment tool that I use. I'm not overly happy with that as an assessment. But the sheer numbers trying into manage what is essential nearly 350 contacts" (2983).

"So there are close on 400 students in that study module, so there is only so much you can achieve with that study module in terms of assessment, in what is physically possible to assess"(5350).

"With the pharmacology is to get 50 short questions marks per each question so it's very objective there is no room for subjectivity so I can see what is the right or wrong answer" (6001).

When designing assessment exam papers they mentioned ensuring sufficient differentiation in questions when foundational test questions are examined regularly. This is to ensure reliability and validity of assessments administered. This was important within a defined subject area where 100% exams are administered, repeated yearly and published. A typical differentiation involves changing testing commands as well as providing different answer options for similar questions. There is awareness that time is needed to come up with good yearly summative assessment. Assessment was graded, mostly manually, acknowledged as time consuming and

completed within a short time span. With large group marking came a responsibility to students, as conveyed below:

“I think as lecturers we all have a responsibility to think about the student who has put all the effort into this” (5471).

Experiences in preparing students for examination/ assessment students described included directing students to sample test questions or fill in blanks questions and to textbooks with self-testing questions on modular content. Some use of technology was apparent. For example students were encouraged to engage in self-testing with maths quizzes on Moodle/ Loop as practical support. Participants' reported up to 2/3rds of students accessed these when student logs were checked. Concern about students not completing online quizzes, or attending class when logins are checked was noted. This concerning as students are unlikely to be unaware of their own limitations in advance of summative examination.

Students have limited exposure to clinical practice in foundational years. Although placement occurs in the first year it increases in subsequent years. This participant described how students developed a greater awareness of how and in ways human science knowledge underpins nursing knowledge. Also other assessing methodologies may be applied with smaller class groups in later years, as conveyed here:

“So that’s really where I see the human science assessments really coming into their own in that second year study module” (5408)

Some final experiences described within this first orientation indicate teaching, assessment and feedback are viewed as separate processes. Regarding feedback, it was reported despite being available to students on feedback days, student engagement with them on feedback days did not feature or featured, rarely.

A related issue concerned no sense of strategic vision for integration of human science knowledge across and over nursing awards. Another was reduction of time allocated to human sciences modules when compared with the Registration/Diploma in Nursing. Another was human sciences education within nursing awards needed investment.

Finally, student assessment was identified as another aspect of academic work undertaken alongside meeting large research commitments, academic supervision of students undertaking higher academic awards and university responsibilities. A view illustrated below:

“But the sheer numbers trying into manage what is essential nearly 350 contacts with those overlaps and trying to manage a busy research profile” (5999).

5.2 Summary of orientation one

Within the first orientation, participants related to assessment by providing conventional assessment within foundational human science modules to large student groups. Assessment was generally applied to determine learning on completion of a module or a phase of learning. Participants' focus of awareness was devising assessment requiring the student to reproduce knowledge, mostly provided in class or selected readings within the human sciences. Students are prepared for examination by directing them to previous assessments administered and in-class support.

Other motivations for applying summative assessment was judging, grading and certifying a student nurse had demonstrated core knowledge or sufficient skill, before application of more advanced learning can occur at a later point in the nursing award. Efficiency was a facet also. Participants also described having other responsibilities including engagement in research, managing postgraduate students as well as institutional responsibilities.

5.3 Discussion of first orientation

This orientation is discussed under three separate headings.

5.3.1 A more comprehensive understanding of human sciences assessment in nursing education

This first orientation provided a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between participants' and human sciences assessment within a disciplinary context. It captured commonality found within dialogue following interviews and analysis of three interviews of participants teaching human sciences.

This was a teacher centred orientation. Participants relationships with assessment found in guiding the student towards reproduction of “the basics” or core foundational human sciences module content, in line with module learning outcomes.

Views and experiences here corresponded with a traditional view of assessment, underpinned by trait theory as described earlier. This proposes human capacities and intelligence are measurable traits or by psychometric theory which views intelligence as innate and fixed (Gepps 1994; Taylor 1994; Lau 2015 ;). A primary motivation for applying summative testing was to enable judging, grading and certifying a learner had demonstrated achievement to a standard on completion of a course (Bloom et al 1971). This represents the classic assessment of learning approach. It ensured learning outcomes are achieved to a standard (National Forum 2017a). Application of summative “high stakes” assessment is undertaken in accordance with standardisation, reliability measures; it also aligns with meeting quality assurance and institutional accountability purposes for learning (Bloxham and Boyd 2008 p.15).

Here participants’ motivation for applying assessment of learning was linked to an awareness of how human science knowledge underpins or is core to nursing. Thus in assessment students needed to display knowledge or competence of learning including for safety or patient / client care reasons. Postareff et al (2012) also noted application of mostly summative approaches to assessment evident within pharmacy academics conceptions. Similar reasons were offered including academics wanted to ensure students demonstrate sufficient knowledge of life sciences for entry to a working life with responsibilities for others. A similar finding was noted in this study, for similar reasons.

Participants also mentioned efficiency as a factor when managing large class teaching and assessment, mostly alone. This provides deeper insight into motivations for applying summative assessment in addition for grading, certification and safety purposes. It was also associated with managing assessment for large classes of between 100-400 students in the research setting, not all nursing students, and often alone. Furthermore, all participants mentioned managing assessment alongside meeting research obligations.

This finding indicated managing the learning of large classes by one individual warrants deeper consideration. Institutional pressures to apply summative assessment are associated with high student- staff ratios and demands to be research active, making it more difficult to apply other types of assessing formats (Yorke 2003; Tse Lau 2015). Reports of academics not applying computer assisted/ aided assessment to support large group assessment nor were reports of using a diversifying assessing methods in the learning context captured.

Assessment of learning activity must provide credible and defensible statements about the nature and the quality of their learning, (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.57) It is possible to improve the quality of assessment of learning, reduce marking load, improve student engagement and support better outcomes for large group learning. Examples include applying MCQ with certainty based marking (CBM), extended matching questions or assertion reason questions testing more complex concepts accessible through institutional learning platforms i.e. Loop or Moodle (Bloxham and Boyd 2008). At the same time, Brown (2015) acknowledges while assessing technologies help with large cohorts, academics need support to apply them effectively investment in human science was mentioned as needed. Challenges to their use include- considerable time and support for setup, on-going management to increase staff and student confidence in their application, may involve additional costs i.e. hardware software back (Brown 2015). Blended learning approaches to teaching and assessing biosciences may be used. Swift et al. (2015) suggesting 'LabTutor', and other online learning and open learning resources can enhance human sciences education and now are applied to nursing.

This finding suggests wider institutional and department dialogue is needed if an expectation continues that one individual manages teaching, assessing and providing feedback alone with very large classes. A related issue is exploring in detail and in dialogue, investment and supports human and technological, needed to assist higher quality student learning and assessment of human sciences knowledge, in foundational years. Professional development and a program-focused approach to assessment should be actively considered. Designing an assessment and feedback strategy using deliberate and arranged longitudinal and parallel assessment activities

for learning and certification, would better prepare students to apply and integrate learning successfully (National Forum 2017c).

The disciplinary grouping of human sciences appeared a factor shaping how assessing methods were administered; they reflect a view that something has been learnt (Biggs 1995). Participants' spoke of teaching and assessing human sciences modules only. Jessop and Malaecker (2015) and others reported similarities in assessment characteristics in disciplinary groupings. They found within a broadly single assessment paradigm with an accepted body of theory consensus regarding examination of content (also known as pure and hard-applied sciences). Examples of such groupings include anatomy, physiology, biology and pharmacy. Application of quantifiable, impersonal, knowledge forms of assessment containing universally accepted truths and application of sciences towards functional ends are more commonly applied. It is compared to other disciplinary groupings such as “softer” sciences e.g. teaching /social work. Their analysis also revealed assessment and feedback difficulties are apparent within hard science groupings, and are associated with recurrent use of summative examination. Whilst disciplinary grouping may be a factor within this orientation, historic familiarity with particular methods and resistance to alter or use other assessment methods may apply also. Furthermore, responsibility associated with large module leader/coordination responsibilities alone may also be a factor in favouring quantifiable assessing formats. Bearman et al (2017) emphasised in designing assessment, academics navigate the various and often competing environmental and personal factors influencing this activity.

Two academics expressed concern regarding application of compensation arrangements relating to human sciences results. For example if students fail a biosciences module, when compensation arrangements are applied in accordance with university regulations, they can pass. This was considered to contribute to some students displaying a weaker understanding of human sciences as they progress through the course. Examples reported of some students unable to distinguish between a virus and bacteria and an inability to apply mathematical calculations to pharmacology accurately. Such findings reinforce how human science knowledge is necessary for effective nursing care and should be resourced and managed appropriately. A lack of confidence in applying a human sciences knowledge to

decision making and of difficulties understanding and integrating human sciences knowledge is termed a 'bioscience issue' within undergraduate nursing education (Tonkes et al 2015 p.2680). Concerns relation to setting time aside for biological sciences, the appropriateness and depth of knowledge required for different branches, availability of academic staff and the value of using different teaching strategies (Thornton 1997; Jordan et al. 1999; Davies et al. 2000). The NMBI (2015) detail requirements of human sciences theoretical content within undergraduate nursing education for all divisions of the nursing register. However, Tonkes et al (2015) notes the depth of human sciences knowledge required by nurses at the point of registration is not sufficiently detailed. It is suggested greater clarity is now needed regarding its depth and breadth as a standard for effective nursing practice is recommended. Furthermore, in light of concerns expressed for patient safety and nursing competence associated with application of biosciences knowledge, a programmatic approach to assessment is worth exploring in this area. This includes developing a vision for human science education for nurses across programmes (Dijkstra van der Vleuten and Schuwirth 2009; van der Vleuten et al 2012; Brunton et al 2016; Schuwirth, van Der Vleuten and Durning 2017).

5.3.2 Assessment Of learning

Conventional assessment methods are administered to test foundational knowledge. Because of this, Earle and Katz (2006 p.57) note it is vital these produce sufficient information to support

“credible and defensible statements about the nature and the quality of their learning, so that others can use the results in appropriate ways’

The focus of the relation between the participants' and assessment within this first orientation, was balanced in favour of assessment *of* learning (Earl 2013 p.29), differentiated from assessment *for* or *as* learning. Although providing useful information about a learner, assessment of learning produces results, ultimately reduced to a grade or mark, set against known scale. It is also known as “high stakes assessment”. It is applied to enable progression through the next stage of a course or to its completion. In providing evidence of achievement, public results in transcripts or as symbols convey how well students are learning. These frequently contribute to

critical decisions affecting students' educational and personal futures (Earl and Katz 2006).

A minor variation was detected in the extent of knowledge integration required with assessment of learning here. Samuelowicz and Bain's (2002) study similarly noted this subtle variation. In this present study when a quantity of human sciences information, knowledge or skills was supplied by academics "in parts or bits"; integration of this information was not a requirement within the assessment activity. The focus of assessment is reproducing material provided by an "expert" or located in directed reading. Thus, short answer questions testing e.g. pharmacology, anatomy, biosciences, immunology, OSCE are methods more commonly administered. Whereas when some integration of human science material is required i.e. principles, ideas as supplied to students in lectures and readings though in a more coherent form, discursive/ type questions are administered. This is more likely to apply to psychology/ sociology assessment.

In this present study following clinical placement, in the second year, it was noted how human science knowledge came alive for students. Examination questions tended to require students to relation human science knowledge to nursing concepts. However, despite subtle variation in emphasis between these two formats, they are reproductive in character and positioned in this first orientation. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) advocate caution in preparing students for assessment as it relations to this subtle emphasis. Students may view their task is to reproduce understandings supplied to them in class. However, what is required is evidence of some application of human science knowledge to nursing in exams consistent with the often-complex information provided to them. This finding provides an insight into a subtle differentiation applied in a summative assessment in undergraduate nursing education, not previously reported. This subtle variation in how assessment is applied within human sciences requires that students are adequately prepared for this in advance of examination.

Participants' understandings reflect views that conventional end of module assessment of learning determines students understandings of basic human science knowledge. This viewed as necessary before application can occur later in the programme. In the present study, discussion of engaging students to develop their

capacity to interrogate human science concepts from commencement of the module to its conclusion was not apparent. Although students were directed to self-learning activities on Moodle/Loop to support learning. However, it was noted not all students accessed this support. Empowering students to self-regulate their own learning and evaluate their performance are important lifelong learning life skills to develop (Evans 2013). It was particularly important for students, as noted by one participant, not yet aware of their personal learning limitations.

Here, participants appeared less aware of, or unable to apply a richer range of assessment methods to motivate more engaged student learning of human sciences to nursing and or use feedback to promote engagement. That is, despite an awareness of the higher potential of students engaging in rote learning and that students did not appear to understand how human sciences inform safe and effective nursing care. Here practices applied reflect the participants' view of what it means to have learnt something, is by reproducing it (Biggs 1996).

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005 p.301) concluded if academics develop a clearer view of the types of learning strategies teaching and assessment tend to evoke in students, they may be more inclined to change or develop how they engage with assessment. Furthermore, they assert how academics view “basic knowledge” is crucial to changing their views of assessment. When assessment is understood as a measure to be applied to determine knowledge that must be acquired *before* relating and application can occur, they will have difficulty viewing an internal relation between teaching and assessment. A more inclusive view is when the teacher and assessment are aligned around developing and examining “basic concepts” that must be acquired by the student *through* knowledge seeking activity. The latter represents a more student oriented –learning view

5.3.3 Feedback

Summative assessment is also associated with missed opportunities to receive feedback that is timely to improve future learning and help student regulate their learning (Harrison et al 2015). Applying formative assessment to support student on-going learning purposes was not very apparent in this orientation. Neither was formative assessment applied to adjust teaching in response to student

misunderstandings. A poor student uptake of feedback following summative exam results was reported. However exam preparation was provided and is an aspect of feed forward. Also participants' reported "being available" during institutional feedback days-; however poor uptake by students may be partly attributed to its scheduling some weeks after promulgation of results in the research setting. Harrison et al (2015) explored why students fail to access feedback. They found summative methods are unlikely to encourage students to access feedback because, having achieved their goal to pass, are relieved and see little incentive to address weaknesses. Studies have consistently demonstrated a strong engagement between feedback and enhancing student learning and achievement in higher education (Black and William 1998; Nicol and Macfarlane- Dick 2006; Evans 2013; Carliss 2015). It is consistently affirmed providing feedback to students and crucially, they attending to it understand it and importantly acting on it, is essential. Feedback is also vital in developing positive self-regulatory capacities and in serving lifelong development purposes. Postareff et al (2012) study emphasised the importance of developing self-reflective, self-evaluative skills awareness of personal learning limitations within pharmacy students. These skills are associated with students receiving and accepting and acting on feedback within a professional programme. They are also associated with helping students develop a positive attitude to learning. In this present study, the performance of some students in human sciences assessment was identified as concerning and ineffective to support a registrant in practice. How and ways integrating teaching assessing and feedback over the course of module is likely to raise student achievement and learning was not acknowledged within this orientation.

Other studies have indicated a critical factor in response to feedback is engagement and engagement by students with teachers (Pekrun et al 2002). Bloxham and Boyd (2008 p.21) emphasise feedback facilitates self-assessment, encourages "peer and teacher dialogue, positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem". It also helps to minimise the gap between current and desired student performance as well as shaping responsive teaching. An important learning from this study is a deeper exploration of how and in ways feedback is viewed, experienced, and used by academics and student nurses in the study setting.

Designing an assessment incorporating a feedback strategy using deliberate and arranged longitudinal and parallel assessment activities better prepares students to apply and integrate learning successfully and more sustainably (National Forum 2017c). This is promising initiative to consider for biosciences education, providing a vision for bioscience education. Finally, National Forum (2015 a) published a professional development framework for those working in HE, interpreted and adapted for academic staff across disciplines. In addressing the local context of assessing within undergraduate nursing education within human sciences. How human sciences knowledge is developed taught, assessed and providing feedback to student and academics must be considered as a priority area for professional development nationally and locally. In particular, given participants displayed an acute awareness of how human science knowledge underpins safe and effective nursing practice. .

5.4 Summary of first orientation

In this orientation, a more comprehensive insight into assessment within undergraduate nursing education revealed how three participants related to assessment. Here participants were very aware how human science knowledge underpins safe and effective nursing care. This was also reported with pharmacy academics (Postareff et al 2012) Here they applied mostly conventional assessment within foundational human science modules to large student groups. It was applied to determine learning for grading and certification purposes after a module or phase of learning. Efficiency was a motivating factor in administering assessment to large groups of student. Providing feedback to student to improve learning and to support teaching that is more effective was not overtly apparent in this orientation. This orientation reflects a view that teaching assessment and feedback are distinctly separate activities. Considerations for the practice of assessment within the human sciences, and development of a more cohesive and coordinated approach to human sciences was reported.

5.5 Second orientation; using more active assessing processes to engage students more deeply with learning.

Twelve participants' dialogues in relation to their views on and experiences of assessment were positioned within this orientation. The distinction between this and other orientations is captured within a theme of the participant taking the lead in applying more innovative assessment processes to intentionally influence student engagement with learning. While conventional assessment was previously applied to determine learning, more active assessment processes are applied to engage students here, than reported within the first orientation. This represented an extended awareness of assessment views and experiences including how to improve assessment. Assessment was also applied, to inform teaching and provide feedback or feedback on student learning, though not consistently.

Wider variation in views and experiences of assessment were located within this orientation when compared to the first, but with sufficient commonality to enable grouping them together. Participants' engaged in assessment across all nursing programmes and across all years of programmes. Assessing was administered by a module coordinator as an employee working in a context with access to similar type learning, teaching resources and time. Differentiations from the first orientations include not always managing large classes, or applying mostly conventional assessment to determine factual learning outcomes or managing other academic responsibilities. Class sizes vary from smaller branch specific groups to larger ones, with a problem-based learning approach applied within one programme. Here theoretical module learning outcomes varied, but are nursing disciplinary specific.

This was a partly teacher centred / partly student centred orientation. At times, what is happening for the teacher / participants' is attended to in the teaching learning situation with what is happening for the student, not explicitly attended to. At other times, the opposite perspective is apparent. A rich variety of assessment methods are applied here to engage students, extending their thinking, developing skills for application to practice, challenging attitudes and feedback. Although the latter focus was not as apparent as within the third orientation.

Participants were aware that assessment within undergraduate nursing education is multifaceted. For example it determines student achievement of complex modular

learning outcomes appropriately; it supports application of learning, ongoing learning and must be manageable. This participant described her dilemma when different assessment formats to “fit” within a problem based learning module were applied:

“So for example my third-year one is I teach have to cover the a particular module in a branch of the programme. So I had to let go, which I find hugely hard. Previous years is I’ve did two forms of assessment, three forms of assessment, sorry. I got them to do – the workload just keeps going, for them and for us. So I got them to do an oral presentation on the first one, on the first case I gave them. So they did an oral presentation on this patient came in, the main problems were, and then they provided the research-based evidence that they would provide for this” (4007).

Another example was where demonstration of competency in application of clinical skills to a standard was necessary, summative assessment was applied. The potential for extending clinical skills assessment using student self and peer assessment with large groups going forward, was also described:

“Other ways around the large groups there could be more peer assessment as well... guidelines would have to be very clear. With controls in place to stop collusion or somebody not realising that this is not right” (87).

Participants’ displayed an awareness assessment serves other functions as well as judging and certifying learning. This included motivating students, intentionally influencing their engagement with learning and developing abilities to acquire, apply and be competent within the practice setting. It also involved feedback, giving and receiving. This dialogue captures this essence:

“ I always thought assessment was a motivator to support our processes rather than a form of evaluation I know that it can be both but I also think that the summative thing does not interest me that much is about the formative elements, the thing of giving feedback on how you are going and for some people it is a principal motivator for their learning and above all and we know this about attendance above all else, the assignment that people do even if they do not do the reading list prescribed for them will drive them in a

certain direction so mmm that is really the main thing where I am with the thrust of assessment in my view” (1295).

Participants' described applying innovative active assessing processes at different stages during and on completion of a module to influence greater engagement together and with learning. Here, views of assessing activity extended beyond testing abilities to memorise factual module and subject content, towards application of learning. Examinations are also administered, as one participant noted, they provide an unaffected snapshot of the students learning. This is how students were prepared:

“it rules out plagiarism which is becoming rampant in assignment based modules. I find in terms of assessment if I have an assignment as the assessment mm and I always find if I provide mmmm Written very clear guidelines including a marking grid that I would have generated based on the on the points that I deem as important and linked to the module learning outcomes. I always try to do that and that the students is being given this at the outset and they know what they are being marked against” (374).

A wider range of innovative assessing methods and resources were described to engage students in learning. These include technology Loop/ Moodle as well as other means supporting student application and engagement with teaching, assessing and feedback and together. Descriptions of how technology was used included within an e-learning option module using discussion forums, or collaborative learning activities. Other examples included the student using Turnitin to check authenticity of work submitted. Assessing clinical skills using video recordings or as peer assessment teaching exercises were reported. The extract below described combining a 4th year skills teaching OCSE with a peer skills session.

The OSCE is my main experience the other area that I have experience is peer assessment Where just last year in NS 000 this assessment for teaching and learning students were allocated a skill to teach and were then assessed by their peers. It seems to be popular from feedback. Its early days yet with regards there will be tweaks along the way. It's using the facilities. It's a good way of getting students to revise previous years work. (42)

Another described constructing peer assessment guidelines to manage student collaboration with each other, in an online module:

“Within the group each student had to write a 300 word outline of what they were proposing they would do their assignment on. Everybody had to ensure that they had 2 or 3 comments to assignments. Obviously I had to have some guidelines for example the comments had to be framed in a positive way and they had to apply or analyse it it’s as not enough to say it was great” (1855).

Tensions with managing assessment were reported often related to the range of methods applied and organisation required to provide for this across student groups. For example, tensions with marking students work across the four nursing branches in large groups in the absence of clear marking guidelines was reported:

“I think it is important that branch specific fails are 2nd marked by branch specific people. e.g. a student failed and the fail was queried because it was not 2nd marked by a branch specific person. The student passed. We have no guidelines around that. Our notion as a team was that this student was very innovative (this was seen differently by the branch specific person)” (5990).

Another tension described by a new employee was the institutional policy around publication of assessment material- as illustrated in this piece.

“When I started this I developed a 25 question exam paper and spent a lot of time developing this and when the exam was over it went up on the web for a group of students to look at....

Researcher - And the implications of that?

“That is appalling, my time was wasted and in other places you have a test bank and you selectively developed sample tests you would not waste hours and hours thoughtfully developing a test to make it available to the whole world you know what it means if you developed the questions that you laboured over and yes you twigged them you have distractors etc. alter them

altered the sequence you have given away your answers. And frankly there is only a finite number of questions you can ask for example the signs and symptoms of lithium toxicity you know those are the things that lend themselves well to MCQ the signs and symptoms the recognition of-of eh signs and syndromes they work less well with interpersonal skills”(55).

The word feedback was used 58 times and evidenced in all participant dialogue. References included adequately preparing students to receive feedback, applauding student effort and work in feedback and preparing academics to provide written feedback on student work. That students did not attend for feedback was mentioned. A focus on using feedback to provide assistance to students, guide their learning or modify teaching or assessing actions at the next opportunity was not overly apparent. A greater focus on providing feed forward within this orientation noted with lesser focus on feedback. Views of where feedback could work better were expressed including in management type simulations where students apply and reflect on practice. Making feedback an essential requirement for first years to access was viewed as essential, another expressed a view students have not yet “bought into” feedback:

“I think feedback on assessments particularly in first year first semester is absolutely like... essential” (5428).

“it’s like ahm you know saying assessment is an essential part of learning, and feedback is in itself then an essential part of assessment, ahm but the students haven’t bought that”(5597).

However closing the feedback loop between student and participants' was viewed time consuming. Tensions with feedback for example students not actioning feedback as these extracts convey:

“I had to generate a grid to mark assessments and mark quickly over a short period of time – 1,000 pieces of assessment. Very pressurised. In terms of feedback you can’t give it properly to 225 people” (827).

Another reported

“I kept the draft with my comments and looked at the final submissions to see how students did respond to my feedback. Out of interest, what I noticed was that mmm kind of when I offered general comments like you really need to proof read this and you know and tidy up your grammar and punctuation and spelling and that was not attended to. The only thing that was attended to was the concrete suggestions so yes it is time consuming supporting students in their assessment is quite time consuming” (5237).

One participant reported feedback from the External Examiner was not actioned indicating the feedback loop from the External Examiner needs also to be closed:

“The feedback from External Examiners was not necessarily actioned. Criticism of the nature of the assessment and they were only being shown failed students in a cluster. They would have liked to see the results of the student across the board. This issue was never taken on board. No mechanism in place to resolve this.”(801).

Participants’ described a time when this was not always how they engaged in assessment indicating their practice has evolved. Dissatisfaction was described in use of similar type essay titles indicating a lack of confidence in and support for assessment. An historical over reliance on reductionist approaches to assessment, .poor engagement by students, negative comments by External Examiners, appeal board decisions as well as student challenges were described as factors leading to change. Others described current concerns including of poor inter-rater reliability of OSCE and poor intra academic communication in relation to assessment. Programme evaluation and a new academic framework were mentioned as agents changing how they now approached assessment. This participant conveyed an experience of stepping- in to manage and assess an early professional development module and of providing a poor quality, yet approved assessment:

“I had to manage large numbers of students in rooms. I had to construct four different assessments to measure the different levels, and maintain paper backup of each of them, it was very time consuming. The essay only looked

at one element of the learning outcomes of the module at that time. I was given the remit to assess academic writing but could not assess it” (1378).

Positive developments arising from a mandatory attendance policy, since discontinued, were mentioned. This included in-service training focusing on assessment and this was viewed beneficial. It led to a greater awareness of how and in ways assessment needed to change at the time. It also led to application of different formats of teaching and assessment to increase student engagement with learning within a professional programme.

5.5 Summary of second orientation

Within this second orientation was an extended awareness that assessment significantly influences student learning. A greater awareness and application of more innovative assessment methods within the context and culture of a higher educational setting was also apparent. This was designed to intentionally influence the student to engage more deeply with learning, both during term and in exam weeks and to collaborate with each other in learning. Historical poor practice in assessment was noted as well as more professional development in this context needed. Providing feedforward and feedback to students was described variously with more focus on feed forward and is understood as important in supporting teaching and learning. Although a consistent approach to providing feedback to students over the course of a module to support learning and adjust teaching in response, was not explicitly apparent.

5.6 Discussion of the second orientation

Participants' relations to assessment are differentiated from the first and third one in qualitatively distinct ways. Here the relation between participants and assessment is captured within an extended awareness of how and in ways assessment was applied to intentionally engage students with learning. Participants' relations to assessment here are also to determine learning but goes beyond applying conventional assessment formats. The differentiation in the relation between participants and assessment between the second and third orientation is in how and in ways feedback was provided to scaffold the next stage of student learning or trace progression of learning or adjust teaching. Two sub themes are now discussed

5.6.1 Increasing variety in assessment to promote student interaction with learning

This second orientation adds to an understanding of the relationship between participants and assessment as it occurred within the disciplinary context of undergraduate nursing education. The relation between participants' and assessment here was balanced more in favour of assessment *for* learning (Earl 2013 p.27). This is distinguished from assessment “*of*” or “*as*” learning (Earl 2013 p.27). Although it must be acknowledged, this has a greater assessment of learning focus. . However following reflection within the second orientation, students were more actively engaged with the learning process itself, through innovative and interactive approaches to assessment. Here, participants considered more deeply the assessment process they applied to promote student learning. Earl (2013) reports when “doing” assessment for learning- it is more interactive and for this reason, views and experiences were grouped in this orientation.

How participants relation to assessment here corresponds with a partly external/partly internal relation between the participant and assessment (Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005 p.291). What is going on for the participant and student are attended, to varying degrees in this orientation. The example of a participant who developed an assessment to determine reproduction of nursing knowledge and concepts was provided. However in an extended awareness, extensive guidance or feedforward to students on completing the assessment set to include clear guidance and marking plan. These explain why a partly external / partly internal relation between teaching and assessment The participants' and assessment are sometimes internally related to each other and sometimes, are not.

Both exemplars above also demonstrated how a participant was taking a lead in attending to what is happening to the students to progress their learning Such actions fall within broader descriptions of assessment for learning (National Forum 2017). Descriptions of applying problem based learning approaches, peer assessment, group work, poster presentations were noted. These correspond with what a teacher is attending to when exerting influence in-class engagement with and application of learning. Kantar (2014) study reported earnest attention to teaching content and examining for retention, of teaching to the test and adherence to applying traditional

assessment in her report of assessment practices applied in a university setting in Beirut. This was found within a contemporary registration-nursing programme positioned in higher education. An emphasis on teacher centred instruction, adherence to traditional assessing formats was not overly apparent in how participants relation to assessment within this second orientation. Rather, it conveys within a contemporary higher educational context, using more active assessing processes to engage students more deeply with learning, to collaborate with each other, and teacher to varying degrees. In this way, assessment for learning is more interactive (Earl 2013).

What is also apparent in this present study is that participants differentiated when it is appropriate to apply assessment strategies testing memorization and recall and when it is not. This represents a more comprehensive understanding of assessment within nursing education. Summative assessment was applied to evoke precise recall or application of knowledge or skills where safety issues were a concern, but other methods were applied when attitudinal, clinical skills assessment and other learning outcomes were assessed. Here, participants' applied a range of assessing methods to check module learning outcomes of psychomotor skills but also other types of competencies performed within a simulated learning context. This included designing assessment that determined attitudinal, communication and management skills. In designing assessment to determine more complex learning competencies, was an awareness that assessment must be "fit for purpose". This finding represents a nuanced and more complex understanding of applying assessment within a nursing award. This understanding was not reflected in Kantars (2014) study, when curriculum documentation profiling assessment activity was examined.

5.6.2 A disciplinary perspective on assessment

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) positioned global orientations to assessment along a continuum. At a middle position on the assessing continuum was a nursing story. This was were used to convey an orientation to assessment in accordance with a belief that understanding and knowing are reflected in a students ability to apply established knowledge and procedure to a standard, in foreseen and unforeseen situations. This current study, Samuelowicz, and Bain (2002) research share a similar discovery. However, Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) work did not elaborate if nursing

academics assess across all years of a nursing award and whether experiences were gathered from those engaged in clinical environment or academic environment. Both are significantly different assessment contexts. This makes the positioning and findings of this current study of significance given they are positioned within a disciplinary context.

This second orientation provides more insights into assessment situated a disciplinary context. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) reported assessment within nursing education was applied for varying purposes, a finding similarly reported here. Both studies similarly reveal assessment was applied for varying purposes including motivating and rewarding student learning, and to ensure attainment of professional standards and controlling entry to the profession, assist learning, and determine competence. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) reported it was applied as an incentive for students to “work hard”. The idea of “working hard” was not overly apparent in dialogue in this current study. Although designing assessment to induce the student to make deeper engagement with learning could be interpreted as requiring students to “work harder” in the present study.

Another similarity between both studies is when assessment was applied to determine understanding and knowing was reflected in a student’s ability to reflect on or apply knowledge to a standard. Within the second orientation, the possibility of detecting inappropriate attitudinal issues arose within assessment material submitted. Participants' reported inappropriate references to patients or clients may be made when deeper concepts are applied to nursing settings. This was mentioned as concerning. No clear direction as to how to deal with this tension was mentioned. The issues of inappropriate/appropriate disclosure in assessment material is a topic needing dialogue within an award leading to registration. This is important if academics wish to engage students in deeper more engaged learning, where students apply or analyse experiences, as a basis for learning. It is also an aspect that must be viewed carefully when preparing students for completing assessment.

In Postareff et al’s (2012) study exploring pharmacy academic conceptions of assessment, similarly analysis revealed application of knowledge was positioned as a middle conception. A large proportion (9 of 28) of pharmacy academics held conceptions reporting the purpose of assessment is to test a student’s ability to apply

knowledge they have gained during a study module, though in a reproductive way. The researchers viewed testing application of knowledge was important within a registered profession substantially rooted in the applied sciences and with responsibilities to the public. Findings represented in this second orientation are somewhat comparable with Postareff et al's (2012) middle categorisation. Although a striking difference in the current study is of academics applying a variety of assessments to intentionally influence and engage student nurses to learn complex outcomes, including attitudinal one's.

Postareff et al (2012) described a striking feature in their study was use of conventional assessing techniques. Based on the findings in the present study a rich variety of assessing methods may be applied including traditional assessment to determine many competences. This second orientation indicates a more nuanced and extended awareness that assessment for reproduction of learning material alone is insufficient preparation for registration award and professional care.

A similar finding with Postareff et al (2012) and this present study is the absence of a coherent focus of academics providing formative feedback. This is despite awareness in both studies of its importance and value. A possible explanation for lack of discussion around providing feedback was found in and Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005) Parpala and Lindblom - Ylanne (2007) work already reported. They note feedback is frequently viewed as separate from teaching rather than as an integral part of it. Here this second orientation corresponds with a finding that feedback was generally separate to and from assessment. This suggests an exploration of the how feedback is viewed and experiences is a potential direction for future research in this area. Feedforward was identified as important in preparing students for greater interaction with learning. This finding indicates when promoting higher student interaction with assessment, they require more guidance.

A related point, is that greater cohesion, better governance supporting assessment decision making and use of methods to optimise learning would likely occur if a programme assessment strategy was in place (van der Leuten et al 2012; van der Leuten et al 2014). This could also support new academic staff engaged in assessment.

This study also revealed historical descriptions of poor assessment scholarship and of how in- service education facilitated reflection and consideration of how educational practices may be improved. A similar targeted focus on professional development on feedback is needed to further engage students with their learning. This is in addition to exploring how those engaged in teaching within large foundational modules of learning understand basic concepts / basic knowledge.

5.7 Summary

Within this orientation are accounts of how twelve participants' relate to assessment. Participants' took a lead in using a greater variety of interactive assessment methods and used feedback to promote deeper student engagement with module learning. Correspondence with findings in the other studies were reported with this second orientation, but difference was also apparent. Use of wide ranging assessment methods to promote student interaction with learning is not substantially reported in other research reviewed. This represents an extended awareness of how assessment was applied to determine learning within an award leading to nursing registration. This orientation broadly corresponds with an assessment "for" learning orientation, as for both student and teacher it is, more interactive (Earl 2013). Seeking deeper and more engaged learning also brings responsibilities for preparing students appropriately for assessment tasks they complete. Assessment related decision making and coherence would improve with greater engagement in feedback and using a programme assessment strategy. The next section presents the third orientation.

5.8 Third orientation; integrating assessment and feedback

The commonality in this orientation was found within four participants' views on and experiences. The qualitative distinction between this and previous orientations is captured in the theme "integrating assessment and feedback". These actions together support student and participant engagement together in learning. The qualitative distinction between this and previous orientations was an overlapping of or integration of assessment, feedback with teaching. Another distinction was that participant and student nurses were engaged with assessment and feedback as early as possible in a module. Another was using technology to support teaching assessment and feedback. It is the first student centred orientations what is

happening for the student the /teaching learning process is explicitly attended to. The participant concern was with what was happening to the student and their learning over the course of the module. This orientation reflected a deeper understanding of assessment within the research context with minimal variation apparent within dialogue. What is happening for the student is captured here:

“It’s about them engaging in a process where they learn. To me, assessment should be a way advancing professional development and knowledge within the student” (2538)

Assessment was not an ‘add-on’ to determine what was learnt. Assessment and feedback were “tied in together” to support student learning and adjust teaching. The dialogue below conveys what happened for this participant when they made the link between teaching, assessment and formative feedback:

“As time moved on, I became more aware of the link between assessment achieving the learning outcomes, but also that the link that assessment and feedback especially... In semester 2 module, I really felt as a lecturer I was falling down there. I found in semester 1, because the physical act that students were on site, the module I was delivering the students were still in college, they did come for feedback and I had three weeks of feedback and it was too much. Then I started really looking at tying it in, with more frequent assessment in- semester assessment and tying that in with in- class feedback, that one big thing” (2184)

Dialogue reflects accessibility and responsiveness to students and their learning. This is made possible through face-to-face dialogue, online interaction, technology or other means. Largest groups were rearranged into smaller groupings to support team-working over the module and to facilitate teacher –student feedback. Explained here:

“I give them a small piece of work that is engaged to a theme every two weeks based on a just a small piece of work e.g. if they were looking at eating disorders they would critique a website; that would be looking at 500 words or something they would have to go to the website they would see what they are saying what is happening in the community in the real world around But in order to do those worksheets they have to attend a

workshop and this in the various pieces are discussed in group these form the assessment for the last two weeks in some ways it means they attend the lecture, some groups workshops because its themed- and then their piece of work is done within that framework” (2550)

The balance between formative and summative feedback was more equivalent. Integrating formative feedback with student learning was highly valued and occurred inside and outside the classroom, assisted by using technology or other means over the module and semester. Participants' were consistently committed to finding ways of improving the quality and timeliness of feedback to students. For example, online discussion forums were monitored by tracking engagement to ensure students engaged in the learning/assessing tasks, with marks for participation awarded, if appropriate.

Another was clinical skills assessment was undertaken by student recording their performance, uploading it for grading by the teacher with online /oral feedback provided. Greater student - teacher interaction was noticeable e.g. in- class, using “the muddiest point “exercise, roving mike, post its, and providing generic feedback sheets to small groups. When summative assessment was used, electronic feedback was released to the students’ portal page. Student engagement was tracked online to identify poor engagers or to reward engagement. It was also used to monitor intergroup work, as reflected below:

“I like the electronic and I like using moodle for assessment people submitting it on module and me giving feedback electronically on moodle. One of the really valuable things about that is that. It makes timely feedback possible it makes detailed feedback easier using track changes running through a text. So I think the quality of feedback that I give to students now is much better for moodle and using moodle than it was before. I think the development of Moodle potentially supersedes some of the practices we have used before in terms of setting aside a day for people to come and see you and obviously people can still come and do that but that’s important.” (2793)

Putting thought into assessment and responding to student evaluations was valued. This extends student learning further as conveyed in these extracts:

“I find generally there is an association between how much proper thought into preparing an assessment and ultimately and what comes out the other end from students. I think when I have approached assessment in a not to thought out way, what I get is something predictable.” (2780)

“and hopefully at the end is that what we are hoping to do at the end is that students can only see their own group work but hopefully at the end of the module so they can students will be able to see and open it up so that they can review and peer review each other’s work. I am hoping to be able to build on this in some form in terms of peer assessment and look at each other’s work and assess it but in for the first years. I just wanted to see how it works” (212)

“...and I think if we listen to our students try something Look at the evaluation listen to you, is it working is it not what can you tweak what can you change . In the first year the quiz that is working really well because the students get a quiz they get immediate feedback the really benefit from that I need to change that they did really well in the quiz so I do not need to work so hard in the next piece of work so there is that think I need to look at that weighting there yes” (2503)

Assessment and engagement activities varied to address learning outcomes. They included group work, individual work, essays, exams, case studies, presentations, booklets, reflective learning activities and clinical skills-OSCE. Views illustrate this here:

“I have changed again and I doing a discussion a forum on moodle followed by a blog followed by a written assignment they get a group mark for their forum discussion and their blog which weights 20% weighting for the assessment and it’s a continuous assessment. So it goes through the module as opposed to an end product and they still have to do their individual assignment and that individual assignment could be informed by all of the work they have done in terms of their discussion and blogging”(4559)

These actions are not confined to small groups but with large groups also. This was necessary as for one participant, teaching and assessment, had to reflect “the reality out there” as described here;-.

“I really felt that the type of assessment we are using needed to reflect the reality out there where there is co-morbidity in our clients. So therefore in the assessment process, I want to use assessing based and a realistic clinical scenario and they relation that back to the theory and to do it from the perspective from starting the inquiry first and bring in concepts of inquiry based learning. I was teaching a large group there is 120 in this group so my idea of teaching small groups is not feasible.... When I looked at the theory, I still give lectures what I tried to do was frequent question and case studies early on, give the students time and relation the case study back to theory”(2193)

Another example of using assessment to reflect “the reality out there” with a large group was targeting group work at a particular concept. For example a patient information booklet as here;

“they do a group booklet; this was the assessment for the module” (4024)

Two reported at a certain point in the programme, nursing students must demonstrate achievement of certain academic skills, e.g. referencing, searching and reviewing literature was an essential early competency to acquire. All participants' agreed a vital element of quality, in assessment was engaging nursing students in appropriate, searching and discerning in their reading and applying an evidence base to their practice. A motivation for this view is presented below:

“I think it is something worth looking at in terms of that link between reading and assessment where does that happen or occur or mmm and you know I was kind of thinking about this when I trained going backwards you had 1 medical/ surgical textbook. I and a physiology textbook we have now moved into an era of research people had traditional ways of doing things but then practice has completely changed now and is continually changing”(4970)

This is another example:

“By 3rd year of undergraduate programme rather than say 10% of a mark if for referencing properly then we should say there is not a mark allocated a mark to it rather make it a precondition, not something you get a mark for I at this stage they get a zero you know what I mean because I think I if we are thinking of a graduate standard around things like being able to produce an essay that arguments can be made and understood” (2871)

Ongoing feedback and in-class informal assessment was linked to class attendance A view held was with in- class participation, students are doing something, contributing to their learning. This may be rewarded by contributing to a summative mark but in their view this meant student were engaged with learning, continuously over the semester. Rewarding students for in -class and attendance or engaging in a discussion forum, incentivised the “right thing”. Their primary motivation was supporting engagement with learning, as described below:

“If it works and if helps and if it enhances student learning I don’t have a kind of a problem with that and think like if I see an improvement in students in the way they are thinking and the way they are writing and its extra work I will do it because it doesn’t I like to see the on-going progressive work and National Forum discussions” (4733).

“People do attend and secondly people value it you know students you know .Where I have used that I have positive it’s been part of a module that’s. That has been well evaluated. So it incentivises the right thing. One of the things it gives them it gives students assurances against other forms of assessment maybe an exam or an essay where they may not be typically that strong or they have worries about If they turn up and participate in class they give it a good effort up got a chunk of marks in the bag that can serve against not doing so well in other areas, so that’s the upside where they may be weaker. The only downside I can think of is that in practical terms there is a lot of work in it. (2735).

Participants frequently applied enquiry or problem based learning approaches supporting student learning. Another feature was being flexible to circumstances

where students are not learning and responding accordingly using alternative approaches. Another was monitoring evidence of student individual engagement within group learning and following through, when disengagement become evident. Electronic monitoring was undertaken when group engagement was linked to agreed assessment criteria and achievement of a grade.

Although a commonality noted was a lesser focus on student grades. The focus was moving forward extending opportunities to advance assessment and student engagement with learning. Opportunities for extending student engagement with learning were considered, as conveyed here.

I am thinking that there is a children's unit in a children's hospital. Wouldn't it be great to have a discussion forum working across groups. I don't know how that would work in terms of assessment that would work but it worked for the link they were doing between USA and Ireland? (4815)

Awareness of diversity and of its impact in the classroom and assessment was noticed. This could affect how students engage together in-group work or online. For example a student with a specific learning disability and its impact on their ability to contribute to a discussion forum or blog. Another was the impact of an in -class "note taker" to support a student with a specific learning difficulty.

A greater and familiarity with using technologies and other means and methods to support teaching, learning and feedback was apparent. These included Moodle/ loop, on-line assessment submissions, sim-man. Recording of clinical skills by students was linked to self-evaluation, electronic multi -choice questioning/self- correcting quizzes. The electronic whiteboard comments used in class was saved and sent to the class afterwards. Podcasts were available for students who miss lectures or group work, Turnitin used to self-evaluate, and electronic feedback released to students on summative submissions. Here, these were applied to link student engagement with assessment and providing feedback to them on their learning. This dialogue captures this perspective:

"I was looking for different ways of engaging with learning and teaching and assessing, but I also wanted some way of tracking the students work over the course of the module because they are not reading and actually because I

have only had the discussion forum going for the last two weeks and its very clear from the responses it is very clear that the students are not reading and are just using internet sources as opposed to using u know going to the library and looking up text books or searching databases.”(4573).

There is less variation within this orientation. However, a noteworthy distinction is for one participant teaching and assessment was with groups of up to 220 nursing students for some time. Other participants’ worked with student groups of between 50-100 and had not experienced working with largest cohorts. One conveyed awe and consternation at the thought of a person managing assessment and feedback in this way with largest groups

5.9 Summary of third orientation

Within this orientation are participants’ views on and experiences of assessment and feedback as overlapping processes that supports continual engagement with learning. This occurs from the commencement of a module and this is a crucial finding. Another was the predominate focus on providing feedback through any manner or means, to support student learning. The next section presents and discusses the final orientation. This final orientation achieves the research aim of discerning variation in this academic activity.

5.10 Discussion

In depicting this orientation, it again achieves the study aim, by identifying another dimension of qualitative variation found in participants’ views on and experiences of assessment. Here participant's teaching assessment incorporating feedback actions are intertwined. Although a small number of participants’ views and experiences were captured within this orientation, it offers a unique insight into the most inclusive orientation to assessment depicted in this study. The orientation is discussed under three headings.

5.10 1 Assessment as learning

This orientation is balanced in favour of assessment as learning (Earl 2013 p.27) although aspects of assessment of and for learning are apparent. For example, assessment of learning is provided to meet certification purposes within a module

and award leading to registration. Assessment for learning is apparent when academics construct assessment tasks designed to purposefully promote students deeper learning. Finally assessment as learning is apparent when a range of methods are applied to progress student learning and provide feedback to the student and participant to alter teaching or learning. It was applied with a view to empower students and to enable them use knowledge to construct personal meaning (Earl 2013). This is a student centred orientation to assessment, the student and their learning is positioned at the centre of participants' assessment related thinking and practice.

When the Commission on Nursing (1998 p.5) recommended transferring pre-registration education to third level, it was considered necessary to meet the higher expectations of nursing practice within a changing healthcare environment. This included practising as a nurse autonomously and with greater interdisciplinary cooperation in nursing care delivery. Helping nursing students to acquire such competencies are more likely to be achieved within an environment, when assessing in accordance with this orientation. The highly relational nature of how participants' go about assessment as described within this third orientation is more likely to engage nursing students in deeper and productive learning, more so than described in earlier orientations. This orientation tells a story of a way of experiencing in its most inclusive way within a nursing award positioned in a contemporary higher education setting.

Interestingly Boud's (2010 p.2) seven propositions for assessment reform, developed to guide assessment thinking, are reflected within this orientation to varying degrees. They include, engaging students in authentic learning and in appropriate tasks over time, positioning learning at the centre of module design, using feedback, developing responsible partnership in assessment, inducting students into the assessing culture, being inclusive and assessment acting as a trustworthy representations of student achievement (Boud 2010 p.2). In this orientation, these principles appear implicitly reflected in academics views and experiences.

A clear link to developing students' academic literacy to source, read and analyse, information as a critical competency. This is necessary because knowledge seeking activity is a direction and expectation from the student, on commencement of a

module. This was found even in foundational modules where academic literacy was taught. This is also linked to facilitating students to engage in the construction of their own knowledge now and in the future as an expectation as described within this orientation. This is clearly differentiated from assessing with a focus on teachers, grades, marks or measuring content- related or reproductive thinking, aspects viewed a barrier to effective learning (Struyven et al 2005). Kantar (2014) reported transformational assessing strategies were not apparent in the curricula documents she examined. Yet she noted higher order thinking is necessary to meet the demands of modern nursing practice.

5.10.2 An inclusive orientation

This third orientation also corresponds with Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm's (2005) most inclusive conception of assessing. In their work, reflecting, understanding, analysing, relating also had an overriding importance on commencement of a module. They did not report using technology or other means for participants' and student to engage together. Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005 et al (2005) report that "conceptions" are often contextual in character and thus probable individuals adopt one or other depending on circumstances. Here, participants described similar views and experiences of assessment applied across all nursing modules with larger and smaller classes. This third orientation extends context specific knowledge of how academics relate to assessment in its most inclusive way, by incorporating feedback with all student groups.

Postareff et al (2012) in describing pharmacy academics' conceptions of transformational or student oriented assessing formats, did not describe using technology. Despite this research undertaken in more contemporary research context. This makes this a finding of significance to nursing education applied in a more contemporary context.

Postareff et al (2012) advises that advancing pedagogic awareness of assessment is necessary to advance practice. They advise collaboration amongst teachers, in particular with those who display more developed conceptions of teaching and assessing with others. Another facet worth highlighting is that participants engaged in teaching, assessment and feedback as integrated activates from commencement of

a module. Postareff et al (2012) also noted in a more advanced conception assessment should act as a feedback tool so that the teacher can improve teaching.

That minority of participants' set out to engage students in purposeful learning from the commencement to the natural conclusion of a module is a finding of interest to the research setting. The notion of altering the traditional rhythm of the classroom is an interesting finding in itself as it applies to undergraduate nursing education and academic employment. Integration of teaching, assessing and feedback is consistent with a learning focussed approach to teaching (Postareff and Lindblom – Ylanne 2008). It tallies with a view of teaching, as providing for a genuine learning opportunity. An unanticipated consequence found in being responsive, providing timely, formative feedback and feed forward, is it alters the traditional rhythm of teacher student engagement in class (Earl 2013 p.5). Assessing, feedback and marking responsibilities are time consuming and potentially problematic particularly with declining staff / student ratios. This orientation reveals how more timely and targeted approaches to feedback may be provided, even alone although requiring skill, and may occur outside traditional working hours. This finds some concordance with the notion of the flipped classroom described earlier (Hawks 2014).

A related observation noted within this orientation, is student grades appeared not to play a leading role. Halinen et al (2013) also reported when the primary focus is supporting student learning, grades play a lesser focus.

Participants displayed a inclusive and facilitative, approach to teaching, balancing the requirement for students to complete the assessment set and providing ongoing feedback to stimulate their engagement with continuing learning. Trigwell and Prosser (1995a) and Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse (1999) found the highest conception of teaching in higher education corresponds with teachers' conceptions of good teaching themselves. This corresponds with reports of good teaching principles. Parpala and Lindblom–Ylanne (2007) research reports good teaching works best within an atmosphere of encouragement and enhancement with the focus of student centred learning. It also corresponds with students' descriptions of higher quality approach to their own learning, giving them feedback on how to improve as well as judging performance (Fletcher et al 2012).

Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm (2005 p.304) claims that a distinction in how basic knowledge is understood by academics is important to the compatibility of an internal relation between teaching and assessing. In the first orientation, it was clear that “basic knowledge” was information participants consider is essential for students to acquire before later understanding relating or application can occur. In contrast, assessment of “basic concepts” is what a student must understand because of “human knowledge seeking activity”. This appears a developed view within academics in this orientation.

5.10.3 Feedback

This orientation is congruent with how Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) describe their most sophisticated orientation to assessment. In their final grouping, they reported assessment is concerned with determining a students’ ability to integrate transform and use knowledge purposefully. However, the consistent use of assessment feedback incorporating feed forward and feed- in, as a critical dimension was not emphasised within Samuelowicz and Bain’s (2002) work. Accordingly, this study extends knowledge in this area, capturing assessment as a more holistic experience. Another important dimension supporting this experience is use of technology to engage participants and students to and with each other and with learning. Use of technology was not reported in Samuelowicz and Bain’s (2002) work, although completed some time ago.

A crucial distinction between this and previous orientations is how four academics used specific and timely feedback to promote student learning. The value of providing good quality feedback to students leading to improvements, raising self-esteem, clarifying goals and standards empowering students to improve their own learning is well established (Suskie 2004; Boud and Falchikov 2005; Biggs and Tang 2007; Boud et al 2010; 2012 Boud and Molloy 2012; Rust 2014; Kantar 2014. In interviews, a commitment to applying feed-in, formative feedback (or feedforward) and feedback was displayed. Evans (2013) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) claim these are crucial to learning so that students fully understand and engage with the assessment brief and assessing criteria. This fosters student development of academic literacy and good academic practice (HEA 2017).

Formative feedback (or feedforward) supporting students to improve a current assessment piece and highlighting how skills may be applied to promote future learning also apparent. In-class feedback to determine learning within the student group as well as electronic feedback released following promulgation of results was also discussed. Laurillard (2002) proposes a key element in quality learning is when dialogue between the teacher and student- is integrated; when students are dialoguing, they are engaging in learning and not passive recipients of knowledge. When assessing in accordance with this orientation a very strong commitment to providing feedback was evident.

An unsatisfactory finding in my study is of a minority of participants' actively providing formative feedback on a consistent basis. In light of poor integration and uptake of feedback by students reported previously and in light of exemplars of how it may be improved, this third finding is of interest within the study context. This is particularly relevant as research indicates students are most likely to accept feedback when it is most needed (Race 2007, Dawson Magne and Sentito 2009a). This orientation depicts context specific exemplars of how timely and specific feedback, self- assessment and peer assessment of learning may be applied over the course of a module. As registrants, nurses need to display these competencies when assessing others, including future student nurses.

This research provided exemplars of how a clear structure to assessment, integrating teaching, assessing and feedback to module aims, integrating assessment with on-going learning may be applied in a nursing educational context. Interview data revealed that exams, OSCE written papers were practices applied. However, they are extended updated and used creatively to guide as well as to determine student learning and responsive teaching.

5.11 Summary

This depicts the third orientation when views on and experiences are explored. Here participants' relation to assessment with an extended awareness of the vital role of how they integrating assessment and feedback as early as possible. These integrated actions occur from commencement of a module to its natural conclusion. Students are encouraged to develop their own understanding of good academic practices

through engagement with assessment. Student and their learning and academics are engaged through teaching, feedback using technology or other means. What is not reported as extensively when literature is reviewed is the important role-played by use of technology in particular as way of engaging student and the teacher together in learning. A programme approach to assessment (National Forum 2017b) would extend awareness of how some academics relation to assessment in the study setting and programme leading to registration.

5.12 Chapter summary

This chapter answers the research question how do academics view and experience assessment within undergraduate nursing education. Findings describe three orientations to assessment when academic views and experiences were analysed using phenomenographic informed analysis. How these findings relate to literature previously reviewed was discussed.

Within the first orientation to assessment, conventional assessment was applied within foundational human science modules to large student groups. This occurs mostly in modules, positioned within early years of the nursing awards. The motivation for applying this assessment format is they consider is needed to determine module learning outcomes before application can occur at a later point in the nursing award. The second orientation although representing a reproductive orientation, it was less apparent. Whilst the focus of assessment remains to enable judging, grading and certification but also to encourage students to apply nursing knowledge, practical and theoretical in seen and unseen circumstances. Given the wide variety of competencies that must be achieved within an award leading to registration, a rich variety of assessing methods were applied. This is a striking feature noted. Participant's' display a greater awareness of the link between assessing and student learning here. Although assessing is often non-conventional and varied, a consistent approach to supporting learning through providing ongoing feedback is apparent. While this remains a broadly reproductive orientation, it does reflect more of assessment for learning concepts (Earl and Katz 2006). However, it does convey that within an award leading to registration, wide-ranging assessing methods are applied by a majority of participants', to determine complex learning outcomes. Within a last and first transformational orientation to assessment the focus is on

developing and using the student's personal competencies and skills to enable them access, discern and apply nursing knowledge. How students gain understanding of basic knowledge differs from the first orientation. Within the third orientation, basic concepts are what student apply to their own thinking processes and support their own knowledge construction. This is a preparatory to lifelong learning and professional learning in nursing. This is a student centred orientation and is differentiated from the previous ones by its particular focus on provision of feedback to students through any manner and means as well as a focus on teaching, assessing and feedback processes supporting student learning on commencement of a module to its completion. How these orientations depicted to some extent are comparable with findings of six orientations to assessing described by Samuelowicz and Bain (2002); eight categories (Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm 2005) and continuum of conceptions (Postereff et al 2012) were discussed. The next chapter makes some recommendation and implications for further research.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendation

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter considers key conclusions, the contribution this study makes to knowledge and study limitations. These include methodological design issues and related factors in conducting this research. Finally, recommendations are made.

6.2 Key conclusions

The originality of this study lies in the revealing of how academics engaged in assessment “on the ground” view and experience assessment. It is a worthy topic of consideration, highlighting the nuance and complexity of assessing in an academic institution, within nursing education. The depiction of three qualitatively different orientations to assessment makes a primary and significant contribution to nursing education knowledge.

This is likely to resonate with other educators engaged in assessment. Using a phenomenographic informed approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of this academic activity applied within one academic discipline. In highlighting an aspect of everyday academic activity, it identifies the complexity of assessment, and challenges a notion of uniformity in this work. It also reveals how an orientation to assessment shapes assessment and feedback actions in three different ways within an academic discipline.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

Using a phenomenographic informed approach a range of perspectives from individuals with different experiences and disciplines engaged in assessment were captured, and qualitative orientations depicted. In highlighting an aspect of everyday academic activity, it challenges a notion of uniformity in this work.

The originality of this research lies in presentation of three orientations providing a holistic account of assessment applied within a programme leading to registration as a nurse. Examining academics views and experiences of assessment was intended to provide a greater understanding of reasons behind assessment practices applied in one disciplinary context. Orientations reflect qualitatively different views and experiences .Within a first orientation the motivation to apply summative assessment

is to ensure students display a basic standard of foundational human science knowledge in early years and upon which understandings that are more complex are built. Additional motivations in shaping assessment actions include class size and issues of efficiency and effectiveness in managing large classes alone. . Within a second orientation, wide-ranging assessment methods were applied to engage students further in learning including within the skills laboratory. Participants displayed a keen interest and commitment to advance assessment in supporting student learning for registration as a nurse. However within a distributed modular programme of provision, a vision and coherence for providing assessment and feedback together, in supporting more integrated learning and assessment related experiences for students, is now required. This finding emphasises the need to support innovation in assessment. It reveals a number of tensions must be to be resolved when applying less than conventional assessment, on the ground.

A final orientation is student centered and reveals an overlapping of teaching assessment and particularly feedback, mediated predominantly through technology. It also reveals greater academic-student collaboration together over the course of a module. Illuminating how assessment and feedback are better facilitated through engagement with technology provides an important learning makes an important contribution to knowledge.

This study reveals the relational nature of assessment as academic work. Teaching, assessment and feedback may be understood as distinctly separate, partially separate but also how they are integrated. In depicting the relational nature of assessment, it extends knowledge providing a greater focus for assessment and feedback enhancement.

New goals and modes of teaching, reversing traditional student learning environments are emerging. This will challenge how and in ways nursing education will be made available inside and outside the classrooms. Pedagogic (including assessment-related) professional development will be required to move beyond issues considering classroom attendance and explore different ways of engaging with student nurses in a less traditional settings. This study provides a starting point for a dialogue about human science knowledge, variety of assessment approaches,

engaging students with assessment, feedback use of technology and information systems situated in an academic discipline.

This study will likely resonate and be of value and interest to the nursing disciplinary community. It provides a basis for discussion and development of assessment and feedback and technological supports in the study setting and similar settings nationally and potentially internationally.

It also contributes to and extends assessment related knowledge broadly across the HE where similar governance arrangements apply and provides disciplinary knowledge of value to nursing education more broadly where national regulatory requirements apply.

It challenges how assessment is defined in the study setting. It reveals a narrow non-expansive definition and understanding as currently presented, fails to account for the complexity with which is understood and applied. This study and its findings contributes to this.

6.4 Recommendations for nursing education managers

1. Active consideration of team teaching and using learning technologists with expertise in large group teaching to support teaching, assessment and feedback.
2. Active consideration of exploring issues of staff effort and workload challenges to support nursing related human science teaching and assessment.
3. Consider exploring issues of staff effort and workload challenges to support nursing related teaching and assessment.
4. Academics engaged in teaching, assessment feedback must be encouraged to and engage in professional development activities as recommended by The National Forum. Awareness of different ways of and approaches to assessment and learning were key in differentiating orientations. The Professional Development Framework from the National Forum (2015) should also be actively promoted and encouraged within academic units.

5. Establish a programme team to develop a programme assessment strategy within undergraduate nursing education.
6. Consider a supportive teaching, assessing and feedback mentorship programme for new academics.

. Recommendation for Programme Chairs.

7. Because of the limited awareness of how teaching assessing and feedback occur across nursing programmes, a comprehensive integrated programme assessment strategy “fit for purpose” is strongly recommended.
8. The Programme Chairs in leadership roles should promote an enhancement initiative focussing on giving and receiving feedback to student nurses.
9. Highlighting how teaching assessing and feedback initiatives within the department should be extended to a wider audience could be considered. This include formally and informally including at staff meetings, in-service teaching and learning days.
10. This research revealed within orientations qualitative differences in awareness of how assessment was applied within a nursing award. This offers the potential to promote the study context as site where a welcoming of exploration of these topics is important.

6.3 2 Recommendations for academics;

1. To take time to consider, reflect on and seek support to extend personal assessment related practices provided within undergraduate nursing education.
2. To commit to making one change as it relates to being more active with module assessment and feedback in supporting student learning and teaching
3. To commit to exploring and using one assessment related technological initiative within a module.
4. To engage in developing a program approach to assessment policy and decision-making.

6.4 Limitations

An important limitation offered is this is an exploratory study; a prior sense of this topic positioned was not ascertained. Its main aim was to produce knowledge situated within a local context. This research falls within the category of insider research. Issues of neutrality and distancing as well as objectivity in the collection and analysis of data and to subsequent findings clearly arise. There were challenging issues, known to me that were addressed by reflecting on and returning to them during the research process. My position as an insider also may have influenced the participants in unknown ways also.

An allied limitation concerns measures taken to gather and analyse data in a situated context without prior supposition. A relationship with participants was required to conduct the study. The concept of “bracketing” (Ashworth and Lucas 2000 p.297) means for a researcher “setting aside his or her own assumptions, so far as is possible” to capture a participant’s viewpoint. This was an aspiration in preparation for and during each interview. In interviews, I listened carefully to the participant’s voice. In analysis I endeavoured as Entwistle (1997 p.7) recommends, to ensure dialogic data remained the “focal point of inquiry”. In analysis, only that material as it related to participants' experience captured in interviews was used for analyses (Cope 2004). I chose not to collect any further personal or professional information about participants for this research. This was to facilitate a measure of distancing, albeit from work colleagues during this research process.

Another limitation concerns the sample size, albeit adequate within a phenomenographic study. It makes the transferability of findings to a larger population a potential limitation. Although transferability is not a concern of this researcher, it is left to a reader to judge himself or herself the transferability of this research to another population or setting. Kvale (2007 p.143) advises discretion in extrapolation from findings from knowledge gathered in a situated context

Although the sample was multidisciplinary, the sample was drawn from mostly nursing academics and colleagues. A greater range of academic disciplines may have yielded a different balance to the three orientations that emerged. Had the researcher approached some academics within different grouping to engage in the research it

may have yielded different findings. However, in capturing academics' views on and experiences, the sample was drawn from nursing and human science academic disciplines, making findings generally applicable to the local study context. Generating a sample from across all nursing programmes and academic disciplines within the 13 Irish academic institutions would make findings generalisable and representative nationally.

An important limitation concerns using interviews with academics as the sole source of data. This reflects a one-dimensional approach to this aspect. When starting out it was the intention of the researcher to capture other data including students' views of assessment. The institutional ethics committee advised of the importance of ensuring the student /teacher relationship would not be compromised as a result. This was an important learning, not considered fully when starting out. This led to a decision not to include data from students in relation to their views and experiences of assessment, though, this could be considered within future research.

Another limitation identified within interviews is what Ackerlind et al (2005 p.81) refers to capturing "snapshot" data. Analysis and findings are then based on data captured at one time not, over a period in time. Different arguments are applied within phenomenographic research concerning the status of interview data and of the relationship between dialogue and experience. Säljö (1997 p.178) reports interviews merely produce accounts of "what people say" about their own experiences. Thus, what is communicated to a researcher may simply be "a way of talking, rather than way of experiencing". Alternatively Marton (1995 p.175) views interview data as "ways of experiencing something", interviewees have reflected on themselves. I agree with the latter position more having completed the interviews. In doing so respected each individual's contribution to developing knowledge of this subject.

Analysis of data by a sole researcher also brings limitations. As described by Bowden (2005) there are benefits to working with a team on analysis or involving participants' to check the outcomes of the analytic process. Many phenomenographic studies report collaboration during analysis of findings, others report working alone. Ackerlind (2005 p.121) acknowledges both practices contribute to producing understandings and do not generate "better or worse outcomes, but more or less

complete, not right or wrong ones”. The uni-dimensional approach adopted here informs my critical reading of phenomenographic research.

Ashworth and Lucas’s (2000 p.305) work reports commonality and variation in presenting phenomenographic findings. Flexibility is evident in how findings are presented including as themes, bearing a variety of relationships, to do “justice to the participant experience” (Ashworth and Lucas 2000 p305). A potential limitation concerns the decision to delimit three orientations emerging from phenomenographic analysis. The analysis process focussed on exploring the commonality within dialogic accounts but also delimiting qualitative variation between them. In the analysis process, I engaged in frequent questioning including were the three orientations mutually exclusive; were there overlaps? and where were the boundaries?

A related limitation concerns the decision to depict orientations not conceptions. Depicting three orientations appeared the best fit so as not to dilute the fertile nature of participant dialogue. This was apparent after interviews were completed and transcribed. This enabled an extended awareness to be depicted including, historical, and the professional complexity of how participants' described their relationship with assessment in findings. Within each orientation, collective views and experiences are conveyed – while the qualitative distinction between orientations is also conveyed. This particular depiction is offered as a limitation in it is not congruent with a pure phenomenographic study outcome.

Prior to completing this study a proposal was submitted to university research ethics committee. The Research Ethics Committee considered it. However, beyond data collection, participants had no control over the generation of findings in a workplace context or how findings would be shared or understood by other (Tracy 2010). Despite that no individual was named, there is a potential for an participant to be recognised from their contribution. In terms of exiting ethics Tracy (2010 p.847) recommends the researcher consider how to present the “to avoid unjust or unintended consequences” For this reason, I intend withholding access to the e-version of this thesis for a defined period of time. This will influence the dissemination of findings. This is offered as a limitation.

Another concern is the length of time to complete the study. Khozaei et al (2015) Van de Schoot et al (2013) report negative factors hindering or helping completion rates of postgraduate work congruent with this limitation. Data was collected in 2011 – 2012; the entire study was submitted for examination in 2017. It is noteworthy, that in that timeframe policy influencing the assessment context will have been revised and updated or changed. However, findings remain of interest in the current assessment context. In particular findings provide a new starting point for a dialogue to commence in the study setting as it relates to assessment. This may be used to support development of a programme approach to assessment as recommended earlier (National Forum b)

6.4 Recommendations for future research

A wider exploration of the topic of how and in ways feedback within the study setting and nursing education is applied and supported

Capturing “others” views and experiences of assessment including Administrators, External Examiners, Students, Patients / Clients/ National Agencies would be a useful direction. This study revealed there are many stakeholders involved in assessment and their involvement in research exploring the topic of assessment, feedback issues and challenges, would capture the full assessing context involving all stakeholders.

How a programme assessment strategy may be developed within undergraduate nursing education is a particularly relevant topic to explore.

6.5 Contribution to knowledge

Despite assessment extensively studied within higher education, including within nursing education, this research provides an extended awareness of how and in ways academics relate to assessment within a nursing programme context. This research and its findings are situated within one programme reflecting the contemporary nature of assessment undertaken by a multidisciplinary group of academics. This provides a nuanced and more complete insight into an aspect of academic work performed in public institutions in the Republic Of Ireland

6.5 Finally

The last words connect with first ones. I started out considering how and in ways assessing matters. I conclude that connecting teaching, assessment and feedback together using any manner and means to support student learning and teaching, matters more.

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Appendix 1

Dublin City University

Ms. Orla O'Reilly

School of Education Studies 29th June 2011

REC Reference: Proposal Title:

Applicants:

DCUREC/2011/049

Assessment matters within undergraduate nursing education at DCU-a case study

Ms. Orla O'Reilly, Dr. Anne Marie Ryan

Dear Orla,

Further to review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna Chair

DCU Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 2

Assessing Matters within the BSc (Hons) Nursing award at DCU

If you are interested in expressing your views on and experiences of assessment within the BSc (Hons), I would like to hear from you.

For further information, please contact me at orla.oreilly@dcu.ie

Or at 7008541

Appendix 3

Consent Form

Dear

As you know, I am Doctoral student in the School of Education Studies DCU, working under the supervision of Dr Anne Marie Ryan. Many thanks for agreeing to participate in this interview. If it suites, our interview will take place on;-.....

I am seeking to explore your views and experiences of assessment over the course of the interview at the School of Nursing. The specific questions to be discussed are your views and experiences of undergraduate assessment within the BSc (Hons) Nursing and the factors that influence your assessment practice on the BSc (Hons).

Data will be collected by myself, and will be recorded. The interview should take about 45 -60 mins. All data will be analysed and discussed with the purpose of producing a final case report as a result of this research. No individual names will be used in the reporting of this case but the site at the School of Nursing DCU will be identifiable. Please take time to read the information below. If you have any concerns or questions in relation to the research please contact me directly by email orla.oreillyv@dcu.ie (01)-7008541.

All information provided to me (the researcher) will be treated in confidence and no names will be used in the published research. Only the researcher, supervisor and external examiners will have access to this information, which will be stored safely. Any participants may withdraw from the study before all stages are complete

I have read and understood the information in this form and therefore, I consent to take part in this research project. Many thanks for agreeing to be a participant.

Participant Signature:

Name in Block Capitals: _

Date: -----