

**Oral Assessment From the Learner's Perspective: The Experience
of Oral Assessment in Post-Compulsory Education**

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**ORAL ASSESSMENT FROM THE LEARNER'S
PERSPECTIVE: THE EXPERIENCE OF ORAL
ASSESSMENT IN POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Education

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed.....

Gordon R. Joughin

January 2003

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experience of oral assessment in post-compulsory education from the student's perspective. A considerable literature has developed over the past three decades describing and analysing how students experience various aspects of learning, including various forms of assessment. Until recently, none of this literature has addressed how students experience oral assessment, and recent studies that have done so are limited in their scope and methodology — it would be true to say that very little is known about oral assessment from the student's perspective.

The starting point for the consideration of oral assessment is the existing literature on oral assessment, nearly all of which has been written from the teacher's perspective. A survey of this literature identified six dimensions of oral assessment — primary content types; interaction; authenticity; structure; examiners; and orality. It is suggested that these dimensions can lead to a clearer understanding of the nature of oral assessment, a clearer differentiation of the various forms within this type of assessment, a better capacity to describe and analyse these forms, and a better understanding of how the various dimensions of oral assessment may interact with other elements of teaching and learning.

Students' experiences of oral assessment were then explored through interviews with fifteen students in a post-compulsory certificate in theology. The interviews and the analysis of the interview transcripts were strongly informed by the phenomenographic methods and conceptual framework developed by Marton and others for describing variations in how phenomena are experienced. Six aspects of students' experience of oral assessment were identified — the indirect object of learning; the direct object of learning; interaction; audience; affective responses; and comparisons with written assignments — and variations in how these aspects could be experienced are described.

Relationships between these aspects suggested three contrasting conceptions of oral assessment. The conception of oral assessment as 'presentation' represents an approach to oral assessment that focuses on reproducing the ideas of others in a one-way

presentation. This conception is associated with a limited sense of audience, a failure to perceive interaction as significant, and an absence of anxiety. In this case, oral assessment is seen as either similar to written assignments, or as being a more limited form of assessment than assignments. The conception of oral assessment as ‘understanding’ is associated with students actively seeking to develop their understanding of the subject, making the ideas they encounter their own, being challenged to understand these ideas because of the questioning involved in the assessment process, and seeing oral assessment as having some advantages over written assessment. The conception of oral assessment as ‘a position to be argued’ is associated with a seeing theology in terms of developing one’s own point of view, having a strong sense of audience, seeing interaction with that audience as both challenging and demanding understanding, and experiencing a heightened self-awareness. In this case, oral assessment is seen as a significantly richer and more personally engaging form of assessment than written assignments.

The study of oral assessment from the student’s perspective extends the dimensions of oral assessment described earlier and challenges our understanding of these dimensions.

The study has significant implications for teachers using oral assessment and for students who are being assessed orally, including the challenge of helping students develop more complex conceptions of oral assessment. The study also provides the basis for further research into specific aspect of oral assessment and its application in different contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures.
(Rowntree 1987, p. 1)

Background to the Study

Rowntree's assertion that the truth about an education system is found in its assessment procedures has been echoed by many other prominent educators. Ramsden, for example, notes that "from our students' point of view, assessment always defines the curriculum" (Ramsden 1992, p. 187), while Biggs asserts that "what and how students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed" (Biggs, 1999, p. 141). Boud points out that "assessment is the most significant prompt for learning" and that consequently, "we need to know what approaches to learning students are adopting, what students' expectations are of different assessment tasks and what they choose to do and what they choose not to do in response to the different assessment regimes which are introduced" (Boud, 1995).

Given these claims about the critical role of assessment, it is not surprising that understanding assessment from the learner's perspective has been a recurring theme in the literature of what Watkins terms the "student approaches to learning position" (Watkins, 1996. See, for example, Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 1988b; Ramsden, 1992; Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

While written forms of assessment now dominate summative assessment in post-compulsory education, oral assessment has had a long history and continues to form an important part of the assessment repertoire of universities and colleges (Brown & Knight, 1994; Forrest, 1985; Hubbard, 1971). Oral assessment is embedded in education for a number of professions, most notably medicine with its clinical assessment, law with its mooting or mock trials, architecture with its design juries, and many areas of vocational education with on-the-job competency-based assessment. In other discipline areas, oral assessment is a less common though possibly growing practice, often considered as a form of ‘alternative assessment’.

Researchers from the student approaches to learning position have not focused on oral assessment, so that there is an almost complete absence of research into understanding oral assessment from the learner’s perspective (Hounsell & McCune, 2001). Compared to other aspects of learning and other forms of assessment, therefore, little is known about how students might be expected to respond to assessment that uses an oral format, what aspects of this format might be educationally critical, or how students’ understandings of and responses to oral assessment might be enhanced.

It is important to note at the outset a basic distinction between two different kinds of qualities that can be measured by oral assessment, namely (i) the command of the oral medium itself, that is, the oral skills of communication in general or language skills in particular, and (ii) the command of content as demonstrated through the oral medium. Assessment in the first category is a long established and well accepted part of

assessment in language learning and oral communication. Oral assessment is unavoidable in these fields because that which is being assessed is oral in nature, and the related literature is extensive and well developed. This study did not seek to add to that literature but rather focused on the second of the above categories by considering the nature of oral assessment in which the object of assessment is the student's cognitive knowledge and understanding.

Purpose and Focus of the Study

Given the significance of assessment and the importance of understanding how students perceive the context of learning, the purpose of the study was framed as being to identify the ways in which students experience oral assessment. The study sought to identify the aspects of oral assessment that appeared to be important to students and the variety of ways in which they perceived these aspects.

In light of this purpose, the focus of the study was firmly on students' experience of oral assessment — it sought to understand oral assessment from the students' perspective and the study's contribution is purely from that perspective.

Notwithstanding this, however, the study required a preliminary focus on the literature of oral assessment, framed within the perspective of teachers and researchers, in order to provide a framework for describing the particular form of oral assessment being considered in the study and to compare students' perceptions of oral assessment with the perceptions of their assessors.

An empirical study of the kind reported here occurs within a specific context or set of specific contexts — for example, problem-solving in the second year of a science course at a British university (Laurillard, 1997), or primary school children learning arithmetic (Neuman, reported in Marton & Booth, 1997). The context of the present study was determined by practical and methodological factors. The study required a context with three critical characteristics. Firstly, the context needed to be one in which students would become familiar with the oral assessment format through repeated exposure to it. Secondly, the content being assessed orally needed to be similar to content in the same course that was being assessed in a written format so that direct comparisons could be made between students' experiences of these two assessment formats. Thirdly, the discipline area needed to be one that was reasonably familiar to the researcher since it seemed likely that the researcher would need to have a background that would enable him to understand and describe students' conceptions of the content that was being assessed. Finally, and most practically, the context needed to be accessible to the researcher.

As a result of these factors, the study is based on the experiences of a group of students enrolled in an adult education course in theology in which assessment alternated between oral presentations and written essays. The course was offered in an open learning mode and articulated into a university degree program.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

This present chapter presents the background to the study and its focus, and provides an overview of the thesis.

Chapter Two: 'Dimensions of oral assessment and the nature of orality'

Chapter Two is the first part of the review of literature that forms the background to this study. The chapter introduces a 'dimensions' framework for discussing oral assessment from the teacher's perspective and notes some provocative perspectives on oral communication that may be pertinent to the present study. The 'dimensions' part of this chapter is based on an analysis of the literature on oral assessment in post-compulsory education which resulted in the identification of six dimensions of oral assessment: primary content type, interaction, authenticity, structure, examiners, and orality. It is considered that these dimensions lead to a clearer understanding of oral assessment, a clearer differentiation of the various forms that oral assessment can take, a better capacity to describe and analyse these forms, and a better understanding of how the various dimensions of oral assessment may interact with other elements of teaching and learning. The identification of the 'dimensions of oral assessment' therefore constitutes a useful contribution to our understanding of oral assessment in its own right. However, in the context of the present study, the construct of 'dimensions' also served some more specific purposes:

- It constituted a description of oral assessment from teachers' perspectives, thus standing in contrast to the students' perspectives on oral assessment that were the focus of the primary research in this study.
- It allowed the description and location of the specific instance of oral assessment in this study within a broader framework of oral assessment. Each instance of oral assessment represents a particular configuration of the six dimensions.
- It was seen as potentially contributing to the discussion of the results of the research into oral assessment from students' perspectives through relating students' perspectives directly to the dimensions, and as a basis for comparing students' perspectives with those of teachers.

Chapter Three: Students' perceptions of the context of learning

While Chapter Two focuses on writing about oral assessment from the perspective of the teacher, Chapter Three introduces models and research that focus on learning and assessment from a student perspective. This chapter begins by considering the role played by students' perceptions of the context of learning and their interpretation of the tasks required of them. The '3-P' model of learning is introduced to locate student perceptions of context in a framework that includes the context of learning, students' personal characteristics, learning processes or approaches, and learning outcomes. This discussion serves to highlight the important role played by students' perceptions of oral assessment and how these perceptions are related to other elements of learning. It also provides a basis for discussing the results of the present study.

Having presented the '3-P' model and the importance of student perceptions of context in general, Chapter Three then considers studies of students' perceptions of assessment in particular. These studies were of two kinds. Firstly, a set of studies into students' conceptions of essay writing provided a direct parallel to the present study and suggested useful perspectives on the results of the present study. Secondly, comparative studies which consider students' responses to different assessment formats highlighted the potential significance of assessment formats and provided a background to the comparative aspects of the present study in which students compared their experience of oral assessment and written assignments.

Chapter Four: Method

With the emphasis of this study on students' experience of oral assessment, the study required a conceptual framework and research method that would allow/afford/lead to a description of the ways in which students experience this aspect of their learning. The phenomenographic approach, including the analytical framework of the 'anatomy of awareness' within its approach to the analysis of interview data, provided a means of describing the variety of ways in which students could experience different aspects of oral assessment. Chapter Four presents the phenomenographic method used, including a detailed outline of the 'anatomy of awareness', and describes the specific procedures of the study.

Chapter Five: Results

Chapter Five presents the results of the analysis of the student interview data using presentation methods typical of phenomenographic studies. Six aspects of students' experience of oral assessment were identified: the indirect object of learning; the direct object of learning; the experience of interaction; affective aspects of the practicum; audience; and comparisons of written and oral assessment. Chapter Five describes these aspects and the variations in students' experience of each of them, and proposes three contrasting ways of experiencing oral assessment.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Chapter Six considers the results of the study in the context of previous work reported in the literature. It does this by analysing the contrasting conceptions of oral assessment noted in the previous chapter and discussing these in the context of some of the critical constructs to have emerged from the 'student approaches to learning' position. Students' experience of oral assessment is also discussed in the context of the six dimensions of oral assessment identified earlier in the study and reported in Chapter Two. This chapter focuses on similarities and differences between the findings of the present study and previous pertinent work, and notes how the present study advances our understanding of oral assessment. Literature on the nature of orality is explored as a means of illuminating some of the results of the study.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter of the thesis presents the educationally critical conclusions of the study, considers the implications of the study for the improved use of oral assessment in educational practice, and nominates issues arising from the study that warrant further research.

2. DIMENSIONS OF ORAL ASSESSMENT

Introduction

While this study considers oral assessment from a student perspective, nearly all of the literature on oral assessment has been written from the perspective of teachers. A consideration of this literature is important, however, since it constitutes an essential starting point for this study. In the absence of a significant literature on oral assessment from the student's perspective, the literature from the teacher's perspective provides both the basis for our current understanding of oral assessment and the language for its discussion.

This chapter summarises the teacher-oriented literature on oral assessment by focusing on the dimensions of oral assessment discussed in that literature. If the distinguishing feature of oral assessment is the use of speech rather than writing as the exclusive, primary or at least a significant mode of student response, what are the principal attributes, or dimensions, of this form of assessment? The identification of such dimensions may lead to a clearer understanding of the nature of oral assessment as an assessment type, a clearer differentiation of the various forms within this type, a better capacity to describe and analyse these forms, and a better understanding of how the various dimensions of oral assessment interact with other elements of teaching and learning. The construct of 'dimensions of oral assessment' may therefore serve descriptive, analytical and research purposes both in the context of this study and beyond.

Aspects of these dimensions have already been discussed in work published from this doctoral research (Joughin, 1998).

Dimensions of Oral Assessment

The dimensions of oral assessment described in this chapter were identified through an analysis of literature on oral assessment in post-compulsory education. This literature included specialist assessment texts which refer to oral assessment (including Banta, Lund, Black & Oblander, 1996; Nightingale, Wiata, Toohey, Ryan, Hughes, & Magin, 1996; Brown & Knight, 1994; and Rowntree, 1987), and over eighty articles focusing on oral assessment and identified through standard educational literature searches. The attributes of oral assessment noted and/or discussed in each relevant study were listed individually. From the initial lengthy list of attributes which resulted, similar attributes were categorised according to a common or underlying quality they were perceived to possess. Through this process, six dimensions of oral assessment were identified. The dimensions are listed in Table One.

Each dimension covers a range of practices. For four of these dimensions ('interaction', 'authenticity', 'structure' and 'orality'), the range has the quality of a continuum. The dimensions of 'primary content type' and 'examiner', however, are not continua but rather consist of more-or-less discrete categories.

The dimensions reported here have been described in similar ways

Table 1. Dimensions of Oral Assessment

Dimension	Range		
1. Primary content type	Knowledge and understanding; applied problem solving ability; interpersonal competence; personal qualities		
2. Interaction	Presentation	vs	Dialogue
3. Authenticity	Contextualised	vs	Decontextualised
4. Structure	Closed structure	vs	Open structure
5. Examiners	Self-assessment ; peer assessment; authority-based assessment		
6. Orality	Purely oral	vs	Orality as secondary

The nature and range of each dimension is considered below by focusing on the variability towards each pole in those dimensions that are more-or-less continuous (i.e., 2, 3, 4, and 6) and by discussing the discrete entities in the non-continuous dimensions (i.e., 1 and 5).

1. Primary Content Type

‘Primary content type’ is concerned with the object of assessment — what Rowntree (1987, p. 82) refers to as “what one is looking for, or remarking upon, in the people one is assessing”. Vu, Johnson and Mertz comment that “the first and most important step in setting up the oral evaluation system is to determine the content to be evaluated” (Vu, Johnson, & Mertz, 1981, p. 668). Since most thinking about oral assessment tends to be

framed by what is being examined, this is an appropriate starting point for the present consideration of dimensions.

The content of assessment can be categorized in a number of ways. Often this is done in terms of a subject's objectives (Ebel, 1979; Rowntree, 1987), with taxonomies of objectives such as that of Bloom (1956) in the cognitive domain, and of Krathwohl and others (1964) in the affective domain, being brought to bear. In contrast to this approach, Nightingale and her colleagues have based their consideration of assessment content on "the characteristics and abilities that are expected of graduates" of university courses (Nightingale et al., 1996, p. 2). The set of content categories resulting from the latter approach may be useful in locating the particular content of oral assessment within a broader framework. The six categories according to this approach are: 'thinking critically and making judgments'; 'solving problems and developing plans'; 'performing procedures and demonstrating techniques'; 'managing and developing oneself'; 'accessing and managing information'; 'demonstrating knowledge and understanding'; 'designing, creating and performing'; and 'communicating'.

Oral assessment undoubtedly could be used to test a wide range of objectives, characteristics and abilities, and the content being assessed by oral assessment could be identified according to general educational categories such as those mentioned above. However, the oral assessment literature tends not to draw directly on such categorisations, though these categorisations constitute a useful background against which the content assessed by oral assessment can be located.

In the oral assessment literature, there is surprising agreement regarding what is tested by this form of assessment (Erhaut & Cole, 1993; Glowacki & Steele, 1992; Habeshaw, Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1993; Kaplowitz, Jenkins & Nair, 1996; Levine & McGuire, 1970; Muzzin & Hart, 1985; Raymond & Viswesvaran 1991). The learning which is assessed by oral assessment can be readily classified into four categories:

Knowledge and understanding

The terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ are not used with any degree of consistency in educational literature. Sometimes they are used interchangeably and sometimes to demote clearly differentiated forms of learning. Here ‘knowledge’ is used in Bloom’s sense to refer to the “ability to remember facts, terms, definitions, methods, rules, principles etc.” (Bloom, 1956, p. 201) while ‘understanding’ refers to the comprehension of the underlying meaning of what is known. Knowledge and understanding are well exemplified by the first two components of the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery’s rating form, ‘recall of factual information’ and ‘analysis and interpretation of clinical data’ (Levine & McGuire, 1970, p. 65).

Oral assessment may be a preferred way of measuring a candidate’s knowledge when there is a particular need to ensure that the responses are actually the candidate’s, or where other forms of response are difficult, or where knowledge is being tested in association with other learning outcomes. Because oral assessment allows probing, it seems to be particularly suited to measuring candidates’ understanding (Aiken, 1979, p.

3; Habeshaw, Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1993, p. 75; Lunz & Stahl, 1993, p. 174). In the context of measurements of student capabilities in professional fields, oral assessment is used to measure candidate's knowledge and understanding of facts, concepts, principles and procedures that underlie professional practice. In other discipline areas, oral assessment is used to measure candidates' knowledge and understanding of the facts, concepts, principles and procedures associated with that discipline.

Applied problem solving ability

The category of 'applied problem solving' has been variously described as 'the ability to "think on one's feet" (Muzzin & Hart, 1985, p. 73), "the cognitive processes which constitute professional thinking" (Eraut & Cole, 1993, p. 10), "the ability to think quickly and diagnose problems in novel situations" (Habeshaw, Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1993, p. 75), "clinical competence" (Solomon et al., 1990, p. 543), "problem-solving skills, application skills, interpretive skills" (Glowacki & Steele, 1992, p. 13) , and "critical thinking" (Dressel, 1991). The applied nature of this category is explicitly noted by Hill, who, in the context of psychology, describes these abilities as "the capacity to apply the knowledge base" (Hill, 1984, p. 72), while Kaplowitz, Jenkins and Nair, in the context of medicine, claim that "the main advantage of the oral exam is that the examiner is able to ask students a series of related questions which can test not just their knowledge base, but how well they can apply this knowledge to a clinical situation" (Kaplowitz, Jenkins & Nair, 1996, p. 2).

Interpersonal competence

‘Interpersonal competence’ refers to a set of factors which Erhaut and Cole describe as “the personal skills ... required for a professional approach to the conduct of one’s work” (Erhaut & Cole, 1993, p. 10). These typically include communication or interview skills, though it must be emphasised that it is not skills *per se* but rather skills exhibited in relation to a clinical situation or problem solving exercise that are being considered in oral assessment (Glowacki & Steele, 1992; Habeshaw, Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1993; Levine & McGuire, 1970; Raymond & Viswesveran, 1991).

Intra-personal qualities

Oral assessment, particularly when designed for certification purposes to test candidates’ suitability to enter a particular profession, is sometimes used to measure a candidate’s intrapersonal qualities. Muzzin & Hart (1985, p. 72) cite a number of personal attributes that oral assessment has been claimed to measure, including personality, alertness, reactions to stress, appearance, confidence and self-awareness. Others cite attitudes (Glowacki & Steele, 1992; Habeshaw, Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1993; Levine & McGuire, 1970) while Abrahamson interestingly, and perhaps worryingly, includes what he refers to as “the subtle characteristic that I call his or her acceptability to the specialty for which the person is being examined” (Abrahamson, 1983, p. 123).

Mixed categories

Oral assessment may test only one of the above categories or it may encompass more than one category. On the one hand, the assessment may focus exclusively on knowledge and understanding, as in the oral defence of the doctoral thesis. On the other

hand, where the capacity ‘to apply the knowledge base’ is the primary focus of the assessment, the knowledge base itself may also be explored, and if the assessment is in the context of a real or pseudo-patient or client, interpersonal competence can also be examined. Clinical assessment in medicine, for example, typically encompass at least the first three content categories (Levine & McGuire, 1970, p. 65).

2. Interaction

Interaction refers to reciprocity between examiner and candidate, with each acting on, responding to, and being influenced by the other. Most non-oral forms of assessment involve the student responding to a task which is presented at the beginning of the assessment process. The examiner sets the task, the student responds, and the response is then assessed by the examiner. In contrast to this, oral assessment creates the opportunity for a more complex set of interactions between examiner and student.

While it is true that non-oral forms of assessment occasionally include an interactive component (for example, when the examinee is asked to re-present a written paper with certain points expanded or clarified), oral assessment allows for instantaneous exchanges between examiner and examinee. It is this capacity that allows oral assessment to “probe a candidate’s reasoning, ethics and knowledge” (Lunz and Stahl, 1993, p. 174), widely recognised as one of oral assessment’s principal advantages (Aiken, 1979, p. 3; Brown & Knight, 1994, p. 75).

While interaction allows for probing with its possibly considerable attendant benefits, interaction also gives rise to the possibility that the social interaction entailed in this form of assessment may distort communication and affect both a candidate's performance and how that performance is perceived by the examiner/s (Moon 1988, 2). Abrahamson (1983, p. 124) refers to this as "bias that is introduced in the interaction". This potential for distortion through interaction is the focus of numerous empirical studies (see, for example, Burchard, Rowland-Morin, Coe & Garb, 1995; Rowland-Morin, Burchard, Garb & Coe, 1991; Wigton, 1980).

The 'presentation' pole

At the 'presentation' pole of the interaction range, oral assessment may resemble written assessment in that a task is set, the student responds, and this response is then assessed. Oral presentations without subsequent questioning or discussion exemplify this pole (see, for example, Church & Bull, 1995; Hay, 1994; Juhl, 1996; Nightingale et al., 1996). Another form is the oral examination in which a series of pre-determined questions are posed, each followed by the student's response but with no other interaction occurring (e.g. Moon, 1988).

The 'dialogue' pole

The opposite end of this range is characterised by a high level of interaction between the examiner and examinee so that the assessment takes the form of a conversation. Such interaction involves reciprocal statements by examiner and student in which each such statement includes a response to that made by the other participant.

This interaction gives assessment an inherent unpredictability in which neither party knows in advance exactly what questions will be asked or what responses will be made.

Since the capacity for interaction appears to be one of the principal advantages of the oral assessment format, it is not surprising that most oral assessment includes a significant interactive component. Thus interaction is a key dimension in (i) any assessment based on client interviews, whether authentic or simulated (e.g. Nightingale et al., 1996, pp. 49-50, 95-96), or (ii) in any assessment involving the probing of students' knowledge, understanding or problem-solving abilities by follow-up questions (e.g. Butler & Wiseman, 1993).

Intermediate points

An intermediate point on the interaction dimension is the formal presentation followed by questioning of the student on the content of the presentation (see, for example, Mandeville & Menchaca, 1994; Rogers & Stemkoski, 1995).

3. Authenticity

'Authenticity' refers to the extent to which the assessment replicates the context of professional practice or 'real life'. Wiggins (1989) has suggested a useful set of criteria for 'authentic assessment', including the use of an actual audience, realistic time frames, collaboration between students, the sophisticated and effective use of knowledge, a focus on depth, and the presentation to students of "contextualized, complex intellectual challenges, not fragmented and static bits or tasks" (Wiggins, 1989, p. 711).

Norman, Muzzin, Williams and Swanson nominate “fidelity” or “the extent to which the simulation method resembles a real life experience” as the first dimension they use to discuss a variety of simulation methods, including oral assessment, in health sciences education, though they also note that “claims about the usefulness of oral exams in judging ability to apply knowledge, to problem solve, to respond to dynamic situations, to demonstrate interpersonal skills and professional attitudes are typically based on unsubstantiated impressions or on reports that the exam seems life like” (Norman, Muzzin, Williams, & Swanson, 1985, p. 11). While this scepticism is not widely shared, the issue of validity is a recurring one in the oral assessment literature (Evans, Ingersoll, & Smith, 1966; Holloway, Hardwick, Morris, & Start, 1967; Hill, 1984; Levine & McGuire, 1970; Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991).

The ‘contextualised’ pole

At the ‘contextualised’ pole, oral assessment is completely contextualised, being conducted in contexts of genuine professional practice. A common example is the clinical examination in medicine which typically involves genuine patients in hospital settings (see, for example, Raymond & Viswesvaran, 1991; Solomon et al., 1990). Evans, Ingersoll and Smith (1966, p. 651) note that “oral examiners perceive the method as more nearly duplicating the usual communication between colleagues, between doctors and patients, and between students and teachers”. Assessment such as this, which requires the performance of professional activities with an actual patient or client,

are often referred to as ‘performance’ or ‘performance-based’ assessment (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar 1991; Webb, Raymond, & Houston, 1990).

The ‘decontextualised’ pole

At the opposite pole, an oral assessment may be ‘decontextualised’ or remote from the situation of professional practice. The oral defence of a doctoral thesis, conducted in a classroom or public auditorium and focussing on ideas abstracted from their context, would exemplify this form, as would any assessment that focuses on what Laurillard characterizes as ‘academic learning’ (Laurillard, 1993).

Intermediate points

Some oral assessment, while not able to be conducted in genuine settings, seeks to simulate significant aspects of authenticity. They are located close to the ‘contextualised’ pole and are often referred to as ‘authentic’ assessment since they contain many of the criteria for authenticity noted above. Simulations which culminate in oral presentations (and which themselves may be made to a simulated panel) and role plays represent common attempts to simulate ‘real world’ conditions in the context of assessment. Examples of such assessment abound, including simulated client interviews in law (Nightingale et al., 1996, pp. 49-50); a ‘real world’ design project for accounting and engineering students who present their results to an industry-based panel (Rogers & Stemkoski, 1995), and mock administrative hearings in marine science (Evans, Dean, & Chapel, 1992).

4. Structure

The dimension of structure refers to the extent to which oral assessment is based on a pre-determined, organised body of questions or sequence of events.

Numerous studies consider ‘structure’ as a fundamental dimension of oral assessment. Hill’s study of oral methods for psychologists’ licensing examinations in thirty-nine American jurisdictions, for example, concluded that “the examination strategies described varied on a continuum of less structure to more structure” (Hill, 1984, p. 69), while many studies have pointed out the need for structure as a means of increasing the reliability of oral assessment (Aiken, 1979; Muzzin & Hart, 1985; Yang & Laub, 1983).

The ‘closed structure’ pole

At the ‘closed structure’ pole, the assessment is tightly structured: the examiner asks a series of set questions in a given order, often following a carefully constructed set of protocols. The questions, the order in which they are asked, and the manner in which they are posed is not influenced by the student’s behaviour. Moon’s description of the use of oral assessment in General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) economics, in which set questions would be asked, followed by student replies, with no scope for examiners to deviate from their ‘script’, epitomises closed structure (Moon, 1988). Van Wart comments regarding a particular form of oral assessment in family medicine that “unlike the traditional medical oral examination, this oral has a tight structure from which the examiner is not allowed to deviate” (Van Wart, 1974, p. 673).

The 'open structure' pole

At the 'open structure' pole, the assessment follows a loosely structured agenda. The student may be given considerable freedom regarding how they present their ideas (e.g. Dressel, 1991) or questions posed by the examiner may be dependent on the student's responses to previous questions, giving the assessment the character of a free flowing dialogue.

Intermediate points

An intermediate point on the closed-open structure continuum could take many forms. For example, students may be given firm criteria but have a choice of subject matter (Dressel, 1991); examiners may have a set of core questions but some latitude in posing follow up questions (Kostick & Nixon, 1952-53); or students may have considerable freedom regarding their own response, while the examiner continues to follow a reasonably fixed pattern of response to the student's comments (Butler & Wiseman, 1993).

5. Examiners

The 'examiner' dimension concerns who judges the worth of the student's responses. Compared with written forms of assessment, the 'product' of oral assessment is relatively 'public' and is accessible to whoever is present at the time of the assessment. Thus oral assessment lends itself to assessment by multiple examiners, including faculty-based panels, or, if the assessment is held in a class setting, by peers.

Self-assessment

The nature and role of self-assessment has received considerable attention in the literature of assessment in higher education (e.g. Boud, 1995). Self-assessment in the context of oral assessment involves procedures and issues similar to those that apply to other self-assessment formats.

Church and Bull (1995, p. 198) suggest that “there are a number of different methods for involving students in the marking process” and describe the use of self-assessment forms to identify how future oral presentations could be improved on the basis of feedback, while Joughin, McGrath and Coles (1995) describe an integrated self- and peer-assessment procedure for presentations. Trevitt, as reported in Nightingale and her colleagues survey of assessment practices in Australian universities (Nightingale et al., 1996, p. 96) involves students in the assessment of their own interview performance.

Peer assessment

Peer assessment occurs whenever other students are involved in responding to the candidate’s work. This response can take a number of forms, ranging from peers being part of the audience to which a presentation is made to peers directly assessing the value of a presentation by giving written feedback based on set criteria (Joughin, McGrath and Coles, 1995). Students often contribute oral feedback during or following a presentation, which the student being assessed then incorporates in a final self-report (see, for example, Church and Bull, 1995; Nightingale et al., 1996, p. 22).

'Authority-based' assessment

Most oral assessment, as in other assessment formats, does not take the form of self-assessment or peer-assessment but is exclusively conducted by teachers or others in a position of authority over the student. In oral assessment, however, such 'authority-based' assessment differs from most written assessment in (i) the frequent use of panels and (ii) the use of 'external' members of such panels.

In the discipline areas in which the use of oral assessment is most widely practiced, namely medicine, law and architecture, the use of panels is common practice. The 'design jury' in architecture, for instance, is by definition composed of several examiners (Anthony, 1991), while the literature on medical education suggests the use of pairs of examiners or larger panels is routine (see, for example, Muzzin & Hart, 1985; Raymond & Viswesvaran, 1991). Hill, in discussing standards for oral licensing examinations in psychology, simply assumes the use of panels (Hill, 1984, p. 75). In other discipline areas where oral assessment is less established, the use of more than one examiner is commonly reported (Church & Bull, 1995; Evans, Dean & Chapal, 1992; Holloway, Collins & Start, 1968; McDowell, 1995; Nightingale et al., 1996; Platt, 1960; Rogers & Stemkowski, 1995).

Mixed categories

It is quite feasible for oral assessment to utilise a mixture of examiner categories, with, for example, an element of self-assessment being conducted in conjunction with a

final determination being made by a teacher, or self-, peer-, and teacher-assessment being used in combination (Joughin, McGrath & Coles, 1995).

6. Orality

‘Orality’ as a dimension of oral assessment refers to the extent to which the assessment is conducted orally, ranging from the exclusively oral format of, for example, the clinical examination in medicine, to assessment in which the oral component is secondary to another component, for example, the oral presentation of a written paper.

The ‘purely oral’

Many forms of assessment are purely oral, with no other medium being used. Any *viva voce*, in which the oral medium is deliberately substituted for the written, belongs in this category (e.g. Butler & Wiseman, 1993).

Orality as secondary

In contrast to the purely oral, the oral component of assessment may be secondary to another component. The oral presentation of a written paper; the oral explanation of a physical work (e.g. an architectural design), or the oral defence of a written paper (e.g. a doctoral dissertation) are illustrative of this category.

Summary

The dimensions of oral assessment identified in this chapter constitute a comprehensive set of categories that can be applied to most instances of oral assessment

to provide a thorough description of that instance. The adequacy of the dimensions for this purpose has been tested by retrospectively applying the dimensions to some of the studies from which they were derived, as well as to studies that were not part of this initial set of cases. It is apparent that many of the instances of oral assessment reported in the literature would be considerably enhanced by addressing all six dimensions rather than the limited range of categories that are applied in most reported studies.

While the dimensions allow a comprehensive description of oral assessment, there are of course many important elements of assessment that are concerned with matters other than description. Thus, for example, of the five ‘dimensions’ which Rowntree uses to frame his exploration of assessment, only two are related to description — ‘what to assess’ and ‘how to assess’ (Rowntree, 1987). His other categories, ‘why assess?’, ‘how to interpret’ and ‘how to respond’ are concerned with non-descriptive matters. Such non-descriptive matters are of course vitally important, and the oral assessment literature is replete with studies addressing such issues as validity, reliability, rater bias, and student anxiety. The dimensions of oral assessment identified in the present study may help to focus studies which address such issues, for while the dimensions of oral assessment are purely descriptive, the capacity of the dimensions to illuminate the oral assessment process may provide an important basis for discussion and research into these areas.

One final point should be reiterated regarding the six dimensions of oral assessment identified in this study: they are based exclusively on teachers’ or educational researchers’ perspectives on oral assessment. Apart from a small number of studies on

anxiety, the literature does not include descriptions of oral assessment from the perspective of students. A survey of students' descriptions of oral assessment may lead to a set of dimensions quite different to those generated from teachers' descriptions. Notwithstanding this important distinction, the dimensions identified from the teachers' point of view may usefully inform the process of listening to and describing the experience of oral assessment from the students' perspective. The literature that is summarised in the next chapter begins this process of considering oral assessment from the student's perspective, while the two subsequent chapters present a methodology for researching this perspective empirically and the results that arose from applying this methodology in the context of a specific instance of oral assessment.

3. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING

*Little is known about what is entailed in presenting as seen
from students' eyes.*

(Hounsell & McCune, 2001, p. 2)

Introduction

The 'dimensions of oral assessment' identified in the previous chapter are based on descriptions of oral assessment from the teacher's perspective. This chapter represents a movement towards understanding oral assessment from the student's perspective. The aim of this chapter is to outline a model of learning that recognises the importance of students' experiences of the context of learning in general, and of assessment as a particular and critical part of that context, and to note research that parallels this study either (a) by considering students' experiences of specific forms of assessment or (b) by reporting studies that compare students' experiences of different forms of assessment. This chapter addresses this aim in five sections:

1. The '3-P' model of learning is outlined, with its emphasis on the pivotal role of student perceptions of the context of learning.
2. Seminal research supporting the importance of student perceptions of the context of learning is summarised.
3. A series of studies comparing student responses to different forms of assessment are outlined. These studies reinforce the important role played in learning by student perceptions of assessment as a critical aspect of the context of learning, as well as introducing important comparative considerations.

4. Detailed studies by Biggs and Hounsell of students' perceptions of a specific form of assessment, essay-writing, and which might inform the present study of another specific form of assessment are outlined in some detail.
5. The small amount of literature regarding student perceptions of oral assessment is noted.

The chapter concludes with a short discussion of aspects of orality.

The '3-P' Model

The '3-P' model of learning, represented diagrammatically by Biggs here in Figure One, is derived from similar representations of learning and teaching suggested by Dunkin and Biddle (1974), Bloom (1976) and Child (1985). The first 'P' — 'presage' — refers to those factors that are in place before learning commences, and which form the basis for new learning. The second 'P' — 'process' — refers to how students go about learning, or the approaches to learning they take, in a specific context. The third 'P' — 'product' — refers to the outcome of the learning process, which can be expressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

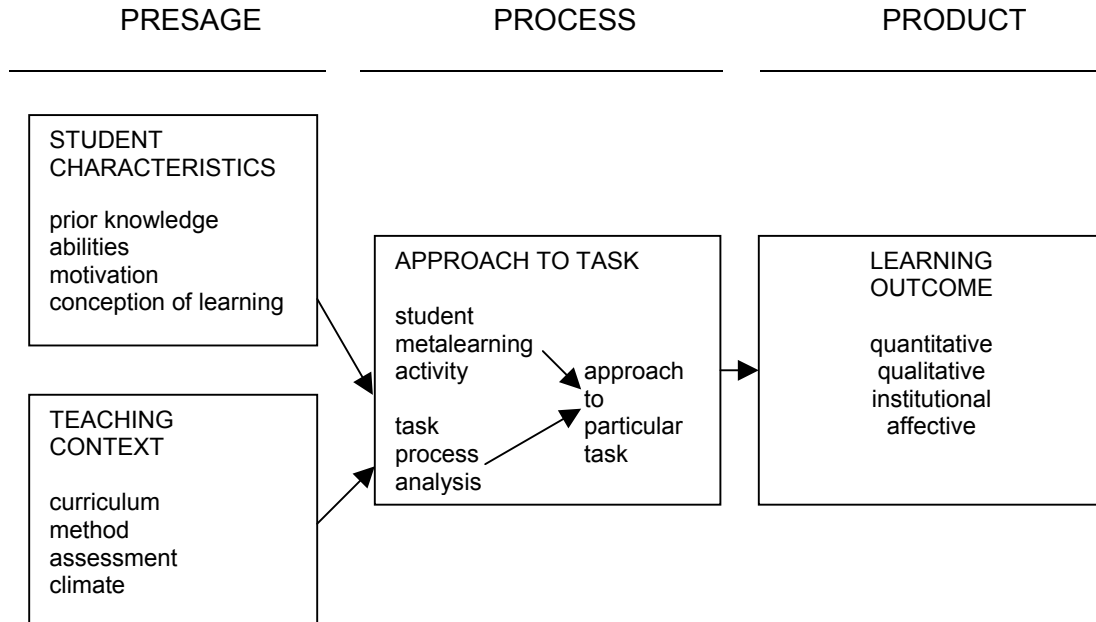


Figure 1. The 3-P model (a) (After Biggs, 1989, p. 11)

Ramsden (1992) utilises a similar though modified model of learning, which is reproduced in Figure Two. Ramsden’s model highlights an element that was not made explicit in Biggs’s early versions of his model (but which did appear later — see, for example, Biggs, 1993), namely students’ perceptions of task requirements. Ramsden’s model explicitly recognises that students’ approaches to learning are not determined directly by the context *per se*, but are mediated by their perception of that context, along with the influence of their pre-existing orientations to studying.

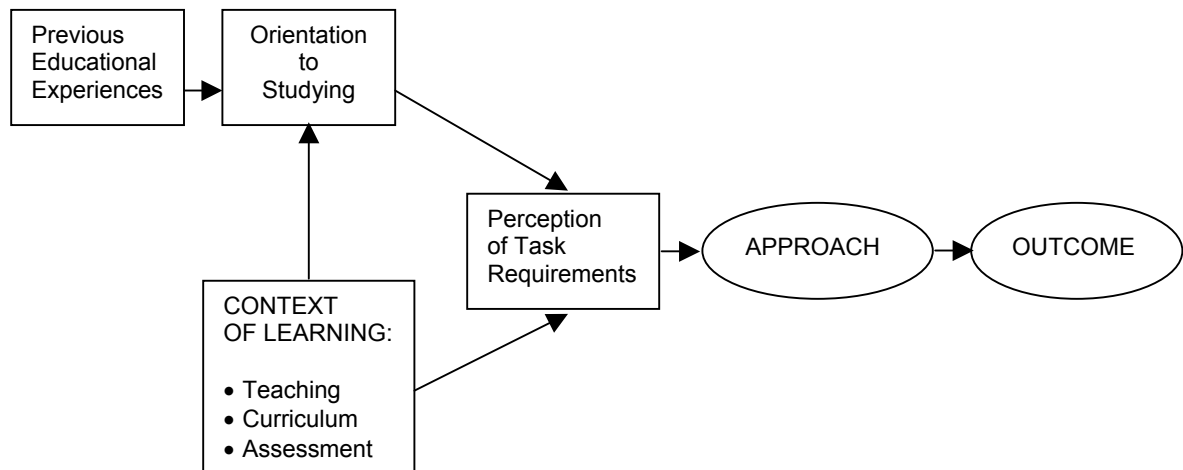


Figure 2. The 3-P model (b) (After Ramsden, 1992, p. 83)

Prosser and Trigwell take Biggs’s and Ramsden’s models a step further in emphasising students’ perceptions of the context of teaching and learning. They express this in what they term “a constitutionalist model of student learning” (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). For them, each student’s perception of context is unique and of such significance that they incorporate the term ‘student’s situation’ into the model to express each student’s unique perception of his or her situation. Consequently, instead of a single ‘context of learning’, there will be many ‘student’s situations’ of learning, each based on the interaction between the student, with his or her unique set of prior experiences, and the context. Prosser and Trigwell’s model is expressed diagrammatically in Figure Three.

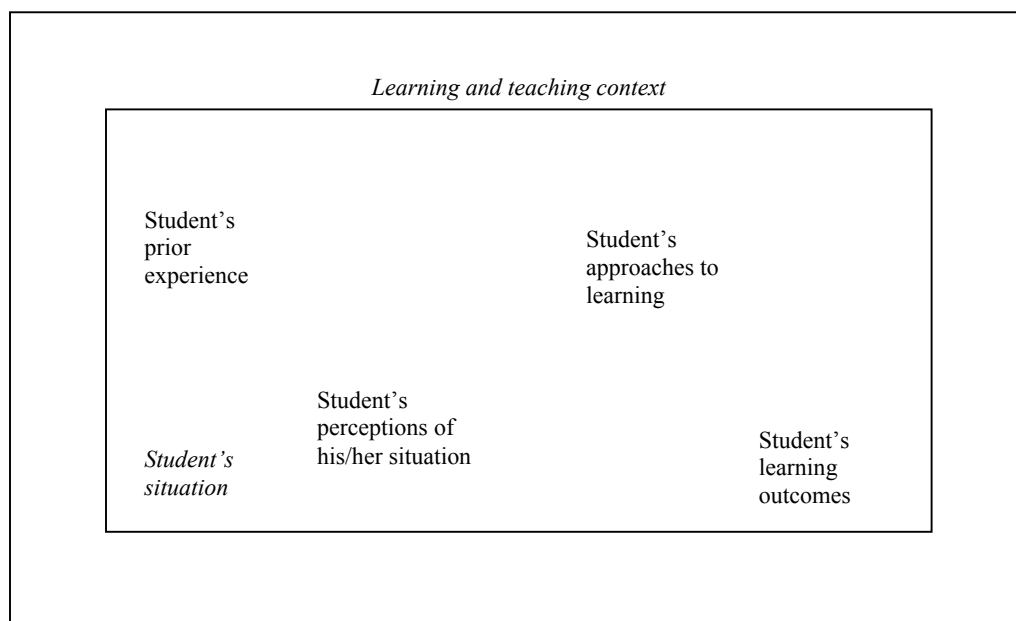


Figure 3. The 3-P model (c) (After Prosser and Trigwell, 1999, p. 17)

It should be noted here that the ‘constitutionalist’ model of learning that underpins Prosser and Trigwell’s, as well as Ramsden’s, models, and which in fact underpins the phenomenographic understanding of learning (Marton & Booth, 1997), is often seen to stand in contrast to the constructivist understanding that is the basis of Biggs’s work (for example, Biggs, 1993, 1996). For Biggs, “constructivism emphasises that people actively construct knowledge for themselves, according to emergent categories derived from social interaction, not from observation. Such constructivism leads them to their own understandings, to their own way of looking at things” (Biggs, 1993, pp.73-74.). For Prosser and Trigwell, such constructivism is ‘dualistic’, with both individual constructivist and social constructivist perspectives involving “a separation between the individual and the world. Knowledge is brought in from the outside or constructed on the inside ... there are two elements: the student and the world” (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 13).

The non-dualistic ‘constitutionalist’ perspective, on the other hand, does not make “the distinction between inner and outer in the first place, not seeing the knower and the known, the subject and the object, as separate” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 138). As Prosser and Trigwell express this,

From a constitutionalist perspective on learning there is an internal relationship between the individual and the world. The individual and the world are not constituted independently of one another. Individuals and the world are internally related through the individuals’ awareness of the world. The world is an experienced world. (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 13)

Biggs acknowledges important differences between constructivism and phenomenography, though seeing both as streams of a non-dualistic tradition (Biggs 1996). Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, it should be noted that the present study has been informed by a constitutionalist rather than a constructivist perspective. Biggs’s model has been introduced not as an alternative framework for this study, but simply as a precursor to the markedly different (though graphically similar) models of Ramsden, Prosser and Trigwell.

Though the 3-P model and its individual components have been widely discussed in educational literature over the past twenty-five years, a short explanation here of its

components and the relationships between them will identify the aspects of the model that are particularly pertinent to the present study.

Student's prior experience. This element could include any aspect of a student's prior experience that is relevant to their current study. Researchers and theorists have tended to focus on certain aspects of that experience. Research within the 'student approaches to learning' position has focused on students' conceptions of learning (for example, Hounsell, 1997b; Ramsden, 1988; Säljö, 1997a), orientations to learning, in the sense of "a propensity to address a range of different learning tasks ... in a certain way" (Ramsden 1992, p. 51. See also, for example, Biggs 1987, and Thomas & Bain, 1982, 1984), and motivation (Beaty, Gibbs & Morgan, 1997).

The context of learning. This element includes traditional aspects of curriculum — principally content, aims and objectives, teaching methods, assessment methods, the climate for learning, and institutional requirements (Biggs 1999; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 1992).

Students' perceptions of context. Students will have perceptions of critical aspects of the context of learning. Many writers see the most influential aspect of context as assessment (for example Ramsden 1988a, 1992; Rowntree, 1987) so that students' perceptions of assessment tasks exert a powerful influence on how they go about learning, and on the quality of learning outcomes. The consideration of students'

perceptions of assessment includes students' conceptions of particular forms of assessment.

Student approaches to learning. This element concerns the well established 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning, along with strategic or achieving approaches (Biggs, 1987; Entwistle, 1997a; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Säljö, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). An approach is typically seen as consisting of an intention, for example, to understand, and a set of related strategies or processes, for example, relating new knowledge to previous knowledge, with the underlying intention determining the processes adopted. (See, for example, Biggs, 1987; Entwistle, 1997a; Ramsden, 1992.)

Learning outcomes. Learning outcomes can be expressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively, and can include affective and skills outcomes as well as outcomes regarding knowledge and understanding.

Ramsden (1992, p. 18) succinctly summarises the significance of the 3-P model by noting that "differences in the quality of learning (outcomes) are due to differences in the ways students go about learning; and these differences in turn can be explained in terms of their experience of teaching". The model therefore points to the significance of this study — how students' experience oral assessment will directly influence their approaches to learning, which in turn will determine the quality of their learning outcomes.

While acknowledging the powerful role of student perceptions, the 3-P model posits two sources of influence on these perceptions and consequently on students' approaches to learning — the context of learning and the student's pre-existing orientation to studying. The relative influence of these sources has been the subject of some debate, and considerable research, that is of particular importance in the present study.

The 3-P model helps to locate the different kinds of research that are pertinent to this study and which are discussed in the following sections of this chapter, namely:

- research that establishes the importance of students' perceptions of the context of learning by indicating that students are alert to particular aspects of this context and adjust their approaches to learning on the basis of how they perceive the context;
- research that compares students' responses to different kinds of contexts, especially with regards to assessment; and
- research that explores variation in students' perceptions of particular kinds of contexts constituted by specific forms of assessment.

Each of these kinds of research will be considered in turn.

Perceptions of Context and Approaches to Learning

Two studies have been particularly influential in establishing the relationship between student perceptions of the context of learning and their approaches to learning.

The first study is reported by Ramsden (1979, 1988a, 1997) and Ramsden and Entwistle (1981). The Course Perceptions Questionnaire and the Approaches to Studying Inventory were used to relate students' perceptions of their courses to their approaches to studying. A 'meaning' orientation towards studying was found to be related to the course perception variables of "good teaching, freedom in learning, clear goals and standards, and less reliance on formal methods of teaching" (Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981, p. 375), while a 'reproducing' orientation was related to heavy workloads. Ramsden concluded that "students' experiences of teaching and assessment influence their approaches to learning, both directly and indirectly", and that "the single most important message to emerge from these research findings is that intense effort must be made in course planning, and in the setting of assessment questions, to avoid presenting a learning context which is perceived by students to require, or reward, surface approaches" (Ramsden 1997, p. 215). However, Ramsden also noted that, while inappropriate assessment can encourage a surface approach, assessment alone may not be enough to induce deep approaches, which may also require good teaching, choice regarding content and ways of learning, and an appropriate workload (Ramsden 1979, 1988, 1997).

Ramsden (1997) noted that the relationship between assessment methods and the quality of learning has been recognised since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, citing Newman, Pattison, Veblen and Whitehead who all railed against examination systems that required memorisation at the expense of true learning, scholarship and understanding.

The second seminal study is Roger Säljö's study, initially reported in his monograph on *Qualitative differences in learning as a function of the learner's conception of the task* (Säljö, 1975) and subsequently in Marton and Säljö's 'On qualitative differences in learning - II: Outcome as a function of the learner's conception of the task' (Marton & Säljö, 1976b).

In this study, two groups of twenty students read sections of three chapters of a textbook. After reading each of the first two sections, one group was asked factual questions, the responses to which required close attention to the surface structure of the text, while the other group was asked questions that required understanding of the author's underlying assumptions. After reading the third section, both groups were asked questions of both kinds. The study aimed to see if asking different kinds of questions would induce different perceptions of the task, different levels of processing (or what were subsequently termed 'approaches to learning'), and different outcomes. The results of the study were that (a) students who were given factual questions came to focus on the surface structure of the text, while (b) students who were given questions that required a deeper understanding responded by either (i) processing at a deeper level, or (ii) 'technifying' the requirements of the task, failing to realise that a deep level of processing was required, and continuing to focus on recall. Marton and Säljö concluded that "students adopt an approach determined by their expectations of what is required by them" (Marton & Säljö, 1976b, p. 125).

Many subsequent studies have supported the initial findings of Säljö, Marton and Ramsden. Several studies have reinforced Ramsden's findings, including studies by Watkins (1982) who replicated Ramsden's study with similar results, Eley (1991) whose study of differential approaches within individual students studying contrasting subjects extended Ramsden's work, and Lawless and Richardson (2002) who used the Approaches to Studying Inventory and the Course Experience Questionnaire to identify relationships between perceptions of academic quality and approaches to studying in distance education courses. Ramsden and his colleagues, in a study of perceptions of academic leadership involving over 800 students in 51 subjects, found strong confirmation of Ramsden's initial findings (Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell & Martin, 1997). In addition to these, most studies following the 'student approaches to learning' position, based as they are on a relational understanding of learning (Marton and Booth, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 1988b, 1992; Watkins, 1996), deal with students' perceptions of context, implicitly if not explicitly, indirectly, if not directly. These studies of students' perceptions of context provide grounds for believing that contexts characterised by oral assessment will be perceived by students in particular ways and will evoke particular responses in them.

Student Responses to Different Forms of Assessment

Numerous studies have compared student responses to different forms of assessment, on the basis that students may respond differently depending on how they perceive the requirements of the different forms. Several of these studies have built on the work of Marton and Säljö noted in the previous section.

The tenor of these studies is set by Terry (1933; cited by Säljö, 1975, and Marton & Säljö 1976a). Terry compared how students studied for essays and ‘objective tests’ (including true/false, multiple choice, completion and simple recall tests). He found that students preparing for objective tests tended to focus on small units of content — words, phrases and sentences — thereby risking what he terms “the vice of shallowness or superficiality” (Terry, 1933, p. 597). On the other hand, students preparing for essay-based tests emphasised the importance of focusing on large units of content — main ideas, summaries, and related ideas. He noted that while some students clearly discriminated between test types in their preparation, others reported no difference in how they prepared for essay and objective tests.

Meyer, also cited by Säljö (1975; and Marton & Säljö 1976a), surveyed studies into student responses to different assessment formats. He cites with approval an observation of Kinney and Eurich which is worth noting in full since it is directly related to the present study:

It has been suggested frequently that the use of the subjective examination stimulates the pupil to study in order to acquire an organised body of information, and observe the relationships and implications of the facts thus learned. On the other hand, the assertion has been made that pupils expecting to be tested with an objective examination are more apt to memorize unrelated facts without a consideration of their interrelationships. If study habits are in

fact related to the type of test question used, it is a matter of fundamental importance that should be taken into consideration in deciding upon the type of question to be used in examinations. (Meyer, 1934, p. 641)

Meyer (1934, pp. 642-643) also quotes Terry's conclusion, which is at issue in the student approaches to learning position and is central to this thesis:

The kind of test to be given, if the students know it in advance, determines in large measure both what and how they study. The behaviour of students in this habitual way places greater powers in the teacher's hands than many realize. By the selection of suitable types of tests, the teacher can cause large numbers of his students to study, to a considerable extent at least, in the ways he deems best for a given unit of subject-matter. Whether he interests himself in the question or not, most of his students will probably use the methods of study which they consider best adapted to the particular types of tests customarily employed.

Meyer considered that "the most important factor in evaluating the various types of examinations may be the mental set produced by studying for any one kind of test" (Meyer, 1934, p. 643). Meyer initially compared the memory of students who studied with an essay in mind with those who studied with multiple choice, true-false, or completion questions in mind. The group who studied with essays in mind performed better than the other groups. Meyer concluded that preparing for the essay-type test

leads to a more complete mastery of material, and that the other forms of testing should be used only in exceptional circumstances.

Meyer (1935) subsequently asked these students to describe how they studied for the type of exam they were expecting, and how this differed from how they would have studied for a different type of exam. He concluded that students expecting an essay exam attempt to develop a general view of the material, while students expecting the other types of exam focus on detail. Students certainly reported being selective in how they studied, rather than simply following a particular way of studying regardless of assessment format.

Silvey (1951) also studied how students prepared for different kinds of exams. He recognised that students' feelings and attitudes towards assessment played a key role in their learning. He noted that their perceptions of assessment were important, irrespective of whether these perceptions were supported by evidence about the tests themselves, observing that "somewhere along the line something operated in the individual's educational experience to influence the establishment of certain attitudes regarding the two types of test ('objective' and essay). Since certain attitudes persist, no matter how or why formed, education can well afford to recognise them in its effective discharge of its obligation to the student" (Silvey, 1951, p. 377). Silvey surveyed 828 college students, asking them to compare essays and objective tests in terms of differences in how they prepared for them. His findings support those of Terry and Meyer — he found that

students reported preparing differently for each kind of test, studying general principles for the essay test and focusing on details for the objective test.

Scouller (1998) noted the relative lack of research into how students perceive different forms of assessment and how these perceptions could relate to their approaches to studying. She consequently administered a questionnaire to 206 education students to see whether they approached a multiple choice examination and an assignment essay differently. The questionnaire was based in part on Biggs's Study Process Questionnaire and included questions on students' perceptions of the levels of intellectual abilities being assessed.

The students in Scouller's study reported preparing quite differently for the different forms of assessment, and perceived that different abilities were being assessed by each form. When preparing for their multiple-choice (MCQ) examinations students were significantly more likely to employ surface strategies and report surface motives than when preparing their assignment essays. They were also significantly more likely to perceive MCQ examinations as assessing knowledge-based (lower levels of) intellectual abilities than assignment essays. In contrast, when preparing their assignment essays students were significantly more likely to employ deep strategies and report deep motives than when preparing for their MCQ examinations. Furthermore, they perceived assignment essays as assessing higher levels of intellectual abilities than MCQ examinations.

Tang studied the effects of short essay tests and assignments on student preparation strategies within an explicit 3-P model (Tang, 1992a, 1992b, 1994). Students' perceptions of the test and the assignment were identified through open-ended interview questions. For the tests, a 'quantitative' perception was identified, according to which the test was seen as assessing the quantity of learning and requiring low level strategies such as rote learning and memorising. A 'qualitative' perception of the test saw it as requiring understanding, integration, relationships, and application. Most students had a 'qualitative' perception of the assignment, seeing it as requiring understanding, analysis, interpretation, relating to other knowledge and professional practice, and application in clinical situations. A 'quantitative' perception of the assignment involved the need to copy from reference materials.

In comparing the perceptions of cognitive strategies required for each form of assessment, Tang (1992b) found that:

- high level cognitive strategies such as understanding, applying the information, and relating to other subjects and previous knowledge were seen to be required for both forms of assessment,
- low level strategies such as rote learning, memorization and reproduction were applied only to the test,
- deep memorisation was associated only with the test, and
- neither form was seen as more or less demanding than the other.

In Tang's study, students tended to see the assignment as requiring understanding, with surface strategies such as rote learning being related to the test. Tang concluded that:

the students' perceptions of the different assessment demands do have an effect on the students' choice and adoption of different preparation strategies. Students will deploy appropriate strategies which are perceived to be congruent to the task demands. Hence students with a quantitative perception will very likely adopt a surface approach to studying while those with a qualitative perception will engage in a deep study approach. Strategy adaptation to an assessment is thus to an important extent situational. (Tang, 1992b, p. 477)

As well as identifying students' perceptions of the two forms of assessment, Tang also measured the approaches to study that they generally took (by using the Study Process Questionnaire) and the approaches they took in relation to each form of assessment (using the Assessment Preparation Strategies Questionnaire), and related both of these to learning outcomes. Students who generally used a surface approach tended to use a surface approach in both forms of assessment. Most, but not all, students who generally used a deep approach often modified this to use a surface approach in the exam, adjusting their normal approach to meet the perceived requirements of the exam better. Tang recommended that teachers make their requirements explicit and as clear as possible to help students accurately perceive what is required (Tang, 1994, p. 166).

Not all research has unequivocally supported students' discrimination between the demands of different types of assessment, as the work of Hakstian, Thomas and Bain indicate.

Hakstian (1971) compared groups of twelve education students who anticipated being tested in an examination situation by an objective test, an essay, or a combination of essay and objective test. Although finding that students expecting an objective test focused more on facts than those expecting an essay, Hakstian does not place confidence in what he regards as a single finding of difference amidst more general finding of similarities between groups. He concluded that "the evidence ... suggests that students do not prepare differently — in terms of time spent, organization of material, and techniques employed — whether they are expecting an objective, essay, or combined objective and essay examination" (p. 324).

Thomas and Bain (1982) found high levels of consistency in how students studied for essays and objective tests — students tended to use either deep or surface strategies, irrespective of the assessment type. In a subsequent study involving multiple-choice exams, a short-answer exam, and a written assignment, they did detect variation in learning activities across these different kinds of assessment contexts such that transformational approaches increased and reproductive approaches decreased with a move from multiple-choice exams to open-ended assignments (Thomas & Bain, 1984). Thomas concluded that, although students vary their approaches "depending on their perceptions of the assessment demands", the level of their position relative to their peers

tends to be unaltered, leading him to conclude that students “have genuine learning preferences that constrain their ability to shift activities in response to perceived requirements” (Thomas, 1986, p. 268).

The research comparing students’ responses to different forms of assessment and described in this section, combined with the work of Marton and Säljö reported in the previous section, suggests that students perceive that different forms of assessment make different demands on them and they adjust their ways of studying accordingly. Within this broad differentiation, however, two qualifications can be made. Firstly, as Thomas and Bain have noted, students may exhibit a degree of consistency, as well as variation, across assessment tasks. Secondly, as Tang’s research indicates, students who have a general tendency to adopt surface approaches to learning are likely to adopt surface approaches to all types of assessment, while students who have a general tendency to adopt deep approaches to learning are more likely to discriminate between the demands of different types of assessment, adopting deep or surface approaches according to their perception of task demands.

Having drawn the above conclusions, this section concludes with an important methodological qualification. While the studies described in this section purport to measure student responses to differences in assessment formats, the contexts being compared rarely vary only on the dimension of format. For example, in Tang’s study, while the test questions and assignment topics were similar in content and form, the assignment covered a single topic while the test covered four. Most of the studies

reported do not provide details of the breadth and depth of what was assessed. It seems possible that variations in forms of assessment are often aligned with variations in the depth and breadth, and possibly the type, of content that is being assessed. What appear to be differential responses to assessment type may be equally construed as differential responses to variations in content.

Notwithstanding the above qualification, the studies cited in this section support the proposition that students are likely to respond differently to different kinds of assessment and that some formats of assessment will be associated with more useful approaches to learning than others. Given this, a study of oral assessment that includes a comparative element is likely to yield insight into the value of oral assessment compared to other assessment formats.

The Experience of Essay Writing

Within the framework of the 3-P model, the previous section dealt with changes to the assessment component of the context of learning. This section focuses on studies of variation in students' perceptions of a single assessment context. While there is a wide variety of forms of assessment in common usage, it is students' perceptions of essays that has received the most detailed attention from educational researchers. These studies are also those that bear the greatest similarity to the study of students' experiences of oral assessment reported in this thesis and so will be dealt with at some length here. Within these studies, several writers have noted that students can have quite different perceptions of the requirements of essays. This section will (i) note the discrepancies in

conceptions of essay writing between teachers and students observed by Norton; (ii) summarise three studies in which particular dichotomies of student conceptions of essay-writing were identified, and (iii) describe in some detail the substantial studies of conceptions of essay writing reported by Biggs and Hounsell.

In a questionnaire study of 98 first year psychology students, Norton identified discrepancies between how students and tutors saw the purpose of an essay. While tutors described the purpose of the essay as being to present an argument, most students in the study focused on content and structure, with only a few being concerned with presenting an argument. Norton concludes about most students that “their thoughts on the actual purpose of the essay are ‘off target’” (Norton, 1990, p. 419). Norton’s proposed solution to this mismatch of purposes is that “students must be somehow persuaded to take a more relativist view” (Norton, 1990, p. 432) and she suggests four ways of achieving this — by explicit statements of criteria, by improved feedback, by using a marking scheme that focuses on the criteria, and by giving spoken feedback on a one-to-one basis. The problem is seen as one of communication — students are out of touch with tutors’ expectations, and the solution is to communicate more clearly.

Campbell, Smith and Brooker analysed the essays of 46 education students using the SOLO taxonomy and interviewed the students regarding how they conceptualised their essay writing and how they went about the writing. They concluded that “the important component in student essay writing is not the adoption of particular strategies (making notes, formulating a plan, revising successive drafts etc.), but students’

underlying conceptualisation of both the nature and purpose of these strategies” (Campbell, Smith & Brooker, 1998, p. 466). Students who wrote more complex essays “built ‘arguments’ rather than presented ‘information’” (Campbell, Smith & Brooker, 1998, p. 449). They concluded that “from a pedagogical perspective, a key issue is how to change students’ conceptualisation of the essay writing process” (Campbell, Smith & Brooker, 1998, p. 467), though they proffered no suggestions as to how this might be done.

The dichotomy between argument and information arises again in a study by Prosser and Webb (1994) regarding the processes and outcomes of 19 students writing essays in a Sociology 1 course. The conceptual framework of the study is closely aligned with the 3-P model, with the authors noting that “the essay that the student produces to satisfy these cultural and situational demands is the manifestation of the student’s understanding of what is required” (Prosser & Webb, 1994, p. 126). The students were interviewed to identify the variations in their conceptions of the essay and how they went about writing it. Two conceptions of essay writing were identified. The first “conceived of the essay as being composed of a collection of points, each related to the topic, but not contributing to a whole view of the topic” (Prosser & Webb, 1994, p. 128). The second “conceived of the essay as being an argument. Issues were included because they were a coherent part of the case being argued in the essay” (Prosser & Webb, 1994, p. 127). The different conceptions were associated with different writing processes. For the former conception, students listed key points as they read, and their writing consisted of a set of written points. For the latter conception, students’ reading involved

relating authors' meanings to the essay question and their own viewpoint, while their writing focused on developing a coherent argument in support of their viewpoint. A clear relationship between conception and outcome was also noted, with the latter conception associated with a well-structured, relational essay.

Approaches to essay writing: Biggs

John Biggs, in a significant contribution to research into essay writing from a student perspective, has developed a model of essay writing based on the literature of essay writing concerned with students' approaches to learning (Biggs, 1988). Three core aspects of Biggs's model will be noted here — the student's underlying intention, the discourse structure and associated genre, and the writing approach.

For Biggs, the intentional aspect of essay writing involves either (a) a high level of personal involvement with an expectation that the task will be personally meaningful and enjoyable, often aligned with an expectation of a high grade, or (b) a necessary hurdle that is faced with some apprehension and frequently a desire to simply pass. Biggs notes that these affective components parallel the affective components of deep and surface approaches to learning.

Biggs discusses discourse structure in terms of his SOLO taxonomy, with its categories of prestructural, unistructural, multistructural, relational and extended abstract. Each of these levels of structure is associated with an essay genre and writing approach, summarised by Biggs in the following Table Two.

Table 2. Discourse structure, genre of essay, and approaches to learning (from Biggs, 1988, p. 198)

Discourse structure	Essay genre	Writing approach
1. Prestructural: structure inadequate; question addressed at too low a level of abstraction.	Unformed.	Surface-subjective: associative, word-based.
2. Unistructural: one major relevant line of argument.	Partial listing.	Surface-restrictive: partial knowledge-telling; focus on words and sentences.
3. Multistructural: several major relevant arguments developed but independently with little interrelation.	Listing.	Surface-elaborative: knowledge-telling, focus on words-sentences; incorrect perception of whole.
4. Relational: evidence and/or argument integrated to make a case that satisfies the question within the context set.	As appropriate to question, e.g., causal explanation, compare-contrast, evaluate, etc.	Deep-integrative: focus on the whole, so that discourse structure is integrated with the question.
5. Extended-abstract: more than answers the question; raises issues and possibilities beyond the set context; e.g., “questions the questions,” hypothesises at higher level of abstraction.	As above, but may use a different and better genre than that intended in the question.	Deep reflective: focus on discourse, and on implications beyond the question, so that higher-order knowledge results.

The discourse structure can be categorised as follows:

- *Prestructural.* The question is not properly addressed so the discourse structure is inadequate, the genre is insufficiently developed and the writing approach focuses on words and sentences that are inappropriately subjective.

- *Unistructural*. The question is addressed by one line of argument, so the genre is described as a ‘partial listing’, while the writing approach involves ‘partial knowledge-telling’.
- *Multistructural*. There is a more complete listing, but with inadequate noting of relationships. The writing approach includes more detail.
- *Relational*. At this level, an argument is finally made and writing integrates arguments and points, leading to a conclusion.
- *Extended abstract*. The response at this level is beyond what is required, and may be at a higher level of abstraction than the question itself, being achieved through a ‘deep-reflective’ approach.

In the SOLO taxonomy, an important change occurs between the ‘multistructural’ and ‘relational’ levels. The multistructural level represents a complex reproduction — still an essentially surface approach to learning. The relational level, on the other hand, is aligned with a deep approach to learning, and in the case of essay-writing, introduces the element of argument. The discourse structure of Biggs’s model clearly parallels the argument/information dichotomy identified in previously mentioned studies.

The five approaches to writing summarised by Biggs are determined at the planning stage. Biggs extends to the task of writing the deep and surface approaches identified in the reading of texts, noting three variations on a surface approach, and two on a deep approach:

1. Surface-subjective approach. The student's intention is simply to answer the question. Planning is minimal and the result is an essay consisting of unsupported opinions, poorly structured.
2. Surface-restrictive approach. The student's intention is to answer the question with as little involvement and work as possible. The structure is based on retelling details and the result is a limited, unistructural outcome.
3. Surface-elaborative approach. Here the student seeks to provide a full account and to do a reasonable job. The student has some interest in the essay, but still sees it as a hurdle. The essay will have a structure based on what the student believes the marker will want, or on a simple chronological order. According to Biggs, "this approach makes most use of knowledge-telling as such: saying as much as one conveniently and plausible can, in the belief that in so doing one is making a case" (Biggs, 1988, 210).
4. Deep-integrative approach. Here the student's prime intention is to learn, and the student has appropriately identified the genre that is required. The student focuses on the case they are making, and reviews their work in the context of its meaning as well as its form, leading to a well thought out outcome that satisfies the question.
5. Deep-reflective approach. This approach is similar to the deep-integrative approach but with a stronger emphasis on originality, leading to higher-level and more generalized outcomes than those sought in the original question.

Biggs interestingly proposes four 'monitoring criteria' within which he suggests writers work:

- *Audience.* Does the writer have a sense of an audience that is more or less knowledgeable than him- or herself, or who may react in certain ways to the writing? Biggs notes that an essay should be written in “‘grapholect’, a dialect used in formal text that is written to address a wide or educated audience” (Biggs, 1988, p. 201) and which removes the need to envision a particular audience. Biggs cites two students who adopted a deep approach to writing and who did not focus on the needs of their readers, while a student who adopted a surface approach to writing had a strong sense of needing to please her lecturer.
- *Originality.* Biggs notes the sense of ownership (“proprietaryity”) or what Entwistle and Ramsden term “integrating the task with oneself” that is characteristic of a deep approach, while others make no attempt to be original.
- *Aesthetics and style.* Students taking a deep approach expressed a concern with style, while other students did not.
- *Compatibility with intentions* is concerned with students monitoring how well their writing is meeting their intentions.

Contrasting conceptions of essay-writing: Hounsell

Hounsell’s study of essay writing in history (17 students) and psychology (16 students) closely parallels the present study which, like Hounsell’s, is concerned with students’ conceptions of a specific form of assessment identified through qualitative analysis of interview data using a phenomenographic approach. Hounsell has reported on his study in a series of articles and book chapters (Hounsell, 1987, 1988, 1997a) in which he identifies conceptions of essay-writing held by the students in his study,

proposes an ‘anatomy’ of these conceptions, and relates the conceptions to other aspects of learning and teaching.

Hounsell identified two kinds of conceptions of essay-writing — ‘interpretive’ conceptions, characterised by a search for meaning, and ‘non-interpretive’ conceptions, in which the student focuses on the arrangement of ideas. He summarises these as “an interpretive group, geared towards making meaning in a form that is ordered and offers substantiation and thus reflects accepted norms for academic discourse; and a non-interpretive group, in which the constructive orientation is lacking and in which interpretation, organisation and data are treated discretely, disjunctively and uncertainly” (Hounsell, 1988, p. 169).

Interpretation, organisation and data are the sub-components of the interpretive conceptions. The interpretation sub-component is seen as pivotal, being concerned with the sense the student has made of the topic. The organisational sub-component is concerned with coherence and ensuring that the essay is an integrated whole, while the data sub-component is concerned with ensuring that the interpretive stance is well supported.

For the ‘non-interpretive’ conceptions, Hounsell describes the ‘interpretation’ sub-component in terms of the absence of a concern with meaning. Regarding interpretation, students’ opinions or views are incidental. Organisational elements such as introductions and conclusions are included because they are required in an essay rather than because

of their contribution to the essay as a whole. Data are considered quantitatively and students seek to provide an exhaustive coverage of their sources rather than applying sources to their interpretive position.

While the broad categories of interpretive and non-interpretive apply to essay-writing in both history and psychology, the specific conceptions in each discipline vary, and are thus worth noting.

In history, the conceptions identified were of the essay as ‘argument’, ‘viewpoint’, or ‘arrangement’. The essay as *argument* involves “an ordered presentation of an argument well-supported by evidence” (Hounsell, 1997, p. 111). The argument “pivots upon a distinctive position or point of view” (Hounsell, 1997, p. 112) or interpretation. The structure of the essay and the data that are presented are provided in order to support this point of view. The essay as *viewpoint* is defined as “the ordered presentation of a distinctive viewpoint on a problem or issue” (Hounsell, 1997, p. 113) and appears to be similar to the essay as argument, but differs in that there are fewer references to data, and data are not necessarily seen as supporting the viewpoint. Finally, the essay as *arrangement* is defined as “an ordered presentation embracing facts and ideas” (Hounsell, 1997, p. 113). The interpretive component is more-or-less absent, the organisational structure is loose, and data are valued quantitatively and for their own sake rather than as being in support of an argument or viewpoint.

In the psychology students' conceptions of essay-writing, the conception of essay-writing as 'cogency' sees an essay as "a well-integrated and firmly grounded discussion of a topic or problem" in which relevant ideas and the student's own thoughts are well integrated, the essay is organised as an integrated whole, and data are used to provide "a firm empirical foundation" (Hounsell, 1988, p. 171). Essay-writing as 'relevance' defines the essay "as an ordered discussion of relevant material on a topic or problem". Essays entail "any ideas, thoughts and opinions" the student has, the essay is organised by linking parts to each other rather than developing an integrated whole, and all data are assumed to be relevant (Hounsell, 1988, p. 171).

In a study subsequent to those of Biggs and Hounsell, Entwistle (1995) reported that the range of students' intentions, how they structured their essays, their writing processes, and the quality of their outcomes were similar to those described by Biggs and Hounsell.

McCune (in press) interviewed fifty-seven first-year psychology students to identify students' conceptions of essay writing and how these conceptions developed over their first year. Conceptions of essay writing were seen to differ in relation to three components — the role of evidence, structure, and conclusions. Hierarchical categories were identified in relation to each component. Higher level categories included using evidence to support arguments, developing one's own structure, and drawing conclusions from evidence. Lower level categories included having vague ideas about evidence and structure and being unsure about conclusions.

The studies of essay writing considered in this section strongly indicate that students' conceptions of essay writing, or how they see the underlying purpose of the essay, is a critical factor in determining how they go about writing essays and the quality of the consequent outcome. These studies also identify a number of conceptions of essay writing, with a clear distinction between the conception of the essay as an arrangement of discrete points and the conception of the essay as an argument. While students may have different conceptions of essay writing, of particular concern is the potential for discrepancies between students' and teachers' conceptions. Hounsell, Biggs and McCune each suggest slightly different ways in which the structure of conceptions might be understood, though all three are concerned with students' underlying intentions and how they use and structure data or information. Biggs's 'monitoring criteria' introduce aspects of students' awareness that inform their approaches to essay writing. The themes of variation, structure, and awareness that underpin the studies reported in this section may usefully inform studies of any aspect of students' experiences of learning, including, of course, their experiences of oral assessment.

Students' Experience of Oral Assessment

The study of oral assessment from the student's perspective is a recent occurrence.

Joughin (1999) conducted a small study of four law and four theology students who had engaged in 'vivas' (law) and peer group presentations (theology). This study was a precursor to, rather than a pilot study for, the study presented in this thesis.

The law students were in their first year of study and the viva was conducted in the subject of contract law. Students could choose to prepare a number of topics for the viva (though only one of these would be examined) or submit a written assignment on a single topic to a panel of two experienced contract law teachers. Each student was asked the same set of questions to test their theoretical understanding. They were subsequently interviewed individually, within a week of the viva, with questions focusing on how they experienced the viva, how they prepared for it, and how they compared their experience of the viva with that of a written assignment or written examination. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the phenomenographic methods described in Chapter Four.

The theology students were enrolled in the ‘Foundations’ theology program from which the interviewees for the principal study reported in this thesis were subsequently drawn. This program is outlined in Chapter Four.

Two dominant themes emerged from interviews with these students — the students’ intention to understand and their perception of the personal nature of the oral assessment format, including an interesting sense of relationship to the spoken word.

Each student in this study perceived a greater need to understand the material they were studying when preparing for oral compared to written assessment. Seven of the students related this to an expectation that their understanding would be probed through questioning, whether by their peers (in theology) or by knowledgeable lecturers (in law),

while the eighth student (law) referred to the need for knowledge to be better structured because the order in which the questions would proceed could not be predicted.

Some students described not only needing to understand better in oral assessment, but that they would submit material that they did *not* understand in written assignments.

Law students described a strong sense of being physically present with their examiners, with this direct contact making the oral assessment more personal, while theology students reported a stronger sense of ownership of the words they would speak compared to the words they would write.

Bone and Hinett (n.d.) extended Joughin's work, noting that students commonly use the ability to talk about a subject or explain it to someone else as a benchmark of understanding. They list the following as characteristic of students' experiences of oral assessment:

- students do not wish to make fools of themselves in front of those passing judgement, which prompts a responsibility towards work
- speech is transparent to waffle and padding
- in order to answer questions on a subject the student has to understand for him or herself (reducing the opportunity for plagiarism)
- speaking inevitably means that you are heard (eradicating any possibility of confused areas being overlooked by those making judgements)
- oral assessment involves body language conveying more about the level of comprehension than can be expressed in written form

- there is a personal involvement and ownership of the spoken word.

(Bone & Hinett, n.d., p. 7)

Bone and Hinett also note, in comparison to oral assessment, the disengagement from learning that can occur with written assessment, quoting one student's comments that "You only have to hand it in and you don't have to be there when it's actually marked. You're separated from your piece of work because you're not there" (Bone & Hinett, n.d., p. 7).

In an exploratory study, Hounsell and McCune (2000, 2001) conducted group interviews of thirty-nine undergraduate students in physical sciences, social sciences and humanities in relation to oral presentations. Hounsell and McCune note that "questions raised in the interviews were concerned with how the students had gone about preparing for and delivering their presentations, their experience of giving the presentation itself and handling the subsequent questions, comments or discussion; the written work to which the presentations were linked; any prior experience they had of oral presentations, within their undergraduate studies or elsewhere; guidance and support from tutors leading up to the presentation and subsequent feedback from tutors; and the students' perceptions of what made for an effective oral presentation" (Hounsell & McCune, 2001, p. 4). Two themes were identified in their analysis of the interview transcripts — the students' sense of audience, and 'learning-to-present'.

Hounsell and McCune's paper on 'learning to present' naturally deals with how students learnt to present rather than their experiences of presentation itself (Hounsell & McCune, 2001). However, they do report some aspects of the experience of presenting that are worth noting here. Firstly, many students in their study reported an at least initial anxiety when they were presenting. This often subsided during the presentation. Secondly, students recognised the need to answer questions as a significant part of their experience of the presentation:

Students in all three settings perceived the discussion component as at least as challenging as the talk component, if not more so. Whereas the content of the talk could be prepared in advance, it was difficult to anticipate what questions might be asked, which introduced a substantial element of uncertainty. And being ready to answer questions could call for even more careful preparation than did the talk component, since questions were a stiffer test of students' grasp of the subject-matter" (Hounsell & McCune, 2001, p. 12).

Hounsell and McCune's work on students' sense of audience considers "the extent to which (students') approaches to the oral presentation demonstrated and were influenced by an altered or heightened sense of audience" (Hounsell & McCune, 2000, p. 3). Hounsell and McCune discuss two sets of findings from this study. The first concerns students' dilemmas in determining the level at which to pitch their presentation, particularly given a mixed audience of students and staff. The second set of findings involves "the ways in which students had sought to devise and deliver their

presentations so as to take account of the communicative needs of their audience” (Hounsell & McCune, 2000, p. 7). Six stratagems are described, ranging from using multiple modes of presentation to seeking to actively engage the audience by, for example, trying to understand where the audience was starting from.

Hounsell and McCune’s study raises many important issues that are pertinent to the present study, including how students learn to present, the nature and role of pre-presentation guidance, the role of interaction, the development of students’ personal styles of presenting, and how (and indeed whether) students relate to their audience. Their study, based as it is on semi-structured group interviews, also raises significant methodological questions regarding the identification of variation in students’ experiences of oral assessment.

Whereas essay writing has been the subject of substantial studies, the work on oral assessment from a student perspective noted in this section, while suggesting some interesting themes for further investigation, must be regarded as exploratory.

Excursus: Orality and Literacy

If the defining characteristic of oral assessment is the fact that it is conducted orally or by word of mouth rather than through writing or any other process, it would seem important in this chapter to consider literature that might illuminate our understanding of oral modes of communicating. Two writers have made particularly significant contributions in this area — Plato in the *Phaedrus* commenced a discussion of orality

and literacy that continues to the present day, while Walter Ong has drawn attention to important distinctions between orality and literacy.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato addresses “the propriety and impropriety of writing, and the conditions which determine them” (Plato, 1973, p. 274). In asserting “the inferiority of the written to the spoken word” (p. 274), he argues that writing destroys memory and the need to use one’s internal resources, that the written word cannot respond to questions, and ultimately, that truth is found in the direct action of one mind on another which can occur only through spoken words. The following passage expresses this eloquently:

Socrates: Now can we distinguish another kind of communication which is the legitimate brother of written speech, and see how it comes into being and how much better and more effective it is?

Phaedrus: What kind do you mean and how does it come about?

Socrates: I mean the kind that is written on the soul of the hearer together with understanding; that knows how to defend itself, and can distinguish between those it should address and those in whose presence it should be silent.

Phaedrus: You mean the living and animate speech of a man with knowledge, of which written speech might fairly be called a kind of shadow?

Socrates: Exactly.

(Plato, 1973, p. 276)

While Plato's claim for the superiority of oral communication has not been the subject of educational or psychological study, it does raise issues concerning the power of speech and the relationship of a speaker to his or her audience that may be of interest in the present study.

Much, but not all, of Ong's study of orality has been based on pre-literate societies or societies that have experienced minimal impact from writing. He distinguishes the 'primary orality' of such societies with a 'secondary orality' in literate societies where orality exists in the context of writing, print, and now electronic forms of communication. Of possible relevance to the present study are what Ong (1982) terms 'the psychodynamics of orality'. Five points in particular are noted here:

- The spoken word is associated with power and action. Ong notes that the Hebrew word *dabar* means both 'word' and 'event', and that oral language is 'close to the human lifeworld' and concerned with action rather than abstraction.
- An interesting notion is that orality is 'agonistically toned'. 'Agonistic' is derived from a word used to describe Greek athletic contests, and is used by Ong in the sense of polemics or combativeness, conveying notions of controversy and aggression. Ong claims that "writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle" (Ong, 1982, pp. 43-44).

- Orality is described as ‘empathic and participatory rather than objectively distanced’ (Ong, 1982, p. 45). “For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known, ‘getting with it’. Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for ‘objectivity’ in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing” (Ong, 1982, pp. 45-46).
- Ong emphasises the personal nature of orality and relates this to the physical production of sound. “Because in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups. ... There is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to ‘audience’” (Ong, 1982, p. 74).
- Finally, Ong notes the presence of an audience in relation to the spoken word, while pointing out that the “writer’s audience is always a fiction” (Ong, 1977, p. 55). The reader is absent from the writing of a text, and may be anyone from anywhere, [and] the writer [is] absent from the reading of a text, whereas speaker and hearer are fully determined persons normally present to one another quite consciously in vocal exchange” (Ong, 1982, p. 269).

Summary

The 3-P model, and the research from which it has arisen, identifies the pivotal role played by students’ perceptions of assessment in learning and teaching. Within this framework, numerous studies support the proposition that students will respond differently to different forms of assessment, though some of these studies incorporate

particular methodological issues that make direct comparisons of assessment formats problematic. Other, detailed studies of the ways in which students experience written assignments provide frameworks that may be useful for detailed studies of any specific form of assessment, including the study of oral assessment reported here. A small number of recent pilot studies of oral assessment suggest a number of areas for further investigation, while writings on the nature of orality introduce some interesting distinctions between oral and written communication that may have relevance in the study of oral assessment. In short, the foregoing literature review reinforces the desirability of undertaking research into students' experiences of oral assessment and the comparative value of this form of assessment, while also providing a conceptual framework through which to do that. The methodology for exploring students' experiences of oral assessment that is presented in the next chapter is closely aligned with this conceptual framework.

4. METHODOLOGY

*If you want to know how people understand their world and their life,
why not talk to them?
(Kvale, 1996, p. 1)*

Introduction

This chapter describes the research method used in this study. It locates the study in a qualitative research paradigm, outlines the conceptual framework of phenomenographic methods and ‘the structure of awareness’ that informed key aspects of the study’s method, and describes the steps taken in collecting, analysing and presenting data. This chapter also describes the open learning theology program and its assessment regime which constituted the context of learning (including assessment) for the subjects of this study.

The Conceptual Framework Underpinning the Methodology

The qualitative approach

This study is located firmly within a qualitative research framework. The reason for this can be explained simply. Husén points to Dilthey’s distinction between *verstehen* (to explain) and *erklären* (to understand) as the basis of the two main conflicting paradigms of educational research. The paradigm that seeks (causal) explanations derives from the natural sciences and emphasises “empirical quantifiable observations”, while the paradigm that focuses on understanding “is derived from the humanities with an emphasis on holistic and qualitative information and interpretative approaches” (Husén, 1997, p. 17). It is not necessary to elaborate on this distinction, nor to argue the

case for a qualitative, interpretative approach in this study. In Chapter One and Chapter Three, it has been noted that there is a lack of information about how students experience oral assessment — our understanding of oral assessment from a student perspective is simply too limited to allow us to begin to ‘explain’ aspects of student learning in the context of oral assessment. As Kvale states in his work on qualitative interviews, “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world *prior to scientific explanations*” (Kvale, 1996, p. 1. Emphasis added). We need to understand what oral assessment means from students’ perspectives before we can progress to explanatory research.

Phenomenographic method

The phenomenographic approach was initially developed in Sweden in the late 1960s and found its early expression in a series of articles in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* in 1976 and 1977 (1976; Marton and Säljö 1976a; Marton and Säljö 1976b; Svensson, 1977; Fransson, 1977). Since then, phenomenography has come to occupy a central place in research into higher education in certain parts of the world, particularly the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, and Hong Kong (Sandberg, 1997).

While reports of phenomenographic studies tend to focus on the outcomes of those studies, a number of papers have been devoted to methodological issues.

Phenomenography’s best known proponent, Ference Marton, has specifically addressed methodological issues on a number of occasions (for example, Marton, 1981, 1986,

1997), while Marton and Booth's chapter on 'the idea of phenomenology' in their *Learning and Awareness* is the most recent and most thorough description of the approach (Marton & Booth 1997).

The approach has been subjected to focused, critical scrutiny on three occasions, in 'The Wharburton Symposium' (Bowden 1994a, 1994b; Walsh 1994; Prosser 1994; Trigwell 1994; Dall'Alba 1994; Marton 1994a, in a series of articles first published in *Nordisch Pedagogik* and subsequently published in a separate collection as *Reflections on Phenomenography: Toward a Methodology?* (Dall'Alba and Hasselgren, 1996), and in a special edition of *Higher Education Research and Development* (Booth, 1997; Hazel, Conrad and Martin, 1997; Hasselgren and Beach, 1997; Säljö, 1997b; Sandberg, 1997; Svensson, 1997; Trigwell and Prosser, 1997).

This section will outline three key concepts in phenomenography that are particularly pertinent to this study, describe the phenomenographic approach to data collection and data analysis, and note two important issues in phenomenographic research that are relevant to this study — the nature of the object of research and reliability.

Key concepts

Three concepts from phenomenography are particularly pertinent to this study and will be noted before the phenomenographic methods of data collection and analysis are discussed.

(i) Phenomenography as method vs phenomenography as approach

In an early article, Marton described phenomenography as “a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton 1986, p. 31). More recently, however, Marton and Booth have stated that:

phenomenography is not a method in itself, although there are methodological elements associated with it, nor is it a theory of experience, although there are theoretical elements to be derived from it. Also, phenomenology is not merely an opportune player that can assume the role needed for the moment.

Phenomenography is rather a way of - an approach to - identifying, formulating, and tackling certain sorts of research questions, a specialisation that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111).

Marton, perhaps in common with most educational researchers, sees methodological questions being determined by the nature of what is being researched. Consequently, phenomenography is associated with a particular non-dualistic ontological understanding which Marton describes as follows:

According to a non-dualistic ontological position, held by phenomenography, object and subject are not separate, the subject's experience of the object is a relation between the two. In this view, there is no "problem as such", for instance. A problem is always understood by someone, in some way; it does not have an independent existence. From a non-dualistic ontological perspective there are not two worlds; a real, objective world on the one hand and a subjective world of mental representations, on the other hand. There is only one world, a really existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is both objective and subjective at the same time. An experience is a relationship between object and subject, encompassing both. The experience is as much an aspect of the object as it is of the subject. After all, the expression "how the subject experiences the object" is synonymous with the expression "how the object appears to the subject". (Marton, 1992, p. 3)

On the other hand, Svensson argues that:

phenomenography is not a system of philosophical assumptions and theses, and it is not derived or deduced from such a system. It is an empirical research tradition. This means that metaphysical beliefs and ideas about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge do not come first. What comes first are more specific assumptions and ideas directly related to the specific character of empirical research. There is no direct and simple relation between general

ontological and epistemological assumptions and the character of an empirical research tradition. (Svensson, 1997, p. 164)

The conceptual framework of this study is consistent with a non-dualistic understanding in that oral assessment is not seen to have an ‘independent existence’ apart from those who experience it — it is always experienced and understood ‘by someone, in some way’ or, perhaps more accurately, by various individuals in a variety of ways. However, this study does not seek to deal with ontological matters associated with phenomenography beyond this simple acknowledgement, but certainly and explicitly applies the methods derived from phenomenography as an ‘empirical research tradition’.

(ii) The object of phenomenographic research

As Marton and Booth put it, “the unit of phenomenographic research is *a way of experiencing something* ... and the object of the research is the *variation* in ways of experiencing phenomena” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111. Emphasis added).

Alternatively, “‘phenomenography’ is the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualized, understood, perceived, and apprehended” (Marton 1997, p. 95).

The object of research in this study, how students experience oral assessment, clearly lends itself to a phenomenographic approach.

(iii) 'Categories of description' as the outcome of phenomenographic studies

The various ways of experiencing a phenomenon are expressed in 'categories of description'. Phenomenographic research results in a limited number of 'categories of description' in relation to a particular phenomenon, or aspect of a phenomenon. The categories of description are logically related to each other and can be seen as hierarchically ordered. The term 'outcome space' is applied to the ordered set of categories of description (Marton 1997, p. 95). In light of this study, it is important to note Marton and Booth's later, and what they consider "more precise", definition of 'outcome space' as "the complex of categories of description comprising distinct groupings of aspects of the phenomenon and the relationships between them" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 125), since the experience of oral assessment, like the experience of many phenomena, can best be seen, at least for analytical purposes, as the experience of various aspects of oral assessment rather than the experience of a unitary phenomenon.

Data collection

Since this study sought to describe how students experience oral assessment, an essential aspect of the research methodology was to identify a method for helping students make explicit their experience of oral assessment. The interview, which could encourage reflection on experience and could make the results of that reflection explicit, was considered to be the most appropriate method. As Marton notes elsewhere, "the more it is possible to make things which are unthematized and implicit into objects of reflection, and hence thematized and explicit, the more fully can awareness be explored" (Marton, 1997, p. 99).

Marton has observed that the phenomenographic interview "... should not have too many questions made up in advance, and nor should there be too many details determined in advance. Most questions follow from what the subject says. The point is to establish the phenomenon as experienced and to explore its different aspects jointly and as fully as possible" (Marton, 1997, p. 99). On the other hand, Marton and Booth begin their discussion of data collection by noting that from the outset the researcher 'delimits' the phenomenon under consideration as well as having an awareness of its structure and the capacity "to distinguish its salient features" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 129). One way of doing this, and the way adopted in this study, was to consider how the phenomenon of oral assessment has been treated in the literature. That part of the literature review reported in Chapter Two, by identifying salient dimensions of oral assessment as it is discussed in the literature, certainly serves this function, so that the process of data collection was conducted with an awareness of these dimensions. However, it must be said, (and it was noted at the end of Chapter Three), that the literature reviewed considered oral assessment from the perspective of teachers rather than students, so that the literature, while doubtless forming an important aspect of the researcher's awareness, also needed to be held cautiously as a different perspective on oral assessment was being considered in this study.

An important feature of the interview, in light of the 'structure of awareness' that will be discussed in the following section, is the need for the interviewee to become aware of oral assessment as a phenomenon or, in other words, to distinguish the 'oral

assessment' aspect of their situation from the situation as a whole. As we will see in Chapter Five, some interviewees showed a limited awareness of oral assessment as a significant aspect of their experience, and it was difficult to bring to their awareness any sense of 'differentness' or variation around oral assessment itself as a phenomenon. This could reflect a limited capacity for reflection on (or 'meta-awareness' of) the experience of oral assessment on the part of some interviewees, or it could reflect limitations on the part of the interviewer since, as Marton and Booth suggest, some difficulties akin to the therapeutic situation of resistance may require some skill to resolve. When Marton and Booth go on to discuss the handling of 'transference' in the interview situation (p. 130), one suspects that the phenomenographic interview process may sometimes require a degree of skill rarely found amongst educational researchers.

Although Marton recognises that the interview is a dialogue and that "the experiences and understandings are jointly constituted by interviewer and interviewee", he nevertheless construes these as "aspects of the *subject's* awareness" (Marton, 1997, p. 99. Emphasis added). There seems to be little explicit acknowledgement in the reports of phenomenological studies or discussions of phenomenographic methodology of the influence of the interview context itself on the process of the subject's reflection and the ways in which his or her awareness and the expression of this is framed by that interpersonal context (Kvale, 1996). This observation is not meant as a criticism of the phenomenographic method but is intended merely to note what is considered to be a significant aspect of any qualitative research interview.

The phenomenographic process of analysis

The phenomenographic method of analysis involves the following:

1. Interviews are transcribed, and the phenomenographic researcher works with these transcripts. While analysis can commence during the interviews themselves, the phenomenographic approach emphasises the interview transcripts as the basis of analysis (Marton & Booth, 1997; Bowden, 1994a; Bowden, 1994b; Walsh, 1994).
2. It is important to note that the transcript data that result from the transcription of the interviews pertain to both individuals and to the pool of individuals in the study. The transcripts initially are treated as a single pool since, at this stage, the researcher is seeking to identify the variety of ways in which the aspects of the phenomenon can be experienced rather than how an *individual* experiences the phenomenon. Moreover, it is possible that an individual may experience a phenomenon, or an aspect of it, in more than one way.
3. When it becomes apparent that different phenomena or topics have been dealt with in the interviews, or when it emerges that a single phenomenon can be seen to have a number of aspects, the data need to be organised accordingly. Each phenomenon or topic or aspect is then analysed separately across the pool of data. This involves “focussing on one aspect of the object and seeking its dimensions of variation while holding other aspects frozen” (Marton & Booth 1997, p.133).

4. Utterances that are deemed relevant to the phenomenon (or aspect of the phenomenon) under study are noted.

5. These utterances are then examined to identify different ways in which the aspect is experienced. This is based on seeking similarities and differences in ways of experiencing, as expressed in the transcripts. A single expression needs to be understood in the context of the particular interview in which it occurs as well as in the context of the variety of ways in which the aspect is being described across the interviews. The outcome of this step is the identification of a number of 'categories of description', supported by a set of quotations that illustrate each of these categories. Marton has asserted that a limited number of categories will be identified in relation to any given phenomenon (Marton, 1994b, p. 4424), and in practice reports of phenomenographic studies invariably refer to small numbers of categories.

During this stage of analysis, the researcher is likely to experience shifts in how they perceive the data they are dealing with. As Marton and Booth express this:

When we work with the transcripts ... we experience that there is a sort of play in them. As we read them again and again they keep changing in appearance. The reason is, of course (in line with our own arguments about the nature of awareness), that we cannot simultaneously be aware of everything with the same degree of acuity all the time. The foreground changes repeatedly, and with each shift other things that are present shift to

become functions of the current items of figural awareness. The data shimmers in the intense light of our analysis (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 134).

6. Once categories of description have been determined, attention focuses on the relationships between the categories. The researcher needs to establish the critical aspects of each category and define the distinguishing differences between the categories. In addition to this, Marton asserts that the categories can be hierarchically ordered:

There are logical relations to be found between the categories of description and, as they represent different capabilities for seeing the phenomenon in question in relation to a given criterion, a hierarchy can be established. This ordered complex of categories of description has been referred to ... as the "outcome space". (Marton, 1994b, p. 4428)

For the purpose of this study, an important extension to the process of identifying categories of description can occur when categories have been identified in relation to several different aspects of a phenomenon. Marton and Booth describe this process thus:

One particular aspect of the phenomenon can be selected and inspected across all of the subjects, and then another aspect, that to be followed, maybe, by the study of whole interviews to see where these two aspects lie

in the pool relative to the other aspects and the background. In a study that involves a number of problems for solution, for instance, the analysis might start by considering just one of the problems as tackled and discussed by all the subjects, and then a selection of whole transcripts that include particularly interesting ways of handling the problem. This process repeated will lead to vaguely spied structure through and across the data that our researcher/learner can develop, sharpen, and return to again and again from first one perspective and then another until there is clarity. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 132)

In practice, the process of holding several aspects of a phenomenon in mind could be rather difficult. For the study reported here, this process would have involved holding six sets of categories of description in mind across fifteen transcripts - a process considered so complex that an alternative approach was taken.

Applying categories of description to individuals

Once categories of description have been determined, the phenomenographic aspect of the research process comes to an end and the research continues subject to other accepted research methods (Bowden 1994b, p.13). As Marton and Booth express this:

Phenomenography aims to reveal the qualitatively different ways of experiencing various phenomena. There are two potential questions to figure out: first, which these ways are, and second, whether or not they appear in a certain case at a certain point in time. The question of phenomenography is the

first one. It is about identifying the very ways in which something may be experienced. This is the researcher's way of experiencing how other people's ways of experiencing something vary. It is experience or rather the nature of experience as seen from a particular perspective. We capture it in a category of description; it is a characterization discerned from that which is characterized. The validity claim is made in relation to the data available. Thus we argue the category of description is a reasonable characterization of a possible way of experiencing something given the data at hand. Whether or not a certain person is really capable of experiencing the phenomenon in question in this particular way, or under what conditions she is capable of doing so, is a question that falls outside phenomenography proper. (Although it is highly reasonable to deal with such questions in conjunction with a phenomenographic study.) (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 136)

In practice, most, if not all, studies that have used a phenomenographic approach have taken this step 'outside phenomenography proper' and asked whether the individuals in the study have experienced the phenomenon under consideration in the ways identified in the categories of description. Individuals often can be identified with a particular way of experiencing a phenomenon, though this may not always be straightforward, since, as the phenomenographic approach itself suggests, an individual may well experience a phenomenon in more than one way. Where this is the case, it may be possible to establish that, in the particular context under investigation, the individual has emphasised one way of experiencing the phenomenon over another. On the other

hand, it may also be the case that some individuals are not easily categorised, and the research needs to take this difficulty into account.

Two issues in phenomenographic method

Two issues that have been the subject of some discussion in relation to phenomenographic studies are (i) whether ‘categories of description’ constitute ways of experiencing or ways of talking about experience (Säljö, 1996, 1997b; Marton 1997; Entwistle, 1997b) and (ii) the ‘reliability’ of phenomenographic research.

(i) ‘Categories of description’ vs ‘ways of experiencing’

Säljö argues that phenomenographers make a mistake in claiming that phenomenographic studies allow us to describe ways of experiencing, since all we have access to is what people *communicate*, and that we should “be extremely cautious of considering this as indicating a way of experiencing rather than as, for instance, a way of talking” (Säljö, 1997b, p.178). This has implications for the development of ‘categories of description’, since

... the basic observation of phenomenography “that whatever phenomenon we encounter we experience it in a limited number of qualitatively different ways” ... can just as easily be accounted for by the fact that there is a limited number of ways of talking about a phenomenon that is perceived as relevant in a particular situation. (Säljö, 1997b, p.178)

In response to this, Marton argues, in accordance with a non-dualistic understanding, that it is not possible to separate what is described (ways of experiencing) from how it is described (categories of description) since there can be no description without something being described, and he questions why we should want to do so (see Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 127).

It is accepted that in this study we are dealing with students' descriptions of their experience, and that their capacity to describe these may have a direct impact on the categories of description that are identified.

(ii) Reliability

Marton notes two questions regarding reliability. The first is, "Would another researcher working independently arrive at the same set of categories if he or she were studying the same data?" The second concerns "whether a conception or category can be found or recognized by others once it has been described to them by the original researcher" (Marton, 1986, p. 35). Marton argues that replicability in the second sense is reasonable, but not in the first. The reason given for this is that "finding the categories of description is a form of discovery, and discoveries do not have to be replicable. On the other hand, once the categories have been found, it must be possible to reach a high degree of intersubjective agreement concerning their presence or absence if other researchers are to be able to use them" (Marton, 1978, p. 35). We might take issue with the notion of 'finding' categories, since the researcher is, in effect, re-interpreting the interpretations of the interviewees. Before this happens, the categories can hardly be

said to exist, waiting to be found, though of course it would be equally misleading to see the categories as purely the creation of the researcher. As Sandberg notes:

the categories of description are always the researcher's interpretation of the data obtained from the individuals about their conceptions of reality. In other words, the categories of description are intentionally constituted through the researcher's interpretation. Hence, as phenomenographic results express knowledge as intentionally constituted, it is a fundamental mistake to judge the reliability of phenomenographic results by interjudge reliability as a criterion. (Sandberg, 1997, p. 208)

Sandberg approvingly cites Säljö's support for Marton's argument about discovery, noting that "it follows from a constructivist conception of reality that the possibility of interpreting reality differently applies to the activity of describing conceptions of reality itself" (Sandberg, 1997, p. 205).

Sandberg suggests that one response to concerns about reliability lies in the notion of reliability as 'interpretive awareness', simply meaning that the researcher acknowledges and deals with subjectivity throughout the research process, in a way that is similar to Kvale's notion of 'perspectival subjectivity' (Sandberg, 1997, p. 209). Kvale writes that "*perspectival subjectivity* appears when researchers who adopt different perspectives and pose different questions to the same text come up with different interpretations of the meaning" (Kvale, 1996, p. 212). This is seen in fact as a

strength of interview research. Kvale argues that it is important that the researcher be explicit about ‘the questions asked of a text’, noting that a text can be interpreted according to the self-understanding of the subject, according to a ‘critical commonsense understanding’ which is a wider frame of reference than the subject, or according to a ‘theoretical understanding’ when a particular theoretical perspective is applied to the text. For both Sandberg and Kvale, the issue of reliability is at least partly addressed by the researcher being explicit about his or her perspective, and describing the process by which the text is interpreted.

It is accepted that in the study reported here, the categories of description are ‘intentionally constituted through the researcher’s interpretation’ (Sandberg, 1997, p. 208). It is certainly not assumed that another researcher, dealing with the same data, would reach the same conclusions by ‘identifying’ an identical, or even similar, set of categories of description. However, in this study both the researcher’s perspective and the process of data analysis that lead to the categories of description should be made as explicit as possible.

‘The Anatomy of Awareness’

Because this study is based on how students experience a particular kind of assessment, the study is dependent on the capacity to talk about that kind of assessment on the one hand, and how students experience it on the other. This section focuses on the latter capacity - how to understand and discuss how students experience the phenomenon of oral assessment. How might we make sense of the ways in which the

various aspects of oral assessment are experienced, and how might we begin to discuss the various ways in which each of these aspects might be experienced? This section therefore continues, and extends, the discussion on data analysis begun on page 79 by focusing on the ‘anatomy of awareness’ as an essential framework within the phenomenographic approach to data analysis.

The starting point for this understanding, and the language for the discussion of students’ experience, is consequently the work of Marton and his associates already referred to extensively in this chapter. What constitutes ‘the anatomy of awareness’ has been part of Marton’s work over almost three decades, and has been addressed in numerous papers (for example, Marton, 1981; Marton, 1997; Marton, Beaty, & Dall’Alba 1993; Marton & Pang, 1999) ‘The anatomy of awareness’ constitutes a major theme of Marton and Booth’s *Learning and Awareness* (Marton & Booth, 1997) where it is presented most thoroughly.

‘The anatomy of awareness’ draws attention to four sets of distinctions that together provide a set of tools for analysing and discussing students’ experiences:

- the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of learning,
- the ‘referential’ and ‘structural’ aspects of learning,
- the external and internal horizon, and
- the distinctions between theme, thematic field and margin.

Marton and Booth begin their discussion of the anatomy of awareness by noting that how one undertakes a particular learning task to some extent reflects one's understanding of both the phenomenon that is the object of the learning and the learning situation. The approach to learning, the content of learning, and the perception of the learning context, are intertwined, or even different aspects of the one phenomenon. These relationships are foreshadowed by Marton and Booth's statement:

... that certain structures of awareness are implied by certain ways of understanding; that the learner is simultaneously aware of certain aspects of a situation or a phenomenon; that her awareness of certain aspects become figural, in focus or focal, whereas other aspects recede to ground, and so on. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 82)

For the study reported here, this suggested that how students go about preparing for oral assessment may reflect their existing understanding of the content of their study and their understanding of oral assessment and what is required of them in it. Moreover, it suggested that certain ways of understanding content may be aligned with certain structures of awareness, including what aspects of awareness students focus on.

The 'what' and the 'how' of learning

The first distinction to note is that between the *act* of learning and the *content* of learning. Marton and Booth cite Entwistle's preface to the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*'s 1976 symposium on learning processes entitled 'The verb "to

learn” takes the accusative’ (Entwistle, 1976). The point being made by Entwistle and endorsed by Marton and Booth is that learning is not an abstract process — it always entails learning of something. It has both a ‘what’ and a ‘how’, as expressed in Figure Four.



Figure 4. The ‘how’ and the ‘what’ aspects of learning (From Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 84)

Marton and Booth term the ‘what’ of learning the ‘direct object’ of learning. If learning has a direct object, it also has an indirect object. The notion of an indirect object of learning arises from the idea that the process of learning (the ‘how’) itself has an object. In Marton and Booth’s formulation:

The principal object is the direct object: the content of what is being learned.

But in addition to that there is a sort of indirect object that refers to the quality of the act of learning, and which, in its simplest form, refers to what the act of learning aims at. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 84)

‘What the act of learning aims at’ might be, for example, understanding what is being studied, or committing something to memory. Accordingly, the ‘how’ of learning

can be seen in terms of the ‘act’ or process of learning, and the underlying intention of learning, illustrated below in Figure Five.

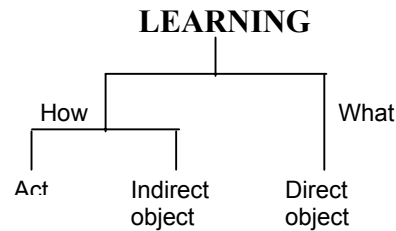


Figure 5. The ‘how’ and the ‘what’ aspects elaborated (From Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 85)

The depiction of the ‘how’ of learning as entailing the act and the indirect object of learning is well established in the ‘student approaches to learning’ tradition, being embedded in the very essence of an ‘approach to learning’. Five writers illustrate this structure of an approach to learning. Early in the development of this tradition, Entwistle, Hanley and Hounsell (1979) identified an ‘approach to learning’ as entailing an intention (that is, an indirect object) and a process (that is, an act). Thus (according to a more recent formulation of Entwistle) a deep approach to learning involves the intention (or indirect object) of understanding ideas for yourself, realised by processes (that is, acts of learning) that include ‘relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience’ and ‘checking evidence and relating it to conclusions’ (Entwistle, 1997a, p.19). Ramsden similarly describes a deep approach in terms of an intention to understand and a set of processes (that include, for example, ‘relate knowledge from different courses’) that constitute the act of learning (Ramsden, 1992, p. 46). Biggs (1987, pp. 8-13; 1991) depicts an approach to learning as comprising a motive (that is, an intention) and a

strategy (that is, an act). It is clear that, within the student approaches to learning tradition, how students go about learning is seen to be determined by their underlying intention, which in turn determines the kinds and quality of the 'act' of learning.

The priority of intention is well stated by Marton when he summarises the results of the seminal studies in approaches to learning by noting that “(w)hat we found was that the students who did not get ‘the point’ failed to do so simply because they were not looking for it” (Marton 1997, p. 43).

Marton and Booth are insistent that while it is possible to distinguish between the direct object, the indirect object, and the act of learning, “these distinctions are analytical, they are introduced to distinguish between different research points of view and have no actual existence as separate entities. They are different facets of an undivided whole” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 85). In saying this, however, these facets are seen to be quite accessible in the research process:

When learning, the learner is, or is at least supposed or presumed to be, focusing on the content of learning, the direct object of learning ... If a researcher carries out an interview study, on the other hand, the learner can be brought to reflect on her *way* of learning, and she will most likely talk about what kinds of outcome she is aiming at, thus the how aspect of learning, specifically the *indirect* object of learning. She will also, to an extent that depends on the researcher's interest, comment on what she does to learn, again

the how aspect of learning, now specifically the *act* of learning. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 86)

Interestingly, and consistent with the priority of intention, Marton and Booth attribute differences in ways of learning identified in a range of studies more to differences concerning the indirect object of learning than the act of learning, even though, as noted above, these two aspect of the ‘how’ of learning are inextricably intertwined (see Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 86).

The significance of the indirect object of learning is important in the study reported here since differences concerning the indirect object of learning were clearly identified, while differences in the act of learning were less apparent.

In summary, then, Marton and Booth identify three aspects of the experience of learning: a direct object of learning (the ‘what’ of learning’); an indirect object of learning; and an act of learning (the latter being two aspects of the ‘how’ of learning). They then proceed to consider the question, “What does it mean to experience something in a certain way?” and apply their conclusions to these three aspects of learning.

Structural and referential aspects of learning and the internal and external horizon

To answer this question, they introduce two sets of ideas — the structural and referential ways of experiencing something, and the internal and external horizons of a phenomenon.

To explain these, they use the analogy of seeing a motionless deer in the woods. To see it as a deer requires firstly that it is distinguished from that which surrounds it, secondly, its parts and how they are related to each other and the whole need to be discerned, and thirdly, what is discerned has to be associated with a deer. As Marton and Booth explain this:

The structural aspect of a way of experiencing something is thus twofold: discernment of the whole from the context on the one hand and discernment of the parts and their relationships within the whole on the other. Moreover, intimately intertwined with the structural aspect of the experience is the referential aspect, the meaning. In seeing the parts and the whole of the deer and the relationships between them we even see the stance - relaxed and unaware of our presence or alert to some sound unheard by us - and thus we discern further degrees of meaning. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 87)

At this point Marton and Booth borrow from the language of phenomenology to apply the term ‘external horizon’ to that which surrounds the deer, and ‘internal horizon’ to the deer itself, including its internal structure.

This terminology and way of conceptualising the structure of experience is summarised in their depiction of ‘the unit of a science of experience, a way of experiencing something’ in Figure Six.

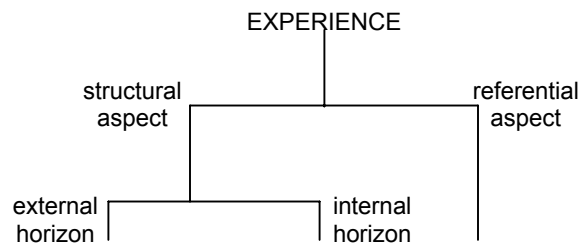


Figure 6. The structure of experience (From Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 88)

Now when the external and internal horizons of the structural and referential aspects of experience are applied to the how and the what of learning, a comprehensive framework for describing the experience of learning emerges that is summarised in Figure Seven.

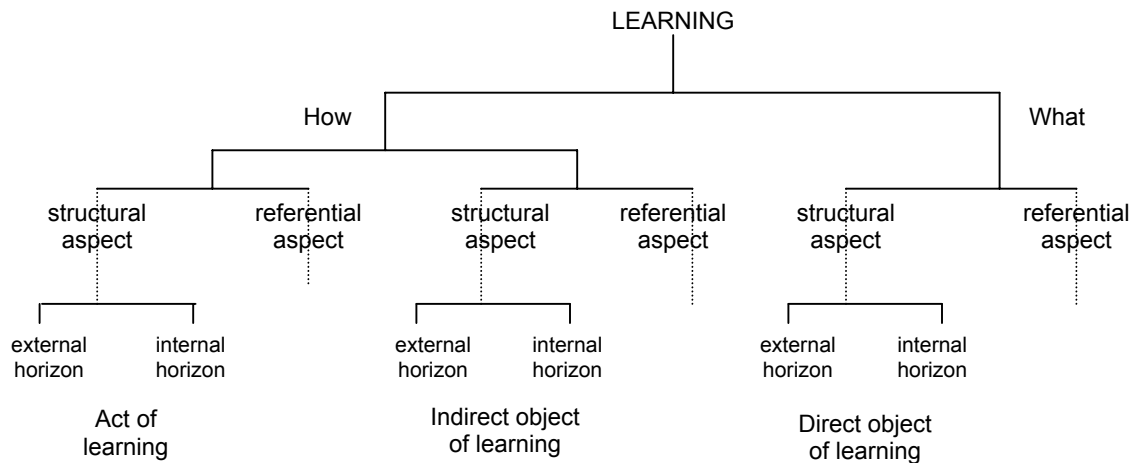


Figure 7. The experience of learning (From Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 91)

This structure constitutes a comprehensive framework for describing and analysing how a phenomenon is experienced by an individual. It can also be used to guide the interview process¹. However, it may not always be the case that an interview study will be able to describe the experience of all of its subjects in terms of all of the elements of the framework. The interview process may not always succeed in bringing the subject to an explicit awareness of all of the elements, and not all of the elements may be relevant to a particular study. Marton and Booth add another important reason for not always applying the framework rigorously:

All of the different aspects of the experience of learning illustrated in (Figure Seven) are present in every experience of learning. But they are surely not always - probably never - present in all *accounts* of the experience of learning. It would be overwhelmingly tedious if every learning experience were described with respect to all its aspects on all occasions. We really don't want to be accused of being tedious, but we do want to indicate that there *are* different aspects of ways of experiencing learning that can be described and commented on. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 92)

¹ The framework informs the interview process to the extent that an interviewer aware of the framework may probe in ways that elicit elaboration of a wider range of aspects of ways of experiencing a phenomenon.

On awareness

Experience is embedded in a context that extends to the whole range of matters of which a learner could be aware. This range could include, for example, aspects of the immediate learning environment, such as the topic that is being studied, and aspects that are far removed from this, such as family matters and plans for the rest of the day. To understand the different aspects of awareness, Marton uses Gurwitsch's distinction between 'theme', 'thematic field', and 'margin' (Marton, 1997).

'Theme' refers to 'the object of focal awareness'. In the study reported here, the theme could include the instance of oral assessment itself and the texts that are studied. The 'thematic field' refers to aspects of the learner's experienced world that are directly related to the theme. Again, in this study, this could include the student's existing knowledge of a specific topic and his or her experience of the environment in which the topic is applied. The 'margin' includes those matters that are in one's awareness but which are unrelated to the theme, for example, the time or an upcoming doctor's appointment. To return to the previous discussion of the internal and external horizons, the thematic field and the margin are part of the external horizon, while the theme is associated with the internal horizon. The relationship between what is theme and what constitutes the thematic field and the margin can also be expressed in terms of 'figure' and 'ground', so that "certain phenomena or particular aspects of certain phenomena are figural and make up the core of our awareness, whereas other phenomena or other aspects of phenomena are nonfigural and constitute the field surrounding and temporarily concomitant with the core" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 100).

The language of themes, thematic fields, focal awareness, figure and ground allows us to see that a way of experiencing something can be described in terms of how one's awareness is structured: "The aspects of a phenomenon and the relationships between them that are discerned and simultaneously present in the individual's focal awareness define the individual's way of experiencing the phenomenon" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 101). This notion is so significant for the study reported here that Marton and Booth's explanation of it is worth noting in more detail:

The main idea is that the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which something is experienced can be understood in terms of which constituent parts or aspects are discerned and appear simultaneously in people's awareness. A particular way of experiencing something reflects a simultaneous awareness of the particular aspects of the phenomenon. Another way of experiencing it reflects a simultaneous awareness of other aspects or more aspects of the same phenomenon. More advanced ways of experiencing something are, according to this line of reasoning, more complex and more inclusive (or more specific) than less advanced ways of experiencing the same thing, "more inclusive" and "more specific" both implying more simultaneously experienced aspects constituting constraints on how the phenomenon is seen. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 107)

A certain way of experiencing something can thus be understood in terms of the dimensions of variation that are discerned and are simultaneously focal in awareness, and in terms of the relationships between the different dimensions of variation. As the different ways of experiencing something are different ways of experiencing the same thing, the variation in ways of experiencing it can be described in terms of a set of dimensions of variation. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 108)

In the study reported here, this framework gives us a way of describing ‘a way of experiencing something’. Since this study is concerned with understanding the ways in which students experience the phenomenon of oral assessment, it provides a useful way of describing the different aspects of those ways.

In the study reported here, the phenomenographic research approach, with its focus on variation in the ways in which a phenomenon is experienced, was deemed to be particularly appropriate in light of the study’s object - ways of experiencing oral assessment. The interview process, as the prime means of data collection, and the phenomenographic method of data analysis with its resulting sets of categories of description, were considered likely to produce a coherent and comprehensive description of the ways in which oral assessment might be experienced.

Within the context of a phenomenographic approach, the anatomy of awareness was considered an appropriate tool for describing ways in which the phenomenon of oral

assessment, or aspect of this phenomenon, was experienced, namely in terms of the dimensions of variation ‘that are discerned and are simultaneously focal in awareness and in terms of the relationships between the different dimensions of variation’ (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 108). It was expected that the results of the study could be expressed in precisely such terms.

The Research Procedure

Selecting the assessment context

Oral assessment can take an extraordinary number of forms. The extent of this can be seen by considering the permutations and combinations that could arise from the six elements of oral assessment identified in the preliminary research on dimensions of oral assessment described in Chapter Two.

This study focused on the oral assessment of knowledge and understanding in accredited tertiary education programs. Within these parameters, a comparative element was considered important — while a study of how students experience oral assessment *per se* would be illuminating, additional insights might arise from a study that allowed comparisons to be made between students’ experiences of oral and written assessment.

A survey of assessment methods in the universities and other organisations with which the researcher was associated identified three instances of oral assessment that met these requirements and could have been the subject of this study:

- A viva in an undergraduate university law degree. The viva consisted of a fifteen-minute interrogation of the student by a two-lecturer panel on a prepared topic. Students could choose to prepare a number of topics for the viva (though only one of these would be examined) or submit a written assignment on a single topic. The viva had been carefully designed, and the lecturers involved had published research into how students responded to it (Butler & Wiseman, 1993).
- A ten-minute oral examination in a journalism course on ‘media ethics and the law’. Students prepared six topics, and were examined on one of these, chosen by throwing a die at the beginning of the exam. The examiner was the course lecturer.
- An oral presentation in a certificate in theology course for teachers and others conducted by a registered training organisation. The course was conducted in an ‘open learning’ mode, with students studying in self-managed cluster groups. Assessment alternated between written assignments submitted to a course coordinator, and oral presentations to the cluster group. The topics and criteria for the written and the oral forms of assessment were identical. (The term ‘oral presentation’ is used here since it is the term used within the program. It will be seen in Chapter Five that, while students experienced this form of assessment as a ‘presentation’, it could be experienced in a number of other ways.)

Initial interviews were conducted in all three contexts. However, significant differences appeared in the quality of the interviews in the different contexts. The transcripts of the theology interviews consistently yielded considerably more relevant utterances than those for the other contexts, and the limited quantity of relevant

utterances in the other contexts made it difficult to establish categories of description with sufficient supporting extracts to generate confidence in them. Consequently a decision was made to base the study on the theology interviews.

This decision draws attention to the ‘qualifications’ of the interviewer in studies such as this. Kvale notes that:

the interviewer is him- or herself the research instrument. A good interviewer is an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction. The interviewer must continually make quick choices about what to ask and how; which aspects of a subject’s answer to follow up - and which not; which answers to interpret - and which not. (Kvale, 1996, p. 147)

These choices are difficult to make in the absence of content knowledge on the part of the interviewer. Moreover, any difficulties that arise during the interview will recur at the analysis stage, where the problem is not what question to ask of the interviewee but what question or questions to ask of the text. There are no doubt many ways in which this problem can be understood. In the context of the present study, the conceptual framework outlined in the first part of this chapter suggests that the researcher needs some familiarity with the topic of study in order to recognise and explore various aspects of the interviewee’s ‘structure of awareness’. While the most immediate demand here on the part of the interviewer is to be able to relate to the ‘direct object of learning’ and the various ways this can be conceptualised, the ‘structure of awareness’ suggests a

close relationship between the direct and the indirect objects of learning as well as the need for the researcher to be able to explore their internal and external horizons. To put this in another way, it has been noted elsewhere that the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of learning are different sides of the one coin, so that it is simply not possible for a researcher to consider *how* students experience a form of assessment apart from how they experience *what* is being assessed. Consequently, for the educational researcher, a familiarity with general learning processes may often not suffice. The researcher is not dealing with an abstracted notion of ‘ways of experiencing’ or ‘ways of learning’ — the research, and hence the researcher, is concerned with ways of *experiencing something*, so that the researcher requires an understanding, and perhaps a relatively sophisticated one, of the phenomenon being experienced by the students who are the subjects of research.

Having completed an Arts degree with a major in theology, I was able to explore and analyse (both during and after the interviews) the structure of awareness of theology and how it was being learnt that was expressed in the course of the interviews and in the subsequent transcripts. I could do this only in a relatively simplistic way in relation to the journalism and law interviews.

The theology oral presentation

The oral presentation which was the basis of this study was one of two forms of assessment in an adult education theology program called *Foundations*. The program

was designed to provide teachers, parish workers and others involved in various roles within the Catholic Church with a foundational knowledge of theology.

The program was offered in an ‘open learning’ mode. Participants attended an orientation workshop, then studied through print materials and self-managed cluster groups that met regularly to discuss the topics they were studying. Participants had access to a group mentor and to the program coordinators.

The program required students to complete six items of assessment. These alternated between written papers which were submitted to one of the program coordinators or a tutor, and oral presentations to the cluster group. The oral presentations were short — five minutes of presentation, five minutes of questioning and discussion, and one minute of personal reflection. At the conclusion of each oral presentation, students would receive oral feedback from group members, complete a ‘feedback sheet’, and send the sheet and their notes to the coordinator or tutor for marking.

Students were provided with clear directions for the oral presentations. These are included as Appendix A: Guidelines for Practicum.

A particular advantage of *Foundations* in this study was the relationship between the written and oral forms of assessment. The requirements for each form were almost identical. For both forms of assessment, students could choose their topic and the

required structure for each was identical. Both forms required a short, 'digest' style of presentation, since length (500 words) or time (5 minutes) was limited. The parallel nature of the assessment formats was highlighted by the use of parallel planning documents for each format (the practicum version is included as Appendix B) and parallel feedback sheets submitted by the student with their written assignment or after their practicum (the practicum version is included as Appendix C).

The program ran over a twelve-month period. On successful completion of it, participants were awarded a 'Certificate III in Systematic Theology'. The program was recognised by the Brisbane College of Theology (affiliated with Griffith University) as being at the level of an undergraduate degree, and participants who had completed it were granted credit towards their Bachelor of Theology course.

The interviewees

The fifteen interviewees were identified by the Foundation's coordinator on the basis of their geographical accessibility to the researcher. The coordinator contacted the convenor of the relevant cluster group to introduce him or her to the research project and to ascertain if the convenor believed the group members would be amenable to being interviewed. The researcher then contacted the convenor and arranged to talk to the group members to explain the nature of the research and the interviews and to ascertain whether the member was agreeable to being interviewed. Only two students declined to take part in the study, citing lack of time.

Nine of the interviewees were school teachers, all interviewees had tertiary qualifications, ten were female and five were male, and ages ranged from mid-twenties to late fifties. All had completed at least two oral presentations.

Conducting the interviews

The interviews were conducted at the students' homes or places of work. The interviews ranged in length from thirty to sixty minutes. They followed a semi-structured format designed to encourage the description of the experience of the oral presentation from the student's perspective. Within an open structure, the interviewer, during the course of the interview, drew attention to three themes:

- what the oral presentation was like for the student, including the student's perception of the context of the presentation,
- how the student prepared for the presentation, and
- how the student compared the oral presentation to the written assignment.

While the interviews were semi-structured with an open interview guide, and while questions and prompts sought to elicit students' perspectives without introducing pre-existing ideas of the interviewer, the interviews were nevertheless conducted with two frameworks in mind that inevitably influenced the course of the interviews, since these frameworks determined what the interviewer would see as relevant or significant statements by the interviewee and hence worthy of further exploration. Thus the interviewer's awareness of the 'dimensions of oral assessment' and 'the structure of

awareness' led the interviewer to be attuned to interviewees' statements about, for instance, interaction or the role of examiners (from the 'dimensions of oral assessment') or statements that referred to the direct and indirect objects of learning (from the anatomy of awareness), on the other. Of course, the presence of these frameworks in the researcher's mind would also have influenced the subsequent analysis of the interview data.

Recording and transcribing the interviews

The interviews were recorded, and transcribed. Five transcriptions were made by the researcher, with the remaining ten being made by an experienced transcriber. All of the transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher by comparing the transcripts with the tape recordings.

Analysing the interviews

The analysis of the interviews initially followed the phenomenographic process outlined in the first part of this chapter:

(i) Identifying relevant utterances

The pooled transcripts were treated as a single entity and were read as such.

Utterances that were considered relevant to the research were identified and highlighted in the transcripts. 'Relevant' utterances included those utterances that were about oral assessment rather than 'asides' or tangential comments.

(ii) *Identifying themes or aspects in the pooled transcripts*

As relevant utterances were highlighted, a marginal note was made to indicate what each utterance was about. From these marginal notes, the utterances were seen to be about six themes:

- the underlying purpose of the oral presentation and of the student's preparation,
- the nature of theology,
- interactions during the oral presentation,
- the students' feelings during the oral presentation,
- the students' awareness of the audience, and
- comparisons of the oral presentation with the written assessment required in the program.

Consistent with the conceptual framework underpinning this study, and to focus the analysis, these themes were seen as aspects of the experience of the oral presentation, and described as:

- the indirect object of learning (the underlying purpose of the oral presentation),
- the direct object of learning (the nature of theology),
- the experience of interaction (the experience of interaction),
- affective aspects (feelings),
- the experience of audience (awareness of audience), and
- comparing the experience of oral and written assessment (comparisons).

The utterances associated with each of these aspects were then re-coded according to this scheme. Of course, as indicated previously, this research was conducted against a background of the structure of awareness. The identification of the direct object of learning and the indirect object of learning may in part reflect the research framework, though it could equally be noted that these constructs are ubiquitous and likely to emerge in any educational research similar to the study reported here.

(iii) *Analysing each aspect*

Each aspect was then analysed in turn. The utterances associated with each aspect already having been identified, these utterances were examined to identify the different ways in which the aspect seemed to be experienced. This stage involved the repeated reading of the utterances which now needed to be seen in two contexts — as part of a pool of utterances on a single aspect, and as part of the interview of an individual student. This iterative process was not a simple one since it required a dual focus on a substantial amount of transcript material and a constant movement of focus from the meanings of the aspect as these appeared across the transcripts to the meaning of the relevant utterances within a single transcript. As exposure to, and immersion in, the transcripts increased, perceptions and understandings changed until a point of ‘settled clarity’ was reached regarding the variety of ways in which an aspect of oral assessment was experienced. As was noted earlier in this chapter, “this process repeated will lead to vaguely spied structure through and across the data that our researcher/learner can develop,

sharpen, and return to again and again from first one perspective and then another until there is clarity” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p 132). The data certainly ‘shimmered’ (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 134).

The purpose of this stage was to identify the ways in which each of the aspects of oral assessment could be experienced. The outcome for each aspect was a range of ways of experiencing that aspect or, to use the phenomenographical terminology, a set of categories of description. Each category was illustrated by a set of quotations. (The system used to reference quotations identifies the interviewee and the transcript page on which the extract occurs. Thus the first such reference, ‘4:12’ on page 118, refers to page 12 of the transcript for interviewee number 4.) It is noted that some categories were more clearly defined than others, and some were more strongly supported by illustrative utterances than others. The descriptions sought to indicate not only the nature of each category, but the relationships between categories, allowing the hierarchical nature of the categories to be noted.

Phenomenographic studies are typically concerned with the holistic experience of a phenomenon. The present study’s focus on *aspects* of oral assessment arose from two primary considerations.

Phenomenographic studies are typically concerned with the holistic experience of a phenomenon. The present study’s focus on *aspects* of oral assessment arose from two primary considerations.

Firstly, the study of oral assessment from teachers' perspectives described in Chapter Two identified six dimensions of oral assessment and described the ways in which each dimension could vary on the basis of continua or more-or-less discrete categories. Thus a foundation for understanding oral assessment in terms of sub-categories or 'dimensions' was established at this stage. Consequently, a focus on sub-categories of oral assessment from students' perspectives, referred to as 'aspects' of oral assessment, was seen to be in a sense a continuation or extension of that earlier work in a form that could potentially allow direct comparisons to be made between the dimensions of oral assessment from teachers' perspectives, on the one hand, and aspects of oral assessment from students' perspectives, on the other. What aspects of oral assessment figured in students' awareness and how students experienced those aspects might serve to inform, extend, illuminate, contrast with, or complement the understanding of oral assessment that had emerged through the preceding consideration of its dimensions. In short, the parallel sub-categories of oral assessment 'dimensions' on one hand, and 'aspects' on the other, were conducive to comparisons.

Secondly, the focus on aspects of oral assessment was seen as pertinent in the context of recent consideration of what has been termed 'variation theory' (Marton & Morris, 2002). At an *analytical* level, particular ways of experiencing a phenomenon are seen to occur because students attend to different aspects of a phenomenon and experience those aspects in different ways. As Marton and Runnesson summarise this, "we not only discern features, but also discern different qualities ... in the relevant

dimensions” (Marton & Runesson, 2003, p. 18). Variation theory applies to the *pedagogical* level, where teachers’ use of variation with respect to specific aspects of a phenomenon has come to be seen as perhaps the most critical function of teaching (Lo & Ko, 2002; Marton & Trigwell, 2000; Patrick, 2002; Runesson & Marton, 2002; Tsui, 2002). In the context of the present study, variation theory is pertinent to how students might be helped in coming to see oral assessment in ways that are consistent with teachers’ intentions. Bringing students’ attention to aspects of oral assessment and to the variation in how these aspects may be experienced could become the basis for helping students to develop more complex ways of understanding oral assessment. Consequently the analysis of aspects of students’ experience of oral assessment somewhat independently of the analysis of their holistic experience of oral assessment was seen potentially to serve an important pedagogical purpose.

(iv) *Applying the categories of description for each aspect to individuals*

The analysis up to this point had identified categories of description related to ways of experiencing different aspects of oral assessment. The categories were derived from pooled transcripts rather than an analysis of individuals’ descriptions of their experience. The next stage of analysis entailed applying the categories of description to individual transcripts to determine if individual students tended to experience each aspect in a particular way. This would generate useful results in themselves, as well as providing a basis for the more holistic analysis outlined in step 6 below.

In most instances it was possible to identify individuals with a particular way of experiencing each aspect of oral assessment, though there were occasional exceptions to this.

(v) *Relating ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning to ways of experiencing the other aspects of oral assessment*

Given the critical significance of ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning, the way each student experienced this was considered in relation to the way in which they experienced each of the other aspects of oral assessment. This was set out in table form as a means of summarising the relationships between the way of experiencing the indirect object of learning and each other aspect of oral assessment.

(vi) *Looking for patterns*

While the identification of categories of description may lead to a useful set of outcomes in their own right, it should be kept in mind that these aspects may, to some extent, be artificial constructs that, while serving a useful analytical purpose, might also function to atomise, fragment, or ‘dis-integrate’ what might be considered to be a more unitary experience of the phenomenon of oral assessment. Consequently at this stage it becomes important to consider if ways of experiencing the various aspects of oral assessment cohere, and if patterns can be discerned that move towards viewing the experiencing of aspects of oral assessment as more holistic ways of understanding students’ experiencing of oral assessment.

A simple step was taken to identify patterns and coherence. Based on the association of ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning with ways of experiencing other aspects of oral assessment that were identified in the preceding step of the research procedure, a matrix was developed to express the relationship between ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning and ways of experiencing the remaining five aspects of oral assessment. This matrix, which could be described as the 'outcome space' with respect to students' experience of oral assessment, would be a major, though simple, analytical tool in summarising the outcomes of the research reported here.

The matrix suggested three ways of experiencing oral assessment. These were subsequently termed 'conceptions of oral assessment'. Based on the associations expressed in the matrix, each conception was then described in terms of its referential aspect, derived from students' underlying intentions as expressed in the indirect objects of learning, and its structural aspect, based on specific configurations of ways of experiencing the other aspects of oral assessment. In contrast with the typical phenomenographic process which begins with tentative holistic categorisations of experiences and moves to tentative analyses of the structures of categories, moving between these categorisations and structures until some clarity and stability is achieved, this study moved in a different direction, with the conceptions being derived from the preceding detailed analysis of aspects, though being subsequently confirmed by a final 're-viewing' of the interview transcripts.

5. RESULTS

*In every work regard the writer's end
Since none can compass more than they intend.*
(Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, cited by Hounsell, 1997a, p. 106)

Introduction

This chapter considers how students experienced a particular form of oral assessment — the practicum in the *Foundations* theology program. Perhaps more accurately, it seeks to describe the *variety* of ways in which students experienced the practicum.

Marton and Booth note that “a particular way of experiencing something represents a combination of related aspects that are simultaneously present in a person’s focal awareness” and that “by aspect we mean a dimension of variation” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 206). In accordance with this understanding, this chapter begins by considering the ‘aspects’ of the practicum reported by the students in the study, that is, those aspects of the practicum that seemed to be important parts of the students’ experiences (or which were present in the students’ awareness of the practicum as expressed in the interviews). In this chapter, those aspects and the variations within each of them are described.

The chapter then identifies those aspects of the practicum that seem to be related to each other in students’ descriptions of their experience. By noting the relationships

between aspects of awareness, it then becomes possible to posit a limited number of ways of experiencing the practicum.

This chapter reports the analysis of the interviews of theology students in the following way:

- The chapter begins by considering the ways in which students experience the indirect object of learning.
- The chapter then proceeds to consider, in turn, the ways in which students experience
 - the direct object of learning,
 - interaction,
 - affective aspects of the practicum,
 - audience, and
 - comparisons of the practicum with written assignments.

Each of these aspects is considered in a separate section which describes the ways in which the particular aspect was interpreted as being experienced in the group studied and relates how students experienced that aspect to how they experienced the indirect object of learning.

The final section of the chapter describes the relationships between the ways of experiencing all of the identified aspects of the practicum, expressing these relationships in terms of three core ways in which the practicum as a unitary entity was experienced.

The Indirect Object of Learning

This section describes the ways in which students experienced the indirect object of learning as they prepared for the practicum. Four categories of description were identified through the analysis of the interview transcripts. According to these categories, students tend to see the indirect object of learning as either:

- A. a presentation *per se*,
- B. a presentation for others,
- C. an understanding of what they were studying, or
- D. a position to be argued.

Within this section, each of these categories is defined and then described by reference to illustrative extracts from the interviews. The hierarchical nature of the categories is then described. The determinative role of the indirect object of learning established in the foundational research in student approaches to learning is then noted.

A. *A presentation per se*

This category is concerned with the presentation *as an end in itself* without reference to anything (or anyone) else. The practicum required students to prepare material and

present to their cluster group, so in a sense it is not possible to conceive of the practicum without thinking of it as including a presentational element. What distinguishes the presentational nature of this category is the strong focus on the paper that is being presented, how the presentation will be made, or the process of preparing the presentation. The presentation is seen as a ‘product’ which can be described in almost physical terms, either as a series of points, audiovisual aids, or the time that needs to be filled.

While a presentation must have an audience, this category is characterised by a focus on the presentation *per se* with only a limited sense of the audience that would be listening to it. Where the audience is referred to, it is as ‘passive recipients’ — there is no sense of an audience the members of whom benefit from the presentation or who have any substantial interaction with the presenter.

The following extract illustrates two aspects of the ‘practicum as presentation’ by defining expectations in terms of the physical product (‘a paper’) and time:

... what are the expectations?

To produce a paper that should be 10 minutes ... (4:12)

The practicum as presentation could simply be described as an explanation:

I was trying to ... take that encyclical and explain it to someone else ... to explain it to them — why it was written and who wrote it; and just a general summary — just tell them what the encyclical's about and just look at some of the points that were more relevant to today even though it was written thirty years ago or something. So it was just trying to present something to them — something that they may have not read themselves and it's just like a book review I suppose, in some respects. (13:8)

Where a student conceives of teaching as 'presentation', the practicum is sometimes described in terms of 'teaching', though it is important to note that this is a category of teaching that is devoid of a sense of an audience learning. It is not even teaching as transmission (Ramsden,1992) since transmission implies sending a message 'across' to someone.

... it was pretty much like teaching a class. Probably some more preparation went into it than teaching a class. That's 'cos I didn't know much about it, so I did some background reading, summarised, but knew I'd be able to talk about the points ... from my background reading. I'd be able to elaborate on what was on the overhead summary and then at a particular point, hand out the examples of the actual ... documents, point out some of the intricacies of the language and some of the interesting points that were in there and we all had a bit of a "ho" and "ha" and a bit of discussion and pretty much finished up ... (10:4)

Some students described the practicum in terms of time to be filled, associating the short time available with a limited need for understanding or detail:

I don't think ... I've reached a point where I could say ... I think I understood the basic concept ... I suppose I understood enough to be able to explain it in five minutes to someone but I didn't come to a complete all knowing understanding. (10:5)

I had an idea that ... you didn't have to go to extreme depths. It was only going to be five or ten minutes anyway, but only a very short presentation so within a short time you've got to cover a lot of things and give the general picture without going into too much detail, so I knew that it would have to be fairly quick, fairly brief and fairly general ... (9:5)

The physical aspect of the presentation was referred to in terms of summaries, points, and the use of overhead transparencies to convey these:

... some people used an overhead projector and some people gave handouts. I used an overhead projector and I just had my points on the overhead. (9:6)

I grabbed some books ... I found some examples ... did a summary that I put on an overhead and photocopied the primary source things. (10:3)

A variation in this category involves seeing the presentation as the object of evaluation — the presentation is evidence that the student has done the required work:

I see the main purpose to show the group what you've learnt and also it's like an evaluation thing. They are checking up on you that you've done it ... (5:7)

B. A presentation for others

While Category A involves a focus on the presentation *per se*, category B involves an intention of presenting ideas *to others*. This represents a dual focus on presentation on the one hand, and an awareness of the presentation's audience on the other. Content and audience are typically described in a way that ties them together. For example, content is studied thoroughly so that it can be presented to the audience. One way of summarising this intention is to describe it as a form of teaching where teaching is conceptualised as 'transmission' (Ramsden, 1992). In contrast to the use of the term 'teaching' in relation to category A, in the case of category B there is an awareness of an audience to receive that which is transmitted.

Since this category entails presentation *to others*, an awareness of and commitment to the audience is part of this intention. *What* is presented is also significant and often related to a commitment to the group, since the 'what' typically is seen as having to be something that needs to be worthwhile, meaningful, or important to the group.

This category entails preparation, the development of explanations, and the ability ‘to put ideas across’ to the group. What is involved can perhaps be described as a ‘translation’ of words and terminology for the benefit of the group rather than a ‘transformation’ at the level of meaning.

The following extracts encapsulate the notion of a presentation, in the form of an explanation, to others:

I might have got to think that the whole process of the practicum was to try to explain it to other people. (15:8)

I’ve made sense of it for me and therefore because it made sense for me I’m going to have to present it and hopefully they can see my interpretation ... I made sense of it for me and I’m presenting the sense that I made of it as ... my practicum. (8:4)

The explanation or presentation is not simply to other people. It is to other people who stand in a certain relationship to the presenter — a relationship that entails a degree of commitment to the others. This commitment is related to the nature of that which is presented. The commitment is such that the presenter wants to share ideas that s/he has found particularly meaningful for her- or himself. In other words, the presentation is not only *to* others; it is *for the benefit of* others. The student has found what has been studied

to be interesting, and because of their commitment to the group, they want to share this with the group.

There's commitment to the group which made me say you've got to be prepared.

(8:3)

I want to bring it together and share with my group ... because I've got a commitment to this group. (8:3)

I want it to be good. I mean it's a matter of sharing some knowledge, important knowledge to me, to this group, so I did the preparation even though it meant flogging myself. (8:3)

I suppose you're sorting what's important ... to them. I mean are they going to be turned off or are they going to be bored, is it too much? (8:4)

... you were sort of doing something like a teacher. You were teaching a little part of the course.

Did that have any influence on how you went about preparing for the talk?

I'd say so, yes. It made you do it thoroughly. What you had to prepare had to be meaningful and it had to be put ... over to the group. (11:8)

I wanted to say, “Here’s something which I’ve got and I think this was worthwhile. I want to share it with you. (15:8)

I think there’s psychology in this because you’re trying to do something for the others in the group ... you try to do something which ... the others would benefit from... (15:6)

I can give the others something which I’ve got out of it myself ... I felt it was saying something to me I was able to convey that to the others ... (15:6)

C. Understanding

‘Understanding’, as a category derived from the interviews in the present study, is based directly on a recurring theme in the interviews. This theme incorporates both the use of the word ‘understand’ in many utterances and expressions that imply ‘understanding’ without using this specific term. Understanding may be expressed in terms of being clear in one’s own mind about what one is presenting, having a sense of certainty about the material, internalising ideas, ‘really knowing what you are talking about’, or simply as a ‘deeper level of understanding’ or a ‘better understanding’ than would be required for written assessment.

The following two excerpts illustrate in its simplest form this intention to understand:

I tried to make sure I understood things a little better. (12:9)

... and I've understood it, that's most important.

What do you mean by 'understand'?

Well by 'trying to understand' means that I really understand the topic, that I have knowledge about it, that I've thought about it ... You know once you've got knowledge it's in here — you understand, you've thought about it and you've come to the conclusion that what you have learnt is correct and so it stays in there and you can argue it with anybody. (3:13)

Invariably this intention is directly related to how students perceive particular aspects of the oral assessment context. Thus the need to understand may be related to the act of presentation:

I think I need a better understanding of it if I'm going to then present rather than to write it and hand it in and that's the end of the story. I think that extra step of presenting it really makes you understand it even more. And I reflect on that in my own teaching as well. I was actually quite good at maths and when I started teaching it I realised how much I really didn't know, that a lot of the stuff I had just accepted and when I had to then explain it and impart that knowledge to the people who I taught, I had to know it ... very thoroughly. (2:9)

It just has that step between what you prepare and what you hand in. Having to present it, you really have to learn what you are talking about and have a fairly clear idea in your mind of where you are going. And I think it's very good experience for people to have to speak about topics and discuss and justify what they've put there, explain more fully if it's not fully explained ... (2:9)

While the above excerpts reflect a need to understand in the context of presentation, the need to understand may also be related to how oral expression is experienced in itself, apart from the audience, so that the attempt to articulate *per se* requires understanding:

I was very concerned about picking up something that I could make sense of and not sound too stupid when I was talking about it ... I guess I wanted to understand the information, and then in order to do that, I had to understand what I was learning ... Well, to sort of understand something properly and to learn about something properly I think you have to be able to talk about it, not just write it down and research it. (12:7)

Most references to understanding occur in the context of the anticipation of questioning. The intention to understand arises from the anticipated need to respond to probing from the audience:

I make sure that I know what I'm talking about ... but you don't really know until people start asking questions the sort of things they're going to ask. (1:3)

I thought my understanding wasn't sufficiently broadened — if I was asked a difficult question, my dismal ignorance would suddenly be displayed before all.

Did knowing you were going to be questioned influence how you prepared?

It made me try to be really certain that I knew what I was talking about whereas if no one's going to ask you a question, you can get away with much more 'unknowing' ... Knowing this will happen, you have to have a deeper level of understanding — more of it, more thoroughly. You probe the text more thoroughly, re-read it and make sure I understand versus giving the impression I've understood. (6: 2-3)

I think in delivering an oral, what you've written on paper you've really got to understand it because if anyone asks you a question and you just go, "Oh, I really don't know what to say" ... You do try to internalise it more because if people really are going to ask you questions about it, you've really got to have some understanding of it, whereas you can write it on paper even if its your thoughts, you can write it on paper and forget about it because no-one is going to question you ... Whether you believe it or agree with it or understand it makes no difference I don't think on paper. So for that reason I think an oral does make you more aware of what you've written and what your understanding

is of it because if someone asks you a question of it, then you've got to have put some time into it ... I've got to be very aware that I do understand it ... (7:1)

I mean I do really understand what it is I've written and why have I written it. I mean I do that with a written assignment but I think there is more responsibility to really be clear about that when you know that somebody may in fact ask you a question on the spot. (7:2)

D. A position to be argued

'A position to be argued' involves developing a position which is to be presented forcefully or defended firmly, with a view to having an impact on the audience. It entails a focus on both the case or position being presented and the audience to which it is being presented. Whereas category C involves understanding, this category assumes understanding in the interests of persuasion:

I've really wanted to convince people about these things which I'd taken on board which were very important to me ... (6:1)

This was more of a sales pitch ... (6:2)

'A position to be argued' can take an aggressive form in which there is a strong focus on the audience as the object of change:

... my adrenalin just goes through because I'm trying to convince these people that what I discovered and what I have written is of great value to each one of those seven people. (3:12)²

Is there any other word you would use to describe the difference (between oral and written assessment)?

Gratifying, gratifying, 'cos I like a battle. You see, I had a battle with seven other people. It really does become a battle because it's you trying to almost impose your viewpoints on someone else. (3:13)

'A position to be argued' can also take a defensive form in which the student's focus is more on themselves than on the audience. Here the intention is to develop a case which can be defended rather than aggressively imposed on others. The emphasis is perhaps more on the 'case' than the arguing of it — the student sees the task as establishing a well-developed position and being very clear about that position so that it can be defended:

² Another quotation from student 3 has been used to illustrate the preceding category. In applying the phenomenographic process of establishing categories of description, it is quite possible for a single interview transcript to contain extracts that illustrate different categories. For example, at one point in an interview, an interviewee might describe the practicum and the written assessment as similar in difficulty, but at another, later point (presumably as a result of further reflection or of considering this issue from a different perspective) might describe them as different. The use of an utterance from one student to illustrate a category to which they are not subsequently ascribed simply means that the transcript of that student's interview is seen overall to emphasise another category.

Well you virtually take a line and you stick to it. (1:3)

... you want to make sure that you really know where *you* stand. You really need to know where *you* stand on a particular issue before you can present it to other people. (Emphasis added) (1:8)

While this category involves a strong awareness of one's position, it also involves a sense of the potential impact on the audience:

... when you're giving a presentation as opposed to an assignment, often the words when spoken verbally have a lot more force than they do when written in an assignment. I guess that's probably where your line of thinking is more evident too. (1:3)

[Preparation involves] being careful about other people's feelings on the highly controversial issues, being aware that what I say is going to affect other people in the group, whereas what I write down is different. (1:8)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

Categories A and B could both be described as 'reproductive' in nature. Neither category requires understanding or any transformation at the level of meaning of the material being studied. But neither implies a simple repetition of what has been studied,

since ‘presentation’ may require careful attention to wording, but not necessarily attention to an understanding of what has been studied. In category A, the focus is on the presentation itself without an expressed awareness of the audience. In category B, while the presentation is essential, it is a presentation with a purpose beyond itself, that is, a presentation which will be of some benefit to its audience.

In contrast to categories A and B, categories C and D are based on a need to ‘understand’ the material being studied. In category C, the student seeks his or her own personal understanding as an end in itself. In category D, this understanding has an additional external focus — the student seeks understanding for him- or herself, then uses that understanding as the basis for arguing a position with others.

The Direct Object of Learning

The student interviews which form the basis of this study focused on the *how* of learning. However, as students discussed how they studied, inevitably some reference was made to *what* they were studying, that is, to the ‘direct object’ of their learning³. These references were usually indirect and subjects were not always invited to elaborate on them. As a result, the descriptions of the direct object of study reported below are based on limited data — no one student described their object of learning at length.

³ Fourteen of the fifteen students referred to one of their practicum topics. (Each student had conducted two or three topics.) These topics are listed in Appendix D. Each topic appeared to lend itself to being dealt with by standard theological processes. Consequently there is no reason to believe that the nature of the topics would have any particular implications for the interpretation of the data reported in this section.

Nevertheless the data obtained do permit a description of a variety of ways in which the direct object of study is experienced and constitute a significant aspect of the ways of experiencing the practicum.

Five categories of description for the direct object of learning were identified:

- A. theology as the ideas of others,
- B. theology as making personal meaning from the ideas of others,
- C. theology as making sense of life, and
- D. theology as point of view.

A. Theology as the ideas of others

According to this category, theology consists of the ideas of theologians or of the Church, and the process of studying involves reading, summarising and ordering these ideas, or re-expressing them in a way that will make them intelligible to the student's audience. According to this category, theological ideas are 'givens' rather than contestable — they are simply to be accessed and then reported intelligibly.

This category is epitomised by the following excerpts which describe a process of going to the text, seeing what is written there, and transposing this into the student's work:

... well the questions, they were nice explicit questions that said, from memory,
“What were the historical and literary contexts in which Matthew's gospel was

written?” So I just went back to the front of the Gospel of Matthew - there’s a blurb in the New Catholic Bible. (5:3)

I’d check with O’Brien’s [book] on Catholicism and see what he had to say. (15:5)

... as I’m reading I’m thinking, “OK, well that’s the Church’s position on that, that’s another theologian’s position, ... that’s what the Church thinks ...” (2:4)

One way in which this view of theology as the uncontested ideas of others finds expression is in the view of theology as ‘information’:

[When I’m reading] I’ll just concentrate on what the questions are presenting or what information the questions are focusing on. As I’m reading [I’ll] just pick out what I think are the important sections ... (14:3)

I guess I wanted to understand the information ... (12:7)

B. Theology as making personal meaning from the ideas of others

Category A involves accepting the ideas of others and reproducing them. Category B is also focused on the ideas of others, but involves a process of coming to grips with what others are saying and then presenting one’s own understanding of this. Theology is

still seen as essentially dealing with the ideas of others, but now they are ideas that have been made the student's own:

I've made sense of it for me and therefore because it made sense for me, I'm going to have to present it and hopefully they can see in my interpretation — it's not so much the interpretation but my bringing together the different bits of the discoveries that are made. (8:5)

You do try to internalise it more. (7:1)

If I really am going to give you this information, what about it is important to me? (7:2)

C. Theology as making sense of life

In both categories A and B, theology is seen as a discipline for its own sake — it is about theological ideas, knowing what these ideas are, and making sense of them.

According to category C, the purpose of theology lies outside itself — the purpose of studying theology is not to make sense of theology, but to make sense of life.

This category is derived from a single utterance. However, the conception of theology that it expresses stands in such clear contrast to the other categories described in this section that it warrants inclusion as a separate category:

Theology is such a personal thing and it's your way of trying to define meaning or to interpret the things that are happening around you. (13:5)

D. Theology as a point of view

Category D highlights a sense of relationship to the ideas being studied. The student locates herself within these ideas, but has developed her own point of view from within this perspective. While this 'point of view' emerges as a result of study, it is seen as highly personal and stands in contrast to that of the audience:

And so I put my point of view across, which is probably pretty different to other people. (1:2)

I'm mulling it over, trying to see which point of view I wanted to present and that's how I put my papers together. (3:4)

I wanted my own research so by putting all these [standpoints] together and thinking about it and saying "No, I don't agree with that" and "Yes, I agree with that", "No, I don't agree with that", that way I came round, almost like a snail shell. (3:4)

The course is really spot on as far as tempting you to think and have your own opinions, so it wasn't regurgitating the whole stuff. It was a reinterpretation of stuff, and speaking opinions. (8:2)

Seeing theology as a ‘point of view’ seems to be closely related to seeing the indirect object of learning as ‘a position to be argued’, as the following extracts illustrate:

I read from a variety of different people ... Then you look at your personal view and how you feel about it and how that fits with you ... You virtually take a line and you stick to it. (1:3)

... it really does become a battle because it’s you trying to almost impose your viewpoints on someone else. (3:13)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

If theology in this study is considered as a relationship between object (theological ideas, processes etc.) and subject (the students in this study), the four categories described above fall broadly into two classes. In the first class, the focus is more on the object than the subject; in the second, the focus is on the subject.

- Category A. Theology exists outside the student. Students focus on the ideas of theologians and see their task as repeating these in the form in which they are received, or interpreting them for their audience. The ideas that students deal with are the ideas of others rather than their own.
- Category B. Theology is an interaction between the student and the ideas of others. This category initially seems to share a characteristic with category A since, as with

category A, theology is initially located ‘outside’ the student and in the ideas of others. However, in category B the student is actively engaged with these ideas and seeks to make his or her own sense from them. This is no passive acceptance, but rather an active examination of these ideas, with a view to deciding which are meaningful to the student and how these can be meaningfully expressed. What may start out as the ideas of others become the student’s own.

- Category C. Theology is concerned with personal meaning, but the primary focus is not on the ideas of others. The focus is in fact beyond theology itself and on the world beyond theology; the purpose of theology lies beyond itself. It is a personal attempt to understand the world.
- Category D. As with category C, the focus lies beyond theology itself. Category D differs from C in at least two ways. First, whereas C entails personal meaning for oneself, D entails meaning *for others*. We can reasonably infer that D also requires the student to establish a sense of personal meaning for themselves as a precursor to perceiving the potential for meaning for others. Secondly, if theology is seen as having meaning, that meaning ‘packs a punch’ — it changes not only how one sees the world, but how one sees oneself. Theology therefore entails, for both the presenter and the audience, the possibility of changing as a person.

Structural and referential aspects of the direct object of learning

The variation across the categories of description can be considered in terms of their referential and structural aspects.

If the referential aspect of the direct object of study is the received ideas of others, the structural aspect involves seeing a theological topic as a series of ‘points’. These may simply be ‘key points’, or these points may be related to each other in some way, for example, as a main point with subsidiary detail or as points that are categorised, structured, sequenced or synthesised. This structure is akin to the ‘multistructural’ form of learning outcome described by Biggs and Collis (1982).

[I’m] just trying to find out the main points about the thing that I’m researching - what it’s basically about ... I just try to find out so that I can impart that knowledge again ... so that I can relay it again ... (12:3)

The way I would write [the written outline of the practicum] would be to say, “OK, these are the things I want to talk about in this order” ... (2:1)

I’m categorising the information in my own mind ... I’m categorising information and narrowing down what I’m going to do ... then I actually order [the ideas] ... (2:4)

The practicum is supposed to follow a particular process. You've got the introduction and the body is supposed to be one, two, three, four points and then a conclusion. (4:7)

If the referential aspect of the object of study is described in terms of one's own internal ideas (as is the case with category C and category D), the corresponding structural aspects of the direct object of learning are characterised by complexity and the relationship between the student and what is being learnt. This relationship is akin to the 'relational' or 'extended abstract' form of learning outcome described by Biggs and Collis (1982). A relational outcome integrates parts into a coherent whole, while an extended abstract outcome goes beyond the information given in treating new and broader issues. One student expressed this complexity particularly clearly:

Thinking about it, I'll say, "O.K. Now this is what I know about it, this is what I feel would be the correct way to go. Do I want to totally condemn everything that was spoken against Martin Luther? Do I agree with everything he had to say? Do I agree with the people who have subsequently written on him, the biographies? What standpoint did they come from?" And I think the more you think about, the more you realise just what standpoint they started to write their research study from and I didn't want to follow that. I wanted my own research, so by putting all these together and thinking about it and saying, "No, I don't agree with that; yes, I agree with that; no, I don't agree with that — that way I came round, almost like a snail shell. (3:4)

The direct and indirect objects of learning

When the ways of experiencing the direct and indirect objects of learning are considered for the students in this study, a relationship does seem to exist between these two aspects of students' experience⁴. This relationship can be summarised as follows:

- Students for whom the indirect object of learning is a presentation *per se* or a presentation for others tended to experience the direct object of learning as the 'ideas of others'. Thus both students for whom the indirect object was 'presentation for others' saw theology as the ideas of others, while the same is true for four of the six students for whom the indirect object of learning was a 'presentation *per se*'. For the other two students for whom the indirect object was a 'presentation *per se*', theology was concerned with others' ideas, but in the more complex form of 'making personal meaning from others' ideas'.

⁴ This process and the similar processes referred to in later sections of this chapter involved ascribing categories of description to individuals. While it was noted in Chapter Four that in studies such as this some individuals are not easily categorised, this did not prove to be the case in the present study and it was possible to ascribe a single category of description to all individuals in relation to the six aspects of oral assessment considered in this chapter. While there were instances in which an individual had referred to more than one category of description, on each occasion it was clear that the individual had emphasised one way of experiencing the aspect of the phenomenon over another.

- Students for whom the indirect object of learning was ‘understanding’ still saw theology as being concerned with the ideas of others or as making personal meaning from the ideas of others.
- Those students who saw theology as a position to be argued saw theology in a markedly different way as point of view. This most complex way of experiencing the indirect object of learning was associated with the most complex way of experiencing the direct object of learning as point of view.

While the above points suggest a pattern of association between ways of experiencing the indirect and direct objects of learning, it must be noted that one student stood outside the pattern, seeing the practicum as a presentation for others while seeing theology as point of view.

The pattern of association noted in the above discussion is summarised in Table Three where category A involves experiencing the indirect object of learning as a presentation *per se*, a presentation for others or understanding, while seeing theology as the ideas of others or as making personal meaning from the ideas of others, while category B involves seeing the indirect object of learning as a position to be argued while seeing the theology as point of view.

Table 3. Ways of experiencing the indirect and direct objects of learning

Direct object	Indirect object				Sub-totals
	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	Position to be argued	
Theology as the ideas of others	4	1	2		8
Theology as making personal meaning	2		1	1	4
Theology as making sense of life	1				1
Theology as point of view		1		2	2
Sub-totals	7	2	3	3	15

Note. The numbers in this table refer to individual students. As noted on page 140, the alignment of students with categories was straightforward.

The Experience of Interaction

‘Interaction’ is concerned with the nature of the interchange between the student and the audience. The way in which students described this aspect of their experience ranged from almost no awareness of interaction with an audience at one extreme, to an acute awareness of interaction as a powerful aspect of the practicum.

Five ways of experiencing interaction were identified:

- A. interaction as one-way communication,
- B. interaction as questioning leading to elaboration,

- C. interaction as discussion,
- D. interaction as questioning requiring understanding, and
- E. interaction as challenge.

A. Interaction as one-way communication

Interaction as one-way communication is a way of experiencing the practicum that involves no awareness of interaction. This may be expressed in three forms. First, it is implicit in the description of the practicum as a presentation *per se* noted in the previous section on the indirect object of learning. There it was noted that this category implied a one-way process with no awareness of the audience. Secondly, it may be stated in terms of the audience's passivity. Thirdly, it may be inferred from a lack of reference to interaction within an interview, suggesting that interaction has not figured in a student's awareness.

The following extracts indicate the passive, listening role of the audience:

I suppose in some respects they were on the receiving end. (13:8)

... there was a little bit of discussion but not probably a great deal. People just sort of accepted what I had to say I guess. (13:9)

They just want to hear the story, your story. (8:5)

A variation of this category is to note the non-verbal feedback that presenters can receive. While this does represent a form of interaction, it is included in this category since, in a context that is highly conducive to verbal exchanges, it highlights the absence of verbal interaction:

... you get immediate feedback in just the way they're looking or they're sleeping. (4:15)

B. Interaction as questioning leading to elaboration

A limited form of interaction occurs when questions from the audience act as prompts for further exposition by the presenter. The interaction is considered 'limited' because it is described not as dialogue but as an opportunity to extend the essentially one-way communication — it simply leads to more presentation:

People talked about it and they ask you questions about it and it was nice to elaborate on a few points so that all meant that when you were putting this thing together you didn't just have the bare bones but you had a bit of the padding as well. (11:8)

I knew that if the occasion arose and somebody asked a question about it I'd have enough in my head to just rave on about it. (5:5)

C. Interaction as discussion

‘Interaction as discussion’ involves reciprocal communication. Where categories A and B are dominated by the presenter, ‘discussion’ involves a more equal participation by presenter and audience. The Macquarie Dictionary’s definition of the word ‘discuss’ is illuminating (Delbridge, Bernard, Blair, Butler, Peters, & Yallop, 1997). ‘To discuss’ may be ‘to debate’, ‘to examine by argument’, ‘to sift the considerations for and against’, or ‘to talk over’. The first three meanings suggests a vigour that is not present in category C. The final meaning, ‘to talk over’, is more consistent with this category. There is no suggestion of debate, rigorous argument, or even a hint of feeling. Discussion is more subdued and even inconsequential.

The following extracts suggest interaction distinctly lacking in vigour:

... I’d be able to talk about and elaborate the points and it would be from my background reading I’d be able to elaborate on what was on the overhead summary ... and we all had a bit of “ho” and “ha” and a bit of a discussion and pretty much finished up ... (10:4)

What happened when you finished the presentation?

Oh we’d make comments about it and it was sort of very informal ... and we’d talk about the issues that we were discussing ... (12:6)

... we had to prepare our oral presentations about a subject and then have questions and discussion ... (12:6)

On the other hand, discussion may be more important to the group, indicated by the time and/or energy spent:

It went for a good couple of hours so we all went over time in a fair bit of discussion ... (10:6)

Well it sort of forced me to do the work in a way, and plus not to let the other members down because we all sort of wanted to talk about things and try and get a bit out of it personally ... (12:6)

... it generates a lot of discussion and our group is really into the discussions on the readings and on the oral — what comes up in the orals and things like that, particularly if it's relating to our own circumstances in any way ... (14:5)

D. Interaction as questioning requiring understanding

Category D represents a form of interaction that is characterised by its sharpness, purposefulness, and impact on the presenter. It involves a keen awareness of interaction as a critical part of the practicum. The awareness of this kind of interaction is so strong that it is described by students as having a significant impact on how they prepare for the practicum.

The following extracts indicate students' awareness of the need to anticipate questions and to be more thoroughly prepared to respond:

I'm always conscious of the fact that during the presentation people may ask me questions about it. (2:1)

...there was one thing that kept coming up — 'ET'. I didn't have a clue what that was and I thought, "It doesn't matter." Then I thought, "It does matter," because someone will say "What does ET stand for?" (2:2)

I had to know everything about it and be able to answer their questions about it. (2:3)

I think there is more responsibility to really be clear about that when you know that somebody may in fact ask you a question on the spot. (7:2)

The above extracts indicate a need to be well prepared. The following extracts emphasise the need to know not merely 'more', but to 'really know what you're talking about', that is, to have a good understanding of the material:

So I think when there's a presentation involved, there is pressure, for want of a better word, to really know what you're talking about and to be thoroughly prepared for that. (2:3)

Initially I felt a bit threatened because I thought my understanding wasn't sufficiently broadened. If I was asked a difficult question my dismal ignorance would suddenly be displayed before all.

Did knowing you were going to be questioned influence how you prepared?

It made me try to be really certain that I knew what I was talking about, whereas if no one's going to ask you a question, you can get away with much more 'unknowing'. (6:2)

Knowing [questioning] will happen, you have to have a deeper level of understanding ... you probe the text more thoroughly, re-read it and make sure I understand it versus giving the impression I've understood. (6:3)

I think in delivering an oral ... you've really got to understand it because if anyone asks you a question, (7:1)

... if people really are going to ask you questions about it, you've really got to have some understanding of it. (7:1)

The awareness of questioning may be particularly acute in comparison to written work:

I think there is more responsibility to really be clear about that when you know that somebody may in fact ask you a question on the spot. (7:2)

E. Interaction as challenge

The experience of interaction as ‘challenge’ involves seeing interaction as a confrontation between the student who is leading the practicum and members of the audience. The interaction is strong and vigorous and clearly represents to the student a crucial element of the situation.

Interaction as challenge can be experienced as a negative or as a positive factor. As the following utterances indicate, challenge can be associated with defensiveness:

Well it’s sharing your thoughts and ideas with other people rather than just expressing “This is how I feel” because at the end of your practicum there is discussion where people can either refute or agree or disagree or whatever with your ideas and that can be a bit confronting if people say, “No, I think you’re wrong — this is what it’s all about.” (1:1)

And then you get people standing up at the end saying, “You know you’re wrong”. You know I find that really confronting ... (1:2)

But you’re very aware of how other people, of how controversial an issue is, and how that’s going to affect other people. (1:9)

The following utterances, while equally suggesting the challenging nature of the interaction, associate this challenge with a positive sense of assertiveness:

When it’s verbal, people can often take it as an attack because you and they are directly opposite. I find it particularly in our cluster group because I have one lady whose views on things are very different to mine, so when you’re presenting something verbally she’s immediately on the attack. (1:6)

It’s gratifying because I like a battle. You see, I had a battle with seven other people. It’s really a battle between me and [the audience] because it’s you trying to almost impose your viewpoints on someone else. (3:13)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

In Chapter Two, ‘interaction’ was presented on a continuum ranging from ‘presentation’ at one extreme, to ‘dialogue’ at the other. The categories of interaction described in this section, while not necessarily lending themselves to being described as points on a continuum, can be seen as a hierarchy, beginning with the essentially non-

interactive position of 'one-way communication' and moving through increasing complexity to the category of 'challenge'. The nature of this hierarchy is described below.

Category A. 'The practicum as one-way communication' represents the most limited sense of interaction. Although the practicum format creates the possibility of intense interaction, category A involves virtually no awareness of interaction.

Category B. 'Questioning leading to elaboration' introduces an awareness of the role of the audience, but this role is somewhat static. The presenter speaks and the audience asks a question which acts as a prompt for further presentation. A pattern of 'presentation, question, more presentation' emerges. The description of this sort of interaction suggests that it is not seen as dialogue but as a form of one-way communication.

Category C. 'Interaction as discussion' represents a transitional point between the first two categories and the last two. Here there is genuine discussion and an equality in participation between presenter and audience. In contrast to categories A and B, true interaction occurs, but compared to categories D and E, it is interaction that is lacking in vigour. It is not yet seen as a form of interaction that has a significant effect on either presenter or audience.

Categories D and E stand in contrast to the previous ones. In both of these categories, interaction forms a highly significant aspect of students' awareness and is described as having a major impact on how they go about studying, whereas in the first two categories, interaction has a minor impact.

In category D, 'interaction as questioning requiring understanding', the anticipation of questioning is seen to prompt the critical intention to understand or to 'really know what you're talking about'. Interaction has therefore become a major aspect of awareness and plays a significant part in defining students' experience of the practicum.

In category E, 'interaction as challenge', the awareness of interaction is even more acute than in category D. While interaction in category D represented a major aspect of awareness, in category E the aggressive nature of the interaction appears to become a dominant factor, aligned with a strong affective component.

The experience of interaction and the indirect object of learning

When individual transcripts were analysed in light of the above categories and in relation to the categories of indirect object of learning, it appeared that the two 'presentation' categories were associated with the less complex forms of interaction, while the more complex indirect objects of learning were associated with the more complex forms of interaction, with the exception of T12. The most complex categories of each aspect are associated with each other, though in the case of T6 the indirect

object of a position to be argued is associated with questioning requiring understanding rather than with challenge.

The relationships between ways of experiencing interaction and the indirect objects of learning are summarised in Table Four.

Table 4. Interaction and the indirect object of learning

Interaction	Indirect object			Sub-totals
	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	
One-way	4	1		5
Questioning leading to elaboration	1	1		2
Discussion	2		1	3
Questioning requiring understanding			2	2
Challenge				2
Sub-totals	7	2	3	15

Note. The numbers in this table refer to individual students. As noted on page 140, the alignment of students with categories was straightforward.

These relationships can be expressed more simply by collapsing some of the categories of description of the ways of experiencing interaction. It was noted earlier that categories D and E stand in contrast to the preceding categories A-C. If categories A-C are combined, the simplified Table Five summarises the relationships between the

ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning and the ways of experiencing interaction.

Table 5. Ways of experiencing interaction and the indirect object of learning

	Presentation <i>per se</i> or Presentation for others	Understanding	A position to be argued
Categories A-C	I		
Category D		II	
Category E			III

According to this simplified outcome space:

- I. The indirect object of study is presentation *per se* or presentation for others. The student shows no awareness of interaction with the audience.
- II. The indirect object of study is understanding. The experience of interaction is now of questioning which requires the development of understanding.
- III. The indirect object of study is a position to be argued. Interaction is now experienced as challenge.

Expressed even more simply, students who have an essentially reproductive indirect object of learning experience interaction as having little impact, while students for whom the indirect object of learning is associated with understanding and developing a position to be argued experience interaction as having a high impact.

Affective Aspects of the Practicum

The interviews for this study did not seek explicitly to explore students' feelings in relation to the practicum. However, it is well recognised that students often experience considerable anxiety in relation to oral assessment (see, for example, Barley, Fuller, & Hopkins, 1990; Glass, Arnkoff, Smith, Oleshansky, & Hedges, 1995; Green, Evans, & Ingersoll, 1967), so it is probably not surprising that the students in this study described their awareness of their feelings associated with the practicum.

Four affective categories were identified from the interview transcripts:

- A. the absence of anxiety,
- B. a fear of appearing foolish,
- C. anxiety, and
- D. a heightened awareness of self.

A. The absence of anxiety

Public speaking is well known for its capacity to induce anxiety, and, as noted above, numerous studies of anxiety in oral assessment have been reported. However, it is also possible for students to *not* experience anxiety in the context of the practicum. The following excerpts illustrate this clearly:

I don't find it stressful *per se*. (4:16)

I didn't feel threatened or anything like that. (9:7)

I guess we're learning to speak to peers on a topic so it's a bit like public speaking but it's not. I don't feel the pressure or the nerves that I might feel if I was standing up at a microphone speaking to a room of peers. (5:7)

Students may associate the absence of anxiety with the relaxed nature of the group:

Our cluster meetings have always been very non-threatening and the whole course I've found has been non-threatening ... (9:5)

... I wasn't particularly concerned about or wound up about it. It was a very comfortable group of people. (10:6)

It was never a sort of worry about performing in front of anyone or anything like that. It was a very friendly sort of situation. (11:7)

I've known these other people quite some time, so they know me so that when we present to each other it is a fairly relaxed. I mean people take it seriously ... but it's a very relaxed thing ... (13:11)

B. A fear of appearing foolish

In category B, students feel some concern and are not relaxed, but neither are they anxious. They report an awareness of their feelings and are worried that they will seem foolish in front of their peers if they do not perform adequately.

In preparing for the practicum, students may be partly motivated by the fear of seeming foolish in front of their peers if they are not adequately prepared:

I'm careful what I (say) and I don't want to appear foolish ... in their eyes. (2:6)

I don't want to look foolish in front of the group. (2:7)

I was very concerned about picking something that I could make sense of and not sound too stupid when I was talking about it. (12: 7)

... you try a little bit harder in a way and so you don't come across as being a bit silly and not knowing what you're talking about. (12:10)

C. Anxiety

Category C involves a strong feeling of anxiety. The level of feeling seems much higher than the concern of category B. The references to nervousness make it clear that it can be a major factor in a student's experience of the practicum:

Terribly nervous, although it never shows. I'm terribly nervous — shaking — I can't hold the page. I don't know — I just don't like it. (1:1)

I was dreadfully nervous. (12:7)

D. A heightened awareness of self

While categories B and C of necessity involve a degree of self-awareness, they are concerned with an awareness of specific feelings. Category D involves a more global awareness of oneself and one's presence in the practicum situation.

This awareness may be referred to as a sense of 'being seen' as the focus of attention:

Well I'm an introvert to start with. I don't like being the centre of attention ...
(1:1)

When you're in the practicum situation and they're looking at you and sitting around you, you can see the reaction straight away. (3:11)

You're more on show. (12:11)

The sense of self-awareness may be expressed as a close relationship between oneself and the material being presented such that students have a strong awareness of themselves in relation to the content:

... it's directly associated with you. (1:1)

[Of the spoken words] They're more heavily linked to you. (1:1)

The only difference would be for the practicum I'm thinking again more personally. (2:4)

I do feel the authenticity aspect of it was an important one ... There's probably still an essence of that not so authentic part in the written papers. (6:1)

Finally, one student described a simple rush of excitement:

My adrenalin just goes through ... I'm completely fired up and stirred up ...
(3:12)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

The hierarchical nature of the affective categories of response to the practicum is not as clear as with the previous categories. While the level of affect increases from category A to category C, the final two categories may be at a similar level.

Category A, 'the experience of an absence of anxiety', may be described as representing a low level of affect.

Category B, 'a fear of appearing foolish' recognises an affective aspect to the practicum. There is an awareness of affective response, but the feeling is not described as particularly strong.

Category C, 'anxiety', represents an affective response that is significantly higher than that of category D.

Category D, 'a heightened awareness of self', also represents a high level of affect. The level of affect seems similar to that of category C, though the nature of the feelings is somewhat different, involving a heightened sense of excitement or arousal, a sense of being the focus of attention, or a sense of one's relationship to what one is presenting.

Affective responses and the indirect object of learning

As was done in the previous sections of this chapter, the affective responses were considered in relation to students' indirect objects of learning. Table Six relates the affective aspect of the practicum to the students' indirect objects of learning.

The result of this process suggests a strong relationship between the indirect object of learning and the affective aspects of the practicum. Simply expressed, where the indirect object is essentially reproductive, that is, a presentation (whether '*per se*' or 'for others'), the affective aspect is less complex or intense, and where the indirect object is essentially transformative and requires understanding, the affective aspect is more intense. This is particularly so if we consider the affective categories as essentially

involving either an absence of anxiety or the presence of feelings. Four categories of relationship could be described:

- A. the presentation *per se* with no anxiety,
- B. the presentation for others with no anxiety,
- C. understanding, associated with a fear of seeming foolish, and
- D. a position to be argued, associated with self-awareness and anxiety.

Table 6. Affective responses and the indirect object of learning

Affective response	Indirect object				Sub-totals
	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	Position to be argued	
No anxiety	7	2			9
Fear of seeming foolish			0	0	0
Anxiety			1	0	1
Self-awareness			2	3	5
Sub-totals	7	2	3	3	15

Note. The numbers in this table refer to individual students. As noted on page 140, the alignment of students with categories was straightforward.

The association of the indirect object of learning could be expressed more simply as two categories:

- I. a reproductive intention (through a presentation *per se* or for others), associated with an absence of anxiety, and

- II. a transformative intention (incorporating understanding and a position to be argued), associated with a significant affective response.

This simplified pair of categories is illustrated by Table Seven.

Table 7. Ways of experiencing the affective aspect and the indirect object of learning: a simplified outcome space

	Presentation <i>per se</i> or presentation for others	Understanding or a position to be argued
No anxiety	I	
Heightened affect		II

Audience

One of the aspects of the practicum that would appear to be significant is that it is conducted in ‘cluster groups’ of peers who constitute the audience and play a part in assessing the student’s performance. The analysis of the interview transcripts suggest that students experience the audience of the practicum in quite different ways:

- A. as passive recipients, with little role in the student’s awareness,
- B. as motivators for the student to do the work,
- C. as judges of whether the work has been done or of its quality, and
- D. as adversaries.

A. Audience as passive recipients

Within this category, the audience has little impact on the student. The audience is not seen as initiating interaction and the anticipated presence of the audience is seen as having a limited impact on the student's preparation. However the audience is seen as playing some role — it may provide non-verbal feedback to the student, or it may be required to respond to questions from the student:

... you get immediate feedback in just the way they're looking or they're sleeping. (4:15)

You can ask a question of your audience in order to see if you are getting a response ... (4:14)

If the audience is not seen as actively involved but requiring direct questioning, it is not surprising that their role might be seen as passive recipients:

... I was just trying to give them the benefit of my reading ... (9:7)

I suppose in some respects they were on the receiving end. (13:8)

B. Audience as motivators

The audience may be seen to function as a motivating force — their presence drives the student to do the work. One student described this as a clever tactic planned by the course coordinators:

... there's commitment to the group which made me say "You've got to be prepared." (8:3)

[the practicum] gives you that little bit of push to do it and come to grips with it and make some sense of it to others so the idea of the meetings ... that's absolutely indispensable. I reckon you wouldn't do it without that. (11:5)

What effect did the cluster groups have on your learning?

Well it sort of forced me to do the work in a way, and plus not to let the other members down ... (12:6)

I've got a major practicum ... that had to be done *for the group* [emphasis added]. (15:1)

I think it's very good psychology because you're trying to do something for the others in the group. (15:6)

I think there is the subtle pressure because you're there with the others ...
(15:11)

C. Audience as judges

The audience can be seen to act as a formal check that the work has been done:

I see the main purpose to show the group what you've studied and what you've learnt and also it's like an evaluation thing. They are checking up on you that you've done it. (5:7)

The audience's role as judge may be less formal, but nevertheless powerful as they are seen to form opinions about the quality of the practicum:

I think it becomes obvious to the listener that this has been an exercise — do they really know what they're talking about? (8:6)

... you're with people who are teaching all the time ... so when you've got other teachers in the room you obviously feel that ... they can critique what you're doing. (14:4)

The presence of the audience may act on the student's conscience, so that they try to perform well so as not to let the audience down:

... you felt a sense of responsibility to have to do things properly so we all wanted to do the right thing by everyone else ... (12:10)

The perception of the audience as judge is also highlighted by the expressions of concern about feeling foolish that were noted in the preceding section. It is not necessary to repeat these here, but it is simply noted that the fear of appearing foolish is obviously a fear of appearing foolish *to the audience*.

A variation that can be noted here is the view of the audience as the provider of immediate feedback:

I don't always know what I'm going to say until it happens because you're waiting for the person to ask a question or for people to raise their eyebrows or there's that non-verbal language that tells you what to say next. (5:8)

... you're also aware of whether you've lost them or you haven't and you have a fairly good idea of whether this is a stinker ... (4:14)

E. Audience as adversaries

This category, in which the audience is perceived as the object of confrontation, involves an acute sense of the audience in the student's awareness. This may lead to a wariness of the audience, so that the student proceeds with a definite purpose to express his or her views, but aware of the potential for a powerful reaction from the audience:

When it's verbal, people often take it as an attack. (1:6)

... is it going to make them angry? (1:9)

But you're very aware of other people, or how controversial an issue is, and how that's going to affect other people. (1:9)

... was I really going to upset them? (3:9)

The confrontation is not necessarily negative. The student may be aware of the audience as a group they are seeking to persuade as powerfully as possible, in which case the audience in fact partly represents the very purpose of the practicum:

... my adrenalin just goes through because I'm trying to convince these people that what I discover and what I have written is of great value to each one ...
(3:12)

I've really wanted to convince people. (6:1)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

The above categories express increasingly important roles for the audience in the students' awareness:

- In category A, the audience is almost incidental.
- In category B, the audience provides a purpose for the practicum but this does not necessarily entail an active role.
- In category C, the audience has an active role which impacts significantly on the student.
- In category D, the student is vigorously engaged with the audience.

The experience of audience and the indirect object of learning

Considering the students' experiences of audience in relation to their indirect object of learning suggests the following:

- The experience of audience as passive recipients is associated exclusively with the practicum as a presentation.
- The experience of audience as motivators tends to be associated with the practicum as a presentation though for one student it was associated with the practicum as requiring understanding.
- The experience of audience as judges is associated only with the more complex indirect objects of understanding and a position to be argued.
- The most category of experience of audience as adversaries is associated with the most complex category of indirect object of a position to be argued.

In summary, increasingly complex ways of experiencing audience are associated with increasingly complex ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning.

The relationship between ways of experiencing the audience and the indirect object of learning is presented in Table Eight.

Table 8. Ways of experiencing the audience and the indirect object of learning

Audience	Indirect object				Sub-totals
	<i>Presentation per se</i>	<i>Presentation for others</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Position to be argued</i>	
Passive recipients	4	2			6
Motivators	2	0	1		3
Judges	1		2	1	4
Adversaries				2	2
Sub-totals	7	2	3	3	15

Note. The numbers in this table refer to individual students. As noted on page 140, the alignment of students with categories was straightforward.

The pattern expressed in Table Eight suggests a simpler set of relationships:

- I. Where the practicum is seen as a presentation, the audience is seen as passive recipients or motivators, with the exception of one student.
- II. Where the practicum is seen in terms of understanding or a position to be argued, the audience's role is more involved as either judges or adversaries.

This pattern is expressed in Table Nine.

Table 9. Ways of experiencing the audience and the indirect object of learning: a simplified outcome space

	Presentation <i>per se</i> or presentation for others	Understanding or a position to be argued
Audience as passive recipients or motivators	I	
Audience as judges or adversaries		II

Comparing Oral and Written Assessment

The final aspect of students' experience of oral assessment that was identified is concerned with comparisons between oral and written assessment. Four categories of comparison were identified:

- A. the written assignment as more demanding than the practicum,
- B. the written assignment and the practicum as similar,
- C. the practicum as having some limited advantages, and
- D. the practicum as a richer form of assessment than the written assignment.

A. The written assignment as more demanding than the practicum

According to this category, the written assignment is seen as more demanding and time consuming than the oral, either because the written assignment is considered to be assessed by a more knowledgeable person (whereas the practicum included a component of peer assessment), or because the written format, compared to the oral format, does not allow clarification or elaboration of points that must therefore be adequately expressed in the first instance:

I find it easier to know what I'm doing with an oral ... I make a little bit more sure that I know what I'm talking about in the written piece because I'm sending it to somebody I assume does know what I'm talking about. (14:4)

I probably will elaborate a lot more [with the written assignment]. (4:15)

[The written assignments] probably take more time because ... you have to be complete because somebody out there's going to be reading it and they're not going to know what my notes mean ... I would have spent a lot more time working on it. (5:11)

I think the oral's easier because it doesn't involve producing a polished written document. (10:11)

With the oral ... the information is given out and then there's a time and space limit to the whole thing. Whereas with the written the person has time to assimilate and see what you've said and has time to marshal their arguments or their comments because they can look at it again and again and again if they choose to, whereas an oral, once it's out, it's done, it's finished and those words evaporate. (14:17)

B. The written assignment and the practicum as similar

According to this category, the written assignment and the practicum are seen as similar, with no differentiation being made with respect to any aspect of the student's experiences of each. This may be expressed as a global similarity, or similarities in planning, preparation or learning:

I think I learn pretty well equally [from the practicum and the written assignment]. (5:13)

Well there's not a great deal of difference. (8:7)

They're similar ... (10:10)

I think they both have the same sort of planning and format. (9:10)

I don't think the reading itself is any different ... I haven't found that I've approached (the practicum) differently. (13:9)

C. The practicum as having some limited advantages

This category involves seeing the practicum as being different in small ways to the written assignment. The difference is limited to one or two points and is not emphasised as a major aspect of the student's experience of the two forms of assessment:

I always reckon there's a little bit more pressure (in the oral) ... the real test is when you have to talk about it so I always saw the practicum as something where you were more open to examination ... (11:10)

I think the written assignment was more personal. (15:11)

D. The practicum as a richer form of assessment than the written assignment

While category C involves seeing some difference, category D involves seeing the practicum as a significantly richer form. This may be expressed in terms of the preparation required, the sense of engagement with the subject, and the level of understanding required. The practicum can also be seen as more demanding, more personal, more intense, and as leading to more or better learning.

This category refers to the practicum as a 'richer' format, not just because it can be seen as qualitatively better in certain specific ways, but because in comparing the two formats, many students described multiple differences, with the practicum being seen to be a richer format on a number of dimensions. Consequently, the following illustrative excerpts contain a number of utterances from each of the students quoted. These utterances are grouped and boxed to emphasise the multiple ways in which the practicum can be seen as the richer form of assessment.

T2. According to the comparative utterances of this student, the practicum is more personal, involves more preparation, demands more understanding, and results in better learning.

More preparation

Whereas if it was a written assignment ... I'd think "It doesn't matter, they won't ask me anyway". I'd just put it in and I wouldn't go to as much trouble as the practicum.

(2:2)

I would prepare it much as I would an assignment... However I'm always conscious of the fact that during the presentation people may ask me questions about it. So rather than just handing it in I know that I've got to present it and if there's some areas that some questions that are left hanging, there may be questions that are raised in the cluster group. So I suppose I try to bring things to some conclusion. (2:1)

I find that it allows me to get fairly detailed knowledge about a particular area and then to talk about it in front of our cluster group and it's almost a reinforcing of the written word. (2:1)

I'm a lot better prepared. The assignment I'm a bit, 'Near enough is good enough' because I can just put it on paper and hand it in, whereas with the practicum, because it's a presentation, you're just more conscious of having to justify what you write there and to say it to others. Yeah, I'm a lot better prepared and I learn a lot more from the

practicum that I do from the assignments. (2:9)

The assignments take me less time because I can just say “Yeah that’ll do, I’ll put it on paper, that’s OK”, whereas with the practicums I’ve gone to a lot more trouble. (2:9)

More personal

I would probably do [the written assignment] more from a theoretical point of view and I wouldn’t be as personal. (2:5)

The only difference would be for the practicum I’m thinking more personally. (2:4)

What I’d put on paper for a practicum is more my own words. (2:5)

I also include a lot more of my own thoughts in [the practicum] ... I have my own questions to raise. Now a formal written assignment ... tends to be more theoretical and you can raise questions but they more come out of your reading whereas the questions I raise [in the practicum] can be not so formal ... or can be more of my own personal reflection because I am going to be discussing it with the group. (2:2)

... with the practicum ... I think, “Yes, that’s what I’m thinking. I want to share that with the group”, whereas with the written assignment it’s a little less personal because I’m just sharing it with a marker. (2:5)

More understanding

I think I need a better understanding of it if I'm going to then present rather than to write it and hand it in and that's the end of the story. I think that extra step of presenting it makes you understand it even more ... When there's a presentation involved there is pressure ... to really know what you're talking about and to be thoroughly prepared for that. (2: 3)

In the written word, I would just put it down and think "I really don't understand this anyway but I'll just quote from the book and put it in". I wouldn't do that in a practicum because I'd be worried someone would ask me "Well what do you mean by that and what do you think about it. Do you really agree with that?" So the challenge to your written and spoken word is there, whereas in a written assignment you can remain quite remote from what you write. It just gets handed in. No-one comes and challenges you and says "You used that quote but ... is that what you really mean, or do you really understand what it says anyway?" You know? So you can fill it out with a bit of a quote. You can almost cheat a bit, you know. (2:5)

It just has that step between what you prepare and what you hand in. Having to present it, you really have to learn what you are talking about and have a fairly clear idea in your mind of where you're going. And I think it's very good experience for people to have to speak about topics and discuss and justify what they've put there, explain more fully if it's not fully explained, that sort of thing. (2:9)

More learning

I've learnt a lot more in the practicums. (2:2)

More ownership

I own the words I speak more than I own the words I write. (2:9)

I can put the words on paper that I write and hand it in and think "That was the biggest load of rubbish" and make it sound good even though I don't believe it but it's very difficult to do that if you're, particularly as, like, we've got to know one another over the year and if I take the girl who comes in, we've got to know her more, I'm sure she would pick up whether I was being genuine or not. (2:9)

I'd have much more ownership of the words that I say than the words that I write. You can write anything on paper and hand it in. Who's really going to know, you know? It's true. Whereas when you actually have to say it and maybe there's a discussion about it, you can often get shown up — "Is that what you really think?" (2:10)

T6. For this student, the practicum was more 'authentic', required more understanding, led to higher quality learning, entailed a deeper level of engagement, and a deeper level of understanding.

More authentic

It was much more authentic ... (6:1)

Higher quality learning

I think you do more genuine learning when you're going to talk to peers than you do when you're going to write a paper where you can do some pseudo-learning and you can often get away with it. (6:2)

Deeper engagement

I was engaged very much more in the work that I was doing if I was going to do an oral ... (6:2)

Deeper level of understanding

Knowing that [questioning] will happen, you have a deeper level of understanding — more of it, more thoroughly. You probe the text more thoroughly, re-read it and make sure I understand it versus giving the impression I've understood. (6:3)

T7. For this student, the practicum involves a greater need to understand, a need to do more work, and a sense of responsibility for the audience.

More understanding

I think in that way in delivering an oral paper you do go back and read [the presentation] again, you do try to internalise it more because if people are really going to ask you questions about it, you've really got to have some understanding of it whereas you can

write it on paper even if it's your thoughts. You can write it on paper and forget about it because no-one is going to question you ... (7:1)

Whether you believe it or agree with it or understand it makes no difference I don't think on paper. So for that reason I think an oral does make you more aware of what you've written and what you're understanding is of it because if someone asks you a questions of it, then you've got to have put some time into it. (7:1)

More work

I probably research [the practicum] even a little bit more. (7:2)

Greater responsibility

I think there is a responsibility to really be clear ... when you know that somebody may in fact ask you a question on the spot. (7:3)

T12. For this student, the practicum involved more understanding, required more preparation, led to a sense of better learning and accomplishment, and was associated with a stronger sense of self-involvement.

More understanding

Well to understand something properly and to learn about something properly I think you have to be able to talk about it and not just write it down. (12:8)

More thorough preparation

I need to be perhaps more thorough ... and I had to research a bit wider and find a little bit more than ... the written assignments ... in case people asked me a question. (12:9)

I made sure I read things more thoroughly ... tried to make sure I understood things a little bit better. (12:9)

... you try a little bit harder ... so you don't come across as being a bit silly and not knowing what you're talking about. (12:10)

I probably found the written assignment a bit easier to do and just send it off ... (12:12)

More learning/achievement

I probably got more out of the practicum. (12:12)

When you do the practicum ... you feel a bigger sense of achievement ... (12:12)

Greater sense of self

You're more on show. (12:11)

The hierarchical nature of the categories

The hierarchical nature of the categories of comparison is clearly seen if the categories are considered as moving progressively in favour of the practicum. On this basis, the comparison of category A is negative, i.e., the oral format is seen as having no

benefits compared to the written, and in fact is seen as a less demanding form of assessment; category B is 'neutral' in that the practicum and written assignment are seen as similar; category C sees some positive advantages in the practicum, but these are not major ones; and category D sees the practicum as strongly preferable to the written assessment.

Categories of comparison and the indirect object of learning

As was done in relation to the previous categories of description, the comparative responses were considered in relation to the indirect object of learning. A clear pattern emerged from this, with three categories being discerned:

- I. The indirect object of the practicum as a presentation *per se*, with the written assignment seen as either similar to the practicum or more demanding than the practicum.
- II. The indirect object as a presentation for others, with a tendency for some advantages to be seen in the practicum.
- III. The indirect object as understanding or a point of view, with the comparisons between the practicum and the written presentation being markedly different from those of the previous two categories. As the indirect object becomes significantly more complex, so too does the awareness of comparisons between the assessment formats.

Table Ten describes the relationship between the categories of comparisons and the indirect object of learning in relation to the individual students. Table Eleven illustrates the three categories discussed above.

Table 10. Comparisons and the indirect object of learning

Comparison	Indirect object				Sub-Totals
	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	Position to be argued	
Written more demanding	4				4
Written and oral as similar	3				3
Oral limited advantages		2			2
Oral as richer			3	3	6
Sub-totals	7	2	3	3	15

Note. The numbers in this table refer to individual students. As noted on page 140, the alignment of students with categories was straightforward.

Table 11. Comparisons and the indirect object of learning: a simplified outcome space

	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	Position to be argued
Written more demanding	I			
Written and oral as similar				
Oral limited advantages		II		
Oral as richer			III	

Summary

This chapter has described six aspects of students' experience of the practicum:

- the indirect object of learning,
- the direct object of learning,
- the experience of interaction,
- affective aspects of the practicum,
- the experience of 'audience,' and
- comparison of the practicum with written assignments.

By identifying the various ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning and relating the ways in which students experienced other aspects of the practicum to their experience of the indirect object, a series of patterns of ways of experiencing the practicum were presented.

When the ways in which students experience each aspect were considered in relation to how they experienced the indirect object of learning, it emerged that less complex ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning were associated consistently with less complex ways of experiencing other aspects of the practicum, while more complex ways of experiencing each of these aspects were associated consistently with more complex ways of experiencing the indirect object of the practicum. This pattern, expressed in a series of tables in the preceding sections of this

chapter, is summarised in Table Twelve. In Table Twelve, row 1 summarizes Table Three; row 2 Table Five; row 3 Table Six; row 4 Table Eight; and row 5 Table Ten.

Table 12. Ways of experiencing aspects of the practicum in relation to the indirect object of learning^a

	Presentation <i>per se</i>	Presentation for others	Understanding	Position to be argued
Direct object	Theology as ideas of others (4); making meaning (2); making sense of life (1)	Theology as ideas of others (1); point of view (1)	Ideas of others (2); making meaning (1)	Point of view (2); making meaning (1)
Interaction	One way (4) Elaboration (2) Discussion (3)	One way (1) Elaboration (1)	Understanding (2) Discussion (1)	Challenge (2) Understanding (1)
Affect	No anxiety (7)	No anxiety (2)	Fear foolish (2)	Self-awareness (3)
Audience	Passive (4) Motivators (2) Judges (1)	Passive (2)	Judges (2) Motivators (1)	Adversaries (2)
Comparison	Written (4) Same (3)	Oral limited (2)	Richer (3)	Richer (3)

^aBracketed numbers refer to numbers of students ascribed to each category.

In considering the relationships between the various ways of experiencing the various aspects of the practicum, there is undoubtedly a danger of oversimplifying what is certainly a complex phenomenon. Successive condensations of meaning have already occurred in identifying aspects of the practicum and then categories of description in relation to each aspect. However, Table Twelve does suggest that a further step could be usefully taken. When ways of experiencing the indirect object of learning in relation to each of the other aspects of the practicum are considered together, there appear to be three ways of experiencing the practicum overall:

Category One

The first way of experiencing the practicum is associated with seeing the nature of the practicum as a presentation, whether *per se* or for others. Seeing the indirect object of learning in this way is associated with experiencing the other aspects of the practicum in the following ways:

- Theology tends to be seen as the ideas of others.
- Interaction is seen as one-way, as either pure presentation, or including questioning that promotes extended presentation.
- The affective aspect of the practicum is characterised by the absence of anxiety.
- The audience tends to be seen as passive.
- The oral form of assessment is not seen as superior to the written assignments. It is seen as either easier than the written form, similar to it, or having some limited advantages.

Category Two

The second way of experiencing the practicum is associated with seeing the practicum as requiring understanding. Where this is the case:

- Theology is still seen as the ideas of others.
- Students are aware of genuine interaction in which their understanding will be tested by questioning from the audience.

- Students report a heightened sense of self-awareness, a fear of appearing foolish, or simply anxiety.
- The audience are seen as actively involved as judges of the students' knowledge.
- The oral form of assessment is seen a significantly richer than the written assignments.

Category Three

The third way of experiencing the practicum involves the intention of developing a position to be argued. In this case:

- Theology is no longer seen as essentially the idea of others, but is more centred on the student who tends to see theology as developing a personal point of view.
- The nature of interaction with the audience is in clear distinction to that of the two previous categories. Here the interaction is vigorous and two-way, characterised by challenge and response.
- Students' feelings are characterised by a heightened self-awareness.
- Whereas in the previous categories the audience was passive or judging the student, now the roles are reversed, with the student seeking to act on the audience and have them come to agree with the student.
- As in the previous category, the oral is seen as a richer form of assessment.

6. DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Six considers the results of this study in the context of previous work reported in the literature. It does this by first locating the results of the study in the context of the 3-P model of learning introduced in Chapter Three. The contrasting ways of experiencing oral assessment identified in Chapter Five are then discussed in the context of the ‘anatomy of awareness’, with the term ‘conceptions of oral assessment’ being introduced. The hierarchical nature of these conceptions is established, based on the hierarchical nature of their constituent aspects and the hierarchical nature of related constructs in the ‘student approaches to learning’ tradition.

The results of this study allow a reconsideration of the ‘dimensions of oral assessment’ presented in Chapter Two. Each dimension is discussed from the students’ perspectives identified in Chapter Five. The consideration of the dimensions from the students’ perspectives allows the dimensions to be seen in significantly different ways, while students’ experience of ‘audience’ introduces a new dimension of oral assessment which is discussed in detail.

Since the defining characteristic of oral assessment is its ‘orality’, the markedly different roles of orality in the three conceptions of oral assessment are noted, with particular attention to the ‘psychodynamics of orality’ as these are expressed in relation to the conception of oral assessment as a position to be argued.

If the ways of experiencing oral assessment identified in this study are hierarchically ordered so that one way in particular is more educationally advantageous for students than others, the principal implications of this study for teaching and learning are concerned with developing students' conceptions of oral assessment. The chapter therefore concludes with a consideration of the issues involved in improving students' conceptions of oral assessment.

Oral Assessment and the 3-P Model of Learning

In Chapter Three, variants of the '3-P' model of learning were outlined in order to locate the role of students' perceptions of oral assessment within the framework of the 'student approaches to learning' position. Using Ramsden's model of 'learning in context' (see Figure Two in Chapter Three), it is now possible to locate the results of the present study within that framework. This study focused on the following components of Ramsden's model:

- The assessment component of the 'context of learning' consisted of the alternating regime of practicum and written assignment as set out in the formal course documents of the *Foundations* program. This assessment regime is described in Chapter Four and Appendices A, B and C. The dimensions of oral assessment outlined in Chapter Two are also relevant to the 'context of learning' component of the model, since they provide a framework for describing the particular instance of

oral assessment represented by the *Foundations* practicum.

- The ‘perception of task requirements’ component, in the form of specific assessment requirements, has been the principal focus of this study. The ‘perception of oral assessment’ as explored in this study is synonymous with ‘how students experience oral assessment’ or ‘students’ conceptions of oral assessment’. This component is addressed in detail in Chapter Five.
- The ‘approach’ component of the model consists of an intention and a set of associated strategies, with the former determining the latter. In this study, students’ intentions have been identified in terms of the indirect object of learning.

The 3-P model is re-drawn in Figure Eight to include these specific components of the present study. The model in Figure Eight has also been modified by the addition of descriptors for the left- and right-hand sides of the model. The ‘presage’ factors on the left of the diagram, as noted in Chapter Three, represent those factors that are in place before learning commences and from which new learning will arise. They focus on the teacher’s intentions in designing the context of learning, taking into account what is known of students’ prior experiences and orientations to studying. Most of these factors lend themselves to descriptions in course documents or can be measured in some way, for example by noting previous grades or by administering a questionnaire designed to measure students’ orientation to learning. Consequently they are characterised in Figure Eight as “‘objective” presage factors”.

The right-hand side of the model focuses on students' experience of learning. In this study, critical aspects of this experience include the variation in how students perceive the context of learning, their varying conceptions of oral assessment, and the differing intentions they form as they prepare for assessment. The term 'the lived experience of learning' has been applied to these factors to suggest their dynamic and personal nature.

Of course, while the distinction between the two 'sides' of the model serves a useful analytical purpose, it could also be claimed to be somewhat artificial. The 'context of learning' is more dynamic than the above discussion of the model suggests and most contexts change during the process of learning, just as students' educational experiences are constantly evolving. At any given instant, all factors of the model may be seen to be in dynamic interaction.

While the foci of the present study are highlighted in Figure Eight, this figure also serves to indicate aspects of learning that are not dealt with in this study, with its focus on students' experience of a particular kind of learning context characterised by oral assessment.

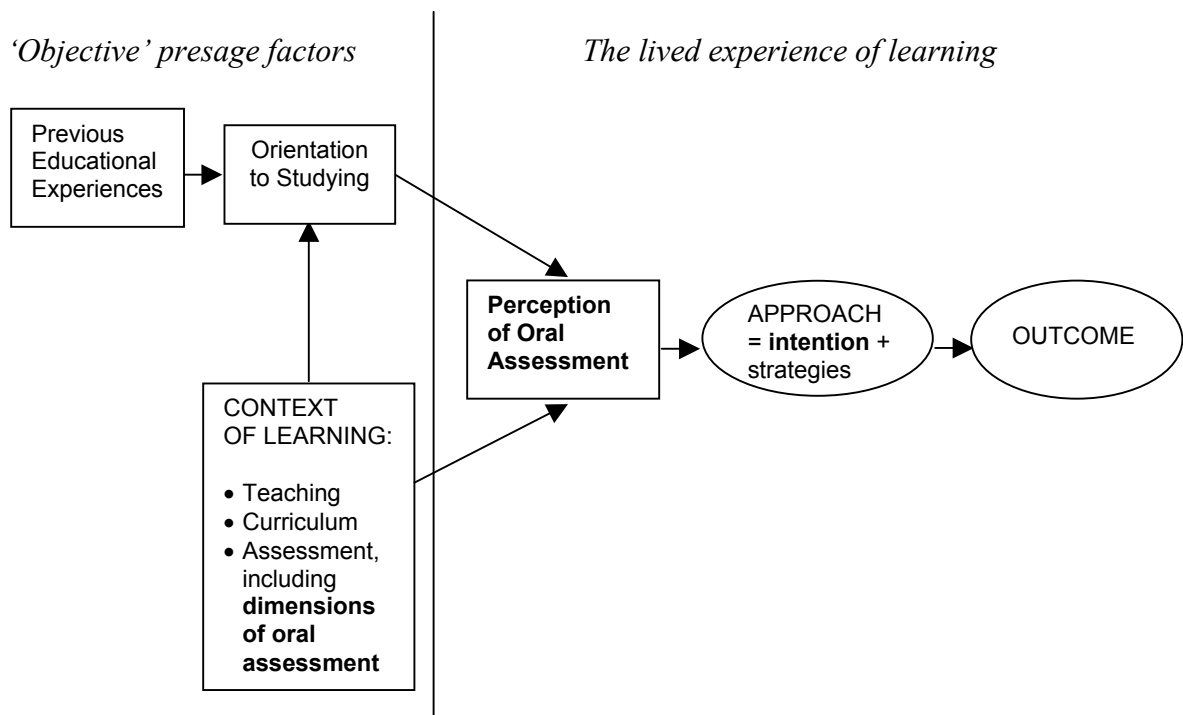


Figure 8. The 3-P model and oral assessment (After Ramsden, 1992, p. 83)

The following sections of this chapter will consider the findings of this study in relation to these foci by (a) considering students' conceptions of oral assessment, including their perceptions of the context of learning characterised by oral assessment and their underlying intentions in preparing for that assessment, and (b) relating the findings of this study to the dimensions of oral assessment outlined in Chapter Two.

Contrasting Conceptions of Oral Assessment

In Chapter Three, the anatomy of awareness was introduced as a way of addressing the question, 'What does it mean to experience something in a particular way?' and hence 'What does it mean for something to be experienced in different ways?' In the following section, the anatomy of awareness will be revisited in relation to the experience of oral assessment and in response to the specific question, 'What does it

mean for oral assessment to be experienced in different ways?’ The anatomy of awareness provides a means of describing variation in experience, while not offering causal explanations for this variation.

The terms ‘conceptions’ and ‘ways of experiencing’ are often used interchangeably in phenomenographical literature. This is notably the case in two of Marton’s frequently cited works. Firstly, in his article on ‘Phenomenography’ in *Educational Research, Methodology, and Measurement* (originally published in *The International Encyclopedia of Education* [Marton, 1994]) he writes, “What then is a conception of something, or a way of experiencing something? (Here, it is noted, the two expressions are being used interchangeably)... It is a way of being aware of something” (Marton, 1997, p. 97). Secondly, in *Learning and Awareness*, Marton and Booth state that “in our presentation, and in other phenomenographic studies, terms such as ‘conceptions’, ‘ways of understanding’, ‘ways of comprehending’, and ‘conceptualizations’ have been used as synonyms for ‘ways of experiencing’; they should all be interpreted in the experiential sense and not in the psychological, cognitivist sense” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 114). Similarly, Samuelowicz and Bain, in reference to a report by Trigwell et al. and following Marton and Booth, note that “their primary interest was in conceptions — that is, the *possible* ways in which a phenomenon (problem solving) can be construed or experienced (Marton and Booth 1997)” (Samuelowicz and Bain , 2002, p. 175).

In the following section, and later in the thesis, the phrase ‘conceptions of oral assessment’ will be used to describe the distinctive ways of understanding oral

assessment described by the students in this study, based on their ways of experiencing, or being aware of, the various aspects of the practicum presented in Chapter Five. This phrase should be understood in the context of the specific form of oral assessment represented by the practicum, and it is not intended to suggest that the conceptions identified would be equally applicable to forms of oral assessment significantly different to that of the practicum⁵.

Contrasting Conceptions and the Structure of Awareness

In *Learning and Awareness*, Marton and Booth note that “a particular way of experiencing something represents a combination of related aspects that are simultaneously present in a person’s focal awareness” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 206). In keeping with this, Marton and Pang subsequently depict “a conception or a way of experiencing something in terms of critical aspects of the phenomenon in question discerned and focused upon simultaneously” (Marton & Pang, 1999, p. 2).

At the conclusion of Chapter Five, three ways of experiencing oral assessment were described, based on the relationships that were noted between ways of experiencing the

⁵ Although the practicum is a specific form of oral assessment, the term ‘conceptions of oral assessment’ is used, rather than an alternative that might express a more limited range of oral assessment types. Perhaps the most obvious alternative, ‘conceptions of oral presentations’, is not considered appropriate since the term ‘presentation’ so aptly applies to one particular way of experiencing oral assessment in the practicum.

six aspects of oral assessment that were present in students' awareness as revealed through the study's interviews. These ways of experiencing the practicum were identified through relating the first aspect of oral assessment that was delineated, namely the indirect object of learning, to the other five aspects of oral assessment — the direct object of learning, interaction, affect, audience, and comparisons with written assessment. The resulting 'outcome space', defined by Marton and Booth as "the complex of categories of description comprising distinct groupings of aspects of the phenomenon and the relationships between them" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 125), is depicted in Table Twelve in Chapter Five.

The indirect object of learning categories of 'presentation *per se*' and 'presentation for others' were associated with similar, though not completely identical, ways of experiencing the other aspects of the practicum and it was therefore seen to be appropriate to combine these categories. Consequently, three ways of experiencing the practicum, or what will henceforth be termed three 'conceptions' of oral assessment, were proposed:

- oral assessment as presentation,
- oral assessment as demonstration of understanding, and
- oral assessment as argument of a position.

Each of these conceptions of oral assessment can be described, to use the above expression of Marton and Pang, "in terms of critical aspects of the phenomenon in

question discerned and focused upon simultaneously”. Before doing so, however, it will be helpful to address the key question that arises from the fact that students can experience a single form of oral assessment in such significantly different ways and noted above: “What does it mean to experience something in a certain way”, extending this to include the question, “What does it mean for students to experience the same thing in different ways?”

The phenomenographic framework, including the anatomy of awareness, introduced in Chapter Three, provides a clear way of understanding such variation. The explanation offered by Marton and Booth which was quoted in Chapter Four will be repeated here, since it is central to understanding the results of this study:

The main idea is that the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which something is experienced can be understood in terms of which constituent parts or aspects are discerned and appear simultaneously in people’s awareness. A particular way of experiencing something reflects a simultaneous awareness of the particular aspects of the phenomenon. Another way of experiencing it reflects a simultaneous awareness of other aspects or more aspects of the same phenomenon. More advanced ways of experiencing something are, according to this line of reasoning, more complex and more inclusive (or more specific) than less advanced ways of experiencing the same thing, “more inclusive” and “more specific” both implying more simultaneously experienced aspects constituting constraints on how the phenomenon is seen. A

certain way of experiencing something can thus be understood in terms of the dimensions of variation that are discerned and are simultaneously focal in awareness, and in terms of the relationships between the different dimensions of variation. As the different ways of experiencing something are different ways of experiencing the same thing, the variation in ways of experiencing it can be described in terms of a set of dimensions of variation. (Marton & Booth, 1997, pp. 107-108)

Following this understanding of variation, the conceptions of oral assessment identified in this study can be understood in terms of the aspects of oral assessment that “are discerned and appear simultaneously in people’s awareness”. However, it is not simply a matter of certain ‘aspects’ being discerned, but rather that those aspects are discerned and experienced in particular ways, both separately and in relation to each other. Each conception of oral assessment can therefore be understood in terms of how each aspect of oral assessment is experienced and the relationships between these ways of experiencing the aspects. To put this another way, these aspects can be structured in different ways in a student’s awareness, and how a student’s awareness of oral assessment is structured is in dynamic relationship with the meaning they give to it. This study has therefore identified structural and referential aspects of the experience of oral assessment that provide insight into the various ways students can experience the phenomenon of oral assessment.

The perhaps somewhat mechanistic process used once aspects and associated categories were established may have inhibited the usual interplay between emerging holistic conceptions and their meaning and structure, since the meaning and structure of the conceptions, in the process adopted in this study, are tied to the meaning and structure of the categories associated with each aspect. To use Marton and Booth's terms, the 'play' in them is reduced and the 'shimmering' is muted (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 134). Of course, the underlying data are unchanged, but the perception of the data will undoubtedly be affected to some extent by the analytical process. However, it seems unlikely that a more holistic process of identifying conceptions of oral assessment would have resulted in significantly different conceptions to those described in the thesis, given the soundness of the process through which the aspects and categories were derived..

The following table summarises the relationships between the referential and structural aspects of the experience of oral assessment as detailed in Chapter Five.

Table 13. Referential and structural aspects of conceptions of oral assessment

Category	Referential aspect	Structural aspect
One	Oral assessment as presentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underlying intention is to produce a presentation. • Theology is seen as the ideas of others, which may be made one's own. • Interaction is mostly seen as one-way. • No anxiety or other affect is reported. • The audience tends to be seen as passive. • Oral assessment is seen as either less demanding than written, or as similar.
Two	Oral assessment as understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underlying intention is to understand the ideas being studied. • Theology is seen as the ideas of others, which may be made one's own. • Anticipation that interaction requires understanding. • Strong feelings are experienced — a fear of feeling foolish, anxiety, or self-awareness. • The audience is seen to have an active role as judges. • Oral assessment is seen as having some advantages over written assessment.
Three	Oral assessment as a position to be argued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underlying intention is to develop an argument. • Theology is seen as the development of one's own point of view. • Interaction is seen as a powerful aspect of assessment in which the audience is challenged and challenges the student. • A strong awareness of oneself is experienced. • A strong sense of audience is reported in which the audience is viewed as adversaries or judges. • Oral assessment is seen as a richer form of assessment than written assessment.

The Hierarchical Nature of Conceptions of Oral Assessment

While ‘presentation’ and ‘argument’ may be equally legitimate forms of public speaking, in the context of oral assessment the three conceptions of oral assessment identified are seen as hierarchical — some ways of seeing oral assessment are educationally more advantageous others, since they are associated with higher quality

learning processes and more complex ways of experiencing the direct object of learning. The hierarchical nature of the conceptions can be described in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen in terms of the hierarchical nature of the separate aspects of the experience of oral assessment presented in Chapter Five. Secondly, the conceptions of oral assessment, and the ways in which particular aspects of oral assessment are experienced, can be seen to be aligned with frameworks that have been developed to describe other aspects of the experience of learning and which are hierarchical in nature.

The hierarchical nature of each aspect of the experience of oral assessment is described in Chapter Five. The following summary regarding each aspect is derived from the discussion in Chapter Five of the hierarchical nature of each aspect. References to allied frameworks are included where appropriate.

The indirect object of learning. The indirect objects of learning associated with Conception A are concerned with the intention to develop a presentation. This intention is essentially reproductive, involving a focus on words rather than their underlying meaning, and constitutes a fundamental component of a surface approach to learning. On the other hand, the intentions associated with categories B and C are concerned with understanding, with students focusing on the underlying meaning of what they are studying. In other words, students are displaying the intentional component of a deep approach to learning.

The direct object of learning. The direct object of learning also shows a pattern of progression in relation to the conceptions of oral assessment. Oral assessment as presentation is predominantly, though not exclusively, associated with a view of theology as the ideas of others, with the possibility that students might make these ideas their own. A similar view of theology applies to the conception of oral assessment as understanding. However, the conception of oral assessment as a position to be argued is associated with the significantly different conception of theology as the development of one's own point of view. The conceptions of theology identified in this study are analogous to the hierarchical conceptions of learning identified by Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty (1993) — theology as the ideas of others reflects a view of learning as quantitative and reproductive, while theology as point of view involves developing a new perspective on the world. These contrasting conceptions of theology also reflect the different stages of intellectual and ethical development mapped by Perry and his colleagues (Perry, 1999) where students move from a position of seeing knowledge as based on authority to seeing knowledge as entailing personal commitment. (It should be noted, however, that this study does not provide evidence that the conceptions of theology are developmental. They may be so, but this aspect of conceptions of theology was beyond both the scope and the method of this study.)

Interaction. Conception A is associated with a limited awareness of interaction as part of the practicum, and students do not associate the essentially one-way form of communication with how they go about studying. In Conception B, the anticipation of interaction in the form of questioning has a significant positive impact on learning since

it seems to prompt the intention to understand, and not merely reproduce, the material being studied. The interactional aspect associated with Conception C involves intensive interaction in the form of challenge between the student and his or her audience, and the need to understand is subsumed by the effort to argue or defend a position.

Affect. The affect associated with the conceptions of oral assessment moves from an apparent absence of affect in the case of Conception A, to a sense of anxiety in Conception B, and to a heightened self-awareness and sense of personal engagement. While anxiety is often seen as detrimental to learning, in this study the association of anxiety with a need to understand suggests that anxiety can perform a positive function in oral assessment.

Audience. While the audience seems to become more actively involved from Conception A through to Conception C, with the audience hardly featuring in students' awareness in Conception A, playing a formal role as judges in relation to Conception B, and being actively involved as protagonists in conception C, it is difficult to attribute educational significance to these roles *per se*.

Comparisons to written assessment. Students' comparisons of oral and written assessment highlight strong differences between category A, on the one hand, and categories B and C on the other. In category A, oral assessment is seen as making demands on students that are more-or-less similar to those of written assessment. Students see oral assessment as less or equally demanding as written assessment.

Category B is associated with seeing oral assessment as having some limited benefits over written assessment, while category C is associated with views of oral assessment as markedly more demanding, requiring greater understanding, and involving a stronger sense of personal engagement.

From the above considerations of the aspects of oral assessment, it is clearly appropriate to consider the three conceptions of oral assessment as being in a hierarchical relationship to each other in which Conception A represents a limited conception of oral assessment while Conception C represents a greatly enhanced, more complex, and more beneficial conception, with Conception B located between these two.

The comment at the beginning of this section that ‘presentation’ and ‘argument’ may be equally legitimate forms of public speaking raises the issue of genre with respect to oral assessment. It might be considered that each conception of oral assessment may be aligned with a particular, and legitimate, genre, that students adopt a particular genre that seems to best suit the topic they have chosen, and that the ‘conceptions of oral assessment’ identified in this study are simply a reflection of genres appropriately chosen according to the particular kinds of topics. Thus some topics might require the student to focus on a presentation of the ideas of a particular writer, for example, in which case he or she may reasonably write in the genre of a book review, with an ‘oral assessment as presentation’ orientation. This does not seem to have been the case in the present study. Each of the specific topics referred to by the interviewees could be dealt

with in ways that could be aligned with any of the three conceptions of oral assessment⁶. It should also be noted that the students' chosen topics were approved by a coordinator so that the topics would need to lend themselves to the overall aim of the 'Foundations' program of challenging students to think for themselves and develop their own perspectives. Thus while it may be possible to align the conceptions of oral assessment with particular genres (though no attempt has been made in this study to do so), the question would remain, "Why has student A sent the topic as requiring a 'genre B' response rather than a 'genre C' or 'genre A' response?" The answer to this question returns us to a consideration of the student's conception of oral assessment.

Conceptions of Oral Assessment and Conceptions of and Approaches to Essay-writing

In Chapter Three it was noted that several writers had proposed a fundamental dichotomy in students' conceptions of essay-writing. Norton (1990), Campbell, Smith and Brooker (1998) and Prosser and Webb (1994) all described conceptions of essay writing as either presenting information or developing an argument. These conceptions appear to be similar to the conceptions of oral assessment as presentation or argument of a position. However, while oral assessment as presentation focuses on presenting information in a way that is based on, and possibly experienced as identical to, the presentation of information in a written format, the conceptions of argument may differ considerably between these genres. In essay-writing, 'argument' refers to a process

⁶ This observation is based on my own study of theology as a 'major' within my Bachelor of Arts degree.

within the essay whereby reasons supporting or contradicting a particular case are examined. In the instance of oral assessment reported in this study, ‘argument’, as will be seen later in this chapter, is more polemical and associated with the desire to convince another person of the truth of one’s position.

It was noted in Chapter Three that Hounsell’s detailed study of conceptions of essay-writing closely parallels the present study. The markedly different nature of the assigned tasks in each study must be acknowledged — in Hounsell’s study, students prepared 2500-word essays, while in the present study, students prepared a five minute ‘presentation’. With this difference in mind, it is nevertheless possible to see the outcomes of the present study as similar to those of Hounsell’s in many respects. The distinction between conceptions concerned with meaning and conceptions that are not arises in both studies. The ‘essay as arrangement’ category in history essays and the ‘essay-writing as relevance’ category in psychology are similar to oral assessment as ‘presentation’ — students focus on presenting relevant ideas without relating them to a point of view or argument.

The category of ‘essay-writing as argument’ in history raises some interesting points in relation to the present study. The essay as argument “pivots upon a distinctive position or point of view” (Hounsell, 1997a, p. 111), just as the ‘argument’ in oral assessment depends on a ‘position’ to be argued. However, the ‘argument’ in essay-writing remains an ‘academic’ rather than a polemical one. That is, it is concerned with a process of reasoning involving the statement of reasons for and against a proposition.

The ‘argument’ in oral assessment includes reasoning but is described as ‘polemical’ because of its more aggressive, even combative, nature. While it appears that the nature of argument in oral assessment may tend to be of a particular type, we may be left to wonder if oral assessment does not encourage the development of the logical and well-structured argument that may be found in written assessment, or if this form of argument is actually subsumed by the polemical form.

Conceptions of Oral Assessment and Discourse Structure

The SOLO taxonomy-based discourse structure proposed by Biggs in relation to essay-writing and outlined in Chapter Three could also be applied to the practicum in this study, though without providing any particular insight into the nature of oral assessment. On the other hand, Biggs’s discussion of students’ ‘monitoring criteria’ in essay-writing raises two points of considerable interest in relation to oral assessment (Biggs, 1988).

Firstly, he suggests that students may or may not write with a sense of audience. He notes that one student with a strong sense of needing to satisfy her lecturer adopted a surface approach, while two students who adopted a deep approach to learning did not focus on the needs of their readers at all. Of particular interest is his reference to ‘grapholect’, a formal kind of academic writing that is used to address a wide or educated audience which constitutes an accepted form of writing for students and which excludes consideration of the needs of a particular audience. Students who equate the oral and written formats and see the practicum as a spoken form of a written paper could

well adopt ‘grapholect’ in their preparation. On the other hand, students who see the oral and written genres as distinctly different are left with no such standard, since there is no clear equivalent ‘oralect’ in tertiary studies or academia, notwithstanding Swales’s observations regarding the introductory lecture and the graduation address as academic genres (Swales, 1990, p. 55).

Secondly, Biggs notes the sense of ownership of an essay that is characteristic of students taking a deep approach to learning. The strong sense of ownership expressed by many students in the context of oral assessment strengthens the case for oral assessment as encouraging deep approaches to learning through students’ more personal association with the spoken word.

Dimensions of Oral Assessment and Students’ Experience of Oral Assessment

In Chapter Two of this thesis, six dimensions of oral assessment were identified from an analysis of an extensive range of literature on oral assessment. It was noted there that this literature, and hence the dimensions derived from it, was based on teachers’ perspectives of oral assessment, and that a survey of students’ descriptions of oral assessment might lead to a set of dimensions quite different from those generated from teachers’ descriptions. This section reviews the dimensions in light of students’ experience and suggests additional dimensions identified from the students’ perspective. In fact, the ‘aspects’ of oral assessment from students’ perspectives presented in the preceding chapter, while being of a significantly different nature to the teacher-oriented

dimensions of oral assessment, serve to illuminate these dimensions in some interesting ways.

Primary content type

In Chapter Two, four kinds of content that are typically assessed orally were noted: knowledge and understanding; applied problem solving abilities; interpersonal competence; and intrapersonal qualities. In the *Foundations* program which was the subject of this study, the object of assessment, from the teachers' perspective, belonged to the first category — knowledge and understanding. The content of assessment in this study was addressed through two aspects of students' experience — the direct and indirect objects of learning.

In terms of the direct object of learning, the four categories of description — 'theology as the ideas of others', 'theology as making personal meaning from the ideas of others', 'theology as making sense of life', and 'theology as a point of view' — suggest different student conceptions of what was being assessed. Certainly all of these can be encompassed by 'knowledge and understanding'; they do, however, suggest different forms of knowledge and understanding. Those students who saw the direct object of learning as the ideas of others would no doubt have seen what was being assessed as 'knowledge', in Bloom's sense of "the recall of specifics and universals" (Bloom, 1956, p. 201). This conception of the direct object of learning is also aligned with a quantitative conception of learning concerned with the consumption and

reproduction of “ready-made pieces of knowledge” (Marton, Dall’Alba & Beaty, 1993, p. 285).

The remaining three conceptions of the direct object of learning are in sharp contrast to the first. While the first was essentially reproductive, the others are aligned with conceptions of learning as seeking meaning (Bowden & Marton, 1998, p. 71). Theology as ‘making personal meaning from the ideas of others’ can be equated with ‘learning as understanding’, ‘theology as making sense of life’ reflects the conception of ‘learning as seeing something in a different way’. ‘Theology as point of view’ could be aligned with either of Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty’s conceptions of learning ‘as seeing something in a different way’ or ‘learning as changing as a person’ (Marton, Dall’Alba & Beaty, 1993).

Students’ conceptions of the indirect object of learning are also pertinent to the consideration of the primary content type being assessed. While students in this study seemed aware of knowledge and understanding being tested, the variations in their indirect objects of learning suggest important differences in another aspect of content type.

For students seeking understanding, no doubt this is what they believed was being assessed. Students who were developing a position to be argued no doubt considered that their capacity to argue a case was at least part of what was being assessed. For both of these groups of students, the ability ‘to think on your feet’ may well have been

associated with what they believed was being tested. Thus for both of these groups of students, what was believed to be being assessed were both substantive knowledge and skills in applying that knowledge in an interactive environment.

On the other hand, students who focused on presentation may have considered that their presentation skills were being assessed, thereby leading them to focus on the form rather than the substance of their presentation.

What emerges from this study is that, from students' perspectives, the 'primary content type' for a single assessment item may be seen in many different ways. In this study, that which students believed was being assessed could have included knowledge (in Bloom's low-level sense of the term), understanding, the ability to present well, the ability to communicate with an audience, and the ability to argue a position.

Interaction

In Chapter Two, it was noted that the capacity for interaction appeared to be one of the principal advantages of oral assessment. The interaction dimension was seen to range from a 'presentation' pole, where oral assessment resembled written assessment in that students simply presented their response to the assessment task without subsequent questioning or discussion, to a 'dialogue' pole characterised by a high level of interaction, and the assessment came to resemble a conversation. An intermediate point was exemplified as involving a formal presentation followed by questioning.

While the oral assessment in this study was designed to be in the form of a presentation followed by discussion, the interactive aspect of the practicum was perceived in markedly different ways, and with markedly different meanings, for students. These ways of experiencing interaction can be located across the whole of the interaction continuum described in Chapter Two:

- ‘Interaction as one-way communication’ is clearly located at the ‘presentation’ pole.
- ‘Interaction as questioning leading to elaboration’ is still presentation oriented, but not exclusively so.
- ‘Interaction as discussion’ could be located at the mid-point of the continuum.
- ‘Interaction as questioning requiring understanding’ and ‘interaction as challenge’ involve the high level of interaction found at the ‘dialogue’ pole. In fact, ‘interaction as challenge’ could be seen as lying beyond the point of dialogue as described in Chapter Two, thereby extending the range of this dimension.

Of course, the remarkable finding of this study is that students’ perceptions of interaction, in a context designed to clearly define (and thus limit) the nature of interaction that was expected, covered the entire range of interactions that were seen to be possible in the study of the dimensions of oral assessment. This is somewhat analogous to studies of students’ conceptions of key concepts in other disciplines, for example in Newtonian physics, where the range of students’ conceptions of motion has been seen to be similar to historical shifts in the understanding of motion (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 81).

Authenticity

In Chapter Two, ‘authenticity’ referred to the extent to which assessment replicates the context of professional practice or ‘real life’. The practicum in terms of its authenticity is an interesting case, since it represents a common task in the doing of theology, namely researching a topic of interest and explaining that topic to others. It would therefore seem to have the potential to be experienced as a highly authentic task, with the student seeking to not merely present a set of ideas, but to effect a change in his or her peers’ intellectual understanding of a topic, and to influence their way of seeing the world.

The ways in which several aspects of the practicum could be experienced suggest that it had the potential to be experienced as a highly authentic activity. Seeing the purpose of the practicum as being to develop a position to be argued, associated with the conception of theology as personal point of view, interaction as challenge, and a heightened awareness of self, all suggest a sense of being engaged in a ‘real’ activity. On the other hand, it was also possible to experience the practicum as a routine, decontextualised ‘academic’ exercise.

Structure

This study did not suggest that students perceived the structure of the practicum in significantly different ways, though the formal structure of ‘presentation’ followed by discussion could be interpreted in different ways. The ‘presentation’ could be seen as a

presentation or as an argument, while the discussion could be seen as uneventful, probing, or involving challenging debate.

Examiners

In Chapter Two, the discussion of the dimension of ‘examiners’ simply noted that oral forms of assessment lent themselves to self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment involving more than one person in role of authority, and the use of external assessors.

In this study, assessment was occurring in three ways. Firstly, the students who were participating in the practicum provided the student with written, evaluative feedback. The student conducting the practicum was also provided evaluative comments on their own performance to the coordinator, who reviewed the self- and peer-assessment reports and provided their own assessment of the students’ notes.

This three-fold assessment did not figure strongly in students’ descriptions of the practicum, with only some students expressing an awareness of the audience as playing a role in assessing their performance. This may be due to the limited assessment role played by the audience and the collaborative nature of the self-managed study groups in which the practicum was conducted. The audience provided some evaluative feedback, but not a grade. The presence of a grading examiner, or any examiner in an authority role, may well alter students’ experience of this aspect of oral assessment quite markedly. How students experience the presence of such an examiner or examiners

would be a useful focus for further study. Certainly the role of examiners is a most important dimension of a well developed approach to oral assessment.

Orality

The sixth and final dimension of oral assessment outlined in Chapter Two is ‘orality’, referring to the extent to which the assessment was purely oral. Assessment could therefore range from the ‘purely oral’ in which no other medium was used, to ‘orality as secondary’, involving, for example, the oral explanation of a written paper.

In this study, students’ interpretation of the oral nature of assessment is so significant that it will be dealt with in a separate section. At this point, however, it can be noted that how students experienced the oral nature of the practicum varied considerably, from seeing it as a spoken version of a written paper, at one extreme, to a highly interactive oral exchange at the other.

This study of oral assessment from the student’s perspective has directly or indirectly shed light on each of the dimensions of oral assessment previously identified from teacher-oriented literature. The student-focused study has, however, identified two additional dimensions — audience and comparisons of oral with written assessment. The comparative aspect is directly related to orality, and will be dealt with in the later section on orality and oral assessment, while a discussion of audience follows below. Before turning to a consideration of students’ experience of audience, however, two

final points regarding the original set of dimensions of oral assessment should be highlighted.

Firstly, this study has emphasised that each dimension of oral assessment needs to be seen from the student's perspective which, in many cases, will be markedly different from that of the teacher. Secondly, there may be considerable variation in students' interpretation of any dimension of oral assessment, such that the whole range of a particular dimension may be experienced in a particular instance of oral assessment.

Audience

Hounsell and McCune's exploratory study of students' oral presentations in three undergraduate courses explicitly sought to examine "the extent to which their approaches to the oral presentations demonstrated and were influenced by an altered or heightened sense of audience" (Hounsell & McCune, 2000, p. 3). The Hounsell and McCune study differs methodologically from the present study in two important ways — it is based on group, rather than individual, interviews, and it assumes that students in oral presentations actually experience a sense, indeed a *heightened* sense, of audience. It was noted in Chapter Three that their study identified two audience-related issues experienced by students — a sense of divided attention, given that their audiences typically included staff and students, so that it was difficult to decide at what level the presentation should be pitched, and a range of strategies that students adopted in taking into account the communication needs of their audiences.

The findings of the present study offer qualified support to those of Hounsell and McCune, while significantly extending their findings.

Firstly, this study identified ‘audience’ as an aspect of the experience of oral assessment that figured in students’ awareness. Hounsell and McCune’s assumption that students experience a sense of audience in oral presentations is supported by the present study. However, the present study also identified a range of ways in which students could experience audience, including differences in both the strength and the meaning of the sense of audience.

Differences in the strength of the sense of audience in the present study are apparent from the four ways in which the audience was experienced:

- A. as ‘passive recipients’, where the sense of audience plays little role in the student’s awareness and has little impact on the student’s approach to the practicum,
- B. as ‘motivators’, where the need to present to others was a driving force in actually doing the work required,
- C. as ‘judges’, where the sense of audience is significantly greater than in the previous categories, since the student is strongly aware of the audience and seeks to produce quality work for them, or is aware of the immediate responses of the audience during the practicum and adjusts their behaviour accordingly, and
- D. as ‘adversaries’ or the object of confrontation, where the sense of audience is acute.

In category A, the sense of audience is limited, and the audience does not seem to figure in how students go about their preparation or presentation. In category B, the sense of audience acts as a trigger for the student's work but does not directly influence how the student then goes about the work, so that the audience remains in the background. In categories C and D, the audience has moved to the foreground, and in category D in particular the sense of audience has come to play a determinative role in the student's experience of the practicum.

While the sense of audience was identified in the present study as a significant aspect of the experience of oral assessment that should be considered in its own right, the sense of audience is also directly reflected in the underlying conceptions of oral assessment represented by the variations in how the indirect object of learning was experienced. Where the purpose of the practicum was to develop a presentation *per se*, the student is primarily focused on the structure of the presentation and pays little attention to the audience. Where the practicum is seen as a presentation for others, the student is dealing with the structure of the presentation, but also has a significant, possibly primary, focus on the audience, seeing the purpose of the presentation as being to provide some benefit to the audience. Where the student is seeking to develop their understanding of the topic, their primary focus is again on themselves and their understanding, with a secondary focus on the audience as askers of questions. Where the task is seen as developing a position to be argued, the focus moves back to the audience which is on the receiving end of the argument. Thus two of the indirect objects of learning are associated with a strong sense of audience, while two are not. It is perhaps

worth noting that the most complex form of indirect object is associated with a strong sense of audience, while the least complex form is associated with the weakest sense of audience.

The consideration of audience in the literature on writing may help to illuminate the contrasting senses of audience in oral assessment. Hounsell and McCune, referring to this literature, note that “‘basic’ or novice writers tend to think infrequently of their readers”, while “experienced writers give fuller and more frequent consideration to their intended audiences” (Hounsell & McCune, 2000, p. 2), giving rise to the distinction between ‘writer-based’ and ‘reader-based’ prose (Flower, 1981). Flower claims that “good writers know how to transform writer-based prose (which works well for them) into reader-based prose (which works for their readers as well)” (Flower, 1981, p. 144) and suggests strategies for effecting this transformation, culminating in developing a persuasive argument.

While the ‘writer-based’ versus ‘reader-based’ distinction seems to directly parallel the self- versus audience-focus noted above in the context of the practicum, the transition in oral assessment from one focus to the other, based as these foci are on differing conceptions of oral assessment, is likely to require a more complex set of processes than those prescribed by Flower.

‘Orality’ and Oral Assessment

The defining feature of oral assessment is that it is conducted by word of mouth. This feature alone is significant, but it also gives rise to a number of what might be termed ‘secondary characteristics of oral assessment’, including the presence of an audience, the physical presence of the student in front of this audience, an immediate relationship between the student and audience, and feelings associated with the oral mode of communication and interaction. These contribute to the oral nature of oral assessment, or what could be termed the ‘orality’ of oral assessment which distinguishes it from written forms of assessment from the student’s perspective. This section will explore the orality of oral assessment by considering (i) the role of orality in relation to the three conceptions of oral assessment identified in this study, including students’ awareness of orality as expressed through their awareness of particular aspects of oral assessment, with particular emphasis on comparisons with written assessment, and (ii) the ‘psychodynamics of orality’ as these are evidenced in this study.

Orality and conceptions of oral assessment

One way of viewing the three conceptions of oral assessment is in terms of increasing degrees of differentiation from written assessment or, to approach this from the opposite direction, the degree to which the conceptions are aligned with the characteristics of orality.

When oral assessment is seen as presentation, students do not describe any substantial differences between the oral and the written form of assessment, and in fact

typically describe the two forms as similar. Ong uses the term 'secondary orality' to describe the nature of orality in literate cultures where orality has come to be dependent on literacy, so that its form is different from that of the orality of pre-literate cultures. A parallel process can be seen in the conception of presentation where students focus on the written form of the paper they are going to present, the written overhead transparencies they will use, or the summaries of written texts that they will present. One student's comment that "I did a summary that I put on an overhead and photocopied the primary source things" (10:3) epitomises an essentially written approach to an apparently oral activity.

Where oral assessment is seen as understanding, the oral nature of assessment is still not prominent. While there is an awareness of audience, that audience functions to promote a process that could equally well be conducted in writing. The form of expression remains tied to that of presentation, though understanding is required to allow that presentation to be adaptable to the probing questions of the audience.

Where oral assessment is seen as a position to be argued, the differentiation between the two forms of assessment is at its greatest. Here the 'secondary characteristics of oral assessment' feature prominently in students' awareness, so that instead of writing-based restatements of others' ideas, the exercise is seen as a personal and oral one:

The course is really spot on as far as tempting you to think and have your own opinions, so it wasn't regurgitating the whole stuff. It was a reinterpretation of stuff, and *speaking opinions*. (8:2. Emphasis added)

Oral assessment and the psychodynamics of orality

In Chapter Three, a summary of what Ong terms 'the psychodynamics of orality' was presented. It is interesting to consider the results of this study in the context of these psychodynamics. It should be noted that Ong's work was based on the orality of pre-literate societies, and that the present study did not seek to explore in any detail the nature of orality as evidenced in oral assessment. Notwithstanding these qualifications, the characteristics that Ong attributes to orality are surprisingly similar to the qualities associated with the conception of oral assessment as a position to be argued. These similarities should be noted as a basis for possible further research.

- Ong noted that the spoken word is associated with power and action. In this study, it has been noted that students can regard oral assessment as having a real effect on its audience, and that the attempt to argue a position is an attempt to generate authentic change in others. Oral assessment is seen as having an impact. As one student noted in comparison to written assignments:

When you're giving a presentation as opposed to an assignment, often the words when spoken verbally have a lot more force than they do when written down in an assignment. (1:3)

- Ong's argument that orality is 'agonistically toned' is particularly pertinent to oral assessment as a position to be argued. It was noted in Chapter Three that 'agonistic' refers to combativeness, polemics, controversy and aggression, factors that were all strongly expressed by one student's statement that "it really does become a battle" (3:13).
- Ong's description of the relationship between the knower and what is known was strongly reflected in this study. Ong's statement cited in Chapter Three is particularly pertinent:

For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known, 'getting with it'. Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity' in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing. (Ong, 1982, pp. 45-46)

Students who saw oral assessment as a position to be argued made strong distinctions between oral and written assessment. Oral assessment was seen as more associated with themselves, more authentic and more engaging. One student expressed a close relationship with the spoken word — "I own the words I speak more than I own the

words that I write” (2:9) — and a marked distancing from the words she would write — “I can put the words on paper that I write and hand it in and think ‘That was the biggest load of rubbish’ and make it sound good even though I don’t believe it ... ” (2:9)

- Ong’s observations regarding the presence of an audience in orality, compared to the fictional nature of the writer’s audience, are reflected in the strong sense of audience associated with the conception of oral assessment as a position to be argued.
- The final psychodynamic factor noted in Chapter Three related the personal nature of orality to the physical production of sound as an expression of the speaker’s self. While this factor was not clearly expressed by students in this study, it may be reflected in the more personal nature of oral assessment associated with seeing oral assessment as a position to be argued. Certainly the comparative statements noted in Chapter Five include numerous references to the more personal nature of oral assessment when compared to the written assignment.

Improving Conceptions of Oral Assessment

This study has not sought to determine the origins of students’ conceptions of oral assessment. However, it seems reasonable to assume that these conceptions are based on students’ prior experiences of oral assessment (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999) and are related to their conceptions of learning (Marton, Beaty, & Dall’Alba, 1993), their orientation to learning (Ramsden, 1992), and their stage of intellectual development (Perry, 1998). Consequently, conceptions of oral assessment are likely to be resistant to

change, and the development of conceptions of oral assessment from presentation to argument represents what Perry, in a slightly different context, refers to as “the most difficult instructional moment” (Perry, 1998, p. 13).

Sadler recognises this difficulty in relation to his own education students when he observes that:

Telling students about assessment requirements often turns out to be fairly abstract to the students. In the past, when normal telling failed to carry the message adequately, I resorted to more elaborate telling. I now try to show them as well. I realize that the same pedagogical devices that I use with respect to the subject matter in the courses I teach make equally good sense with respect to communicating my expectations about the quality of students’ work. (Sadler, 2001, p. 136)

The markedly different ways of seeing oral assessment identified in his study supports Sadler’s approach — students need to learn about oral assessment in the same way they need to learn about subject matter. Helping students to learn about oral assessment, or develop more complex conceptions of oral assessment, requires firstly a knowledge by the teacher of students’ conceptions of oral assessment and secondly an approach to ‘teaching’ about conceptions that directly addresses the processes involved in effecting conceptual change.

Knowledge of students' conceptions of oral assessment is limited, this study being the first to directly consider such conceptions. However, teachers can develop their knowledge of their students' conceptions by considering the sort of questions Prosser and Trigwell propose teachers ask themselves regarding any area of knowledge (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 6). Based on Prosser and Trigwell's suggestions, teachers could ask the following:

- What is the nature and range of students' prior experiences of oral assessment?
- What is the nature of students' current conceptions of oral assessment? How do these vary?
- What do students focus on, or are aware of, when they prepare for and participate in oral assessment?
- How does what they focus on compare with the teacher's intentions?
- What effect does what students focus on have on the quality of their learning?

Having answers to these questions, however tentative these may be, seems to be an essential starting point for developing students' conceptions of oral assessment. Marton and Booth, in their discussion of 'a pedagogy of awareness' suggest that one key to learning involves the teacher taking the part of the learner, seeing the experience of learning through the learner's eyes and being aware of the experience through the learner's awareness, so that "the teacher focuses on the learner's experience of the object of learning" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 179). The essence of this approach is to bring

about "a meeting of awarenesses" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 179) or to create a point of contact between the thoughts of the teacher and those of the students.

The structure of awareness described by Marton and Booth and outlined in Chapter Three suggests that learning about oral assessment, and coming to see it in a particular way, involves students in coming to discern certain patterns of variation in the critical aspects of oral assessment. Those aspects of oral assessment need to be opened up for students against a background of the ways in which that variation can be experienced (Marton & Pang, 1999). In other words, students need to become aware of the aspects of oral assessment, and the different ways in which they can be experienced, as the basis for developing more appropriate conceptions of oral assessment in their particular context.

Conceptions of oral assessment and the scope of this study

The dimensions of oral assessment identified from teacher-oriented literature appear in a new light when oral assessment is considered from the student's perspective, while the variety of ways in which students can experience a single instance of oral assessment offers a profound challenge to teachers who are using this form of assessment. While the study of a particular type of oral assessment has resulted in insights that are both interesting and educationally useful, it is important to note that the three conceptions of oral assessment identified in the study are by no means considered to be a comprehensive set of conceptions of oral assessment. They have been identified in the context of one particular form of oral assessment, and it would seem reasonable to

expect that studies of different types of oral assessment, in different contexts, and with different kinds of student populations, would identify different sets of conceptions, with different implications. The next, final chapter of this thesis will consider these issues further.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarises the approach taken in the research reported in this study, provides an overview of the study's principal findings, notes the implications of the study for the improved use of oral assessment in educational practice, and recommends areas that warrant further research.

The Research Approach

The research was undertaken in two stages.

The first stage involved a review of the literature on oral assessment. Although this literature was written from the perspective of teachers or researchers rather than students, it was an essential starting point for the study since it constituted an important basis for our current understanding of oral assessment. This survey of the literature focused on the attributes of oral assessment noted or discussed in over 80 articles on oral assessment and in a number of specialist assessment texts. From these attributes, six dimensions of oral assessment were identified.

The second stage of the research focused on the experience of oral assessment from the student's perspective. The specific instance of the practicum in the *Foundations* theology program was the basis of this stage of the study. Using a phenomenographic approach to interviewing and data analysis, six aspects of students' experience of oral

assessment were identified, and variations in how each aspect could be experienced were described. The relationships between these aspects were also identified by relating the ways in which the indirect object of learning could be experienced to the ways in which the other five aspects of oral assessment could be experienced. From this process, three conceptions of oral assessment were identified.

Both stages made equally important contributions to the study. The dimensions of oral assessment identified in the first stage provided a clear, simple, yet comprehensive framework for describing oral assessment from the perspective of the teacher planning and implementing this form of assessment. The aspects of oral assessment identified in the second stage from the student's perspective provided the basis for important insights into students' experiences of oral assessment. The value of the approach taken in this research was strongly confirmed when the results from both stages were considered together, highlighting a range of significant differences between institutionally grounded perspectives on oral assessment and students' experience of it.

Principal Findings

This study has explored the experience of oral assessment from the learner's perspective. In doing so, it has addressed a significant gap in the literature of both oral assessment and the experience of learning in post-compulsory educational settings. At the commencement of this study, the literature on oral assessment had not addressed the student perspective, while the extensive literature on students' experience of learning had not considered learning in the context of oral assessment. Since then, only a handful

of studies have addressed this topic, with only the author's work being available in refereed journals or books (Joughin, 1998, 1999).

The principal findings of the study are concerned with the dimensions of oral assessment identified in the first stage of the study, the aspects of oral assessment that figured in students' awareness and the three conceptions of oral assessment that were identified through the analysis of student interviews, and the role of orality in oral assessment. These are summarised as follows.

Dimensions of oral assessment

The first stage of the study identified six dimensions of oral assessment:

- The dimension of *primary content type* includes knowledge and understanding, applied problem solving ability, interpersonal competence, and personal qualities as the most common foci of oral assessment.
- The dimension of *interaction* is seen to range from presentations in which no questioning or discussion occurs, to assessment that takes the form of highly interactive dialogue.
- *Authenticity* as a dimension refers to the extent to which assessment replicates the context of professional practice or 'real life'.
- The dimension of *structure* considers the extent to which oral assessment is based on a pre-determined, organised body of questions or sequence of events, ranging from a closed, tight structure, to an open, loosely structured format.

- *Examiners* as a dimension acknowledges the reality that oral assessment may include components of self- and peer-assessment, and assessment by panels.
- The dimension of *orality* notes that oral assessment can be purely by word-of-mouth, or combined with other media such as a written paper or a physical work such as an architectural design.

Aspects of oral assessment from the students' perspective

Six aspects of oral assessment were seen to figure prominently in students' awareness of oral assessment:

- the *indirect object of learning*, concerned with students' underlying intentions in preparing for oral assessment,
- the *direct object of learning*, concerned with students' conceptions of what they were studying,
- the *experience of interaction* during the engagement, concerned with the nature of the interchange between student and audience,
- *affective aspects* of the engagement,
- the *experience of audience*, and
- *comparisons* between oral and written assessment.

An important set of findings of this study concerns the variation in how each of these aspects was experienced. This variation is summarised in Table Fourteen, which presents the range of experience associated with each of the aspects: for the indirect

object of learning, from a presentation *per se*, to a position to be argued; for the direct object of learning, from theology as the ideas of others, to theology as point of view; for interaction, from interaction as one-way communication, to interaction as challenge; for affective aspects, from the absence of anxiety, to a heightened sense of self; for audience, from the audience as passive recipients, to the audience as adversaries; and for comparisons, from the written assignment as more demanding than the practicum to the practicum as a richer form of assessment than the written assignment.

Table 14. Aspects of oral assessment

Aspect of oral assessment	Ways of experiencing the aspect
Indirect object of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a presentation <i>per se</i> • a presentation for others • an understanding of what they were studying • a position to be argued
Direct object of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • theology as the ideas of others • theology as making personal meaning from the ideas of others • theology as making sense of life • theology as point of view
Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction as one-way communication • interaction as questioning leading to elaboration • interaction as discussion • interaction as questioning requiring understanding • interaction as challenge
Affective aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the absence of anxiety • a fear of appearing foolish • anxiety • a heightened awareness of self
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as passive recipients, with little role in the student's awareness • as motivators for the student to do the work • as judges of whether the work has been done or of its quality • as adversaries
Comparisons with written assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the written assignment as more demanding than the practicum • the written assignment and the practicum as similar • the practicum as having some limited advantages • the practicum as a richer form of assessment than the written assignment

Contrasting conceptions of oral assessment

The 'outcome space' defined by the complex of categories of description for each of the above aspects and the relationships between them suggested three contrasting conceptions of oral assessment:

- I. oral assessment as presentation,
- II. oral assessment as demonstration of understanding, and
- III. oral assessment as argument of a position.

These conceptions are associated with progressively more complex ways of experiencing each of the aspects of oral assessment. For example, Category I is associated with a view of theology as the ideas of others, Category II is associated with a view of theology as the ideas of others which the student can make his or her own, while Category III is associated with seeing theology as involving the development of one's own point of view. Of particular interest is the increasing value students place on oral assessment, so that Category I is associated with seeing oral assessment as similar to, or less demanding than, written assessment, while Category III is associated with a view of oral assessment as a much richer form of assessment than written assessment.

Accordingly, 'oral assessment as presentation' was seen to be a limited conception of oral assessment associated with the least complex ways of seeing each aspect of oral assessment, while 'oral assessment as argument of a position' represented a greatly enhanced and more complex conception associated with the most complex ways of

experiencing these aspects. 'Oral assessment as demonstration of understanding' represented an intermediate position. These conceptions were also seen to be associated with progressively more efficacious conceptions of learning and stages of intellectual development, with the more complex conceptions of oral assessment likely to be aligned with deep approaches to learning, while the essentially reproductive conception of oral assessment as presentation aligned with surface approaches.

Orality and oral assessment

The contrasts noted above find an interesting and suggestive parallel when the conceptions of oral assessment are considered in the context of orality:

- oral assessment as presentation represents a conception of oral assessment in which students have failed to differentiate between oral and written assessment,
- oral assessment as the demonstration of understanding is still tied to a written conception of assessment, and
- oral assessment as a position to be argued differentiates clearly between oral and written assessment and many of the defining characteristics of orality are apparent.

These characteristics, as defined by Ong (1982), include the association of the spoken word with power and action, the combative nature of oral expression, the awareness of audience, and the personal nature of orality.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for at least four aspects of educational practice — the incorporation of oral assessment into curricula; the design of oral assessment items; the preparation of students for oral assessment; and the inclusion of oral assessment in teacher education programs.

Incorporating oral assessment into curricula

This study strongly supports the inclusion of oral assessment in curricula. For students who relate strongly to the ‘orality’ in oral assessment, it can be experienced as an exceptionally powerful form of learning, involving a deeper level of engagement with subject matter and a stronger commitment to understanding than occurs with written assessment.

Oral assessment also has a role to play in the context of self-directed and lifelong learning, and in preparing students for professional life. This study has shown how oral assessment can be associated with a strong sense of personal engagement with subject matter, and an equally strong sense of personal agency in the process of learning. Moreover, oral communication processes play a dominant role in professional life. Indeed, ideas, proposals, and people’s performance in the workplace are commonly assessed in an oral context. Curricula that enhance students’ awareness of orality should stand them in good stead in their student years and beyond.

Designing oral assessment

It was argued in Chapter Two that the dimensions of oral assessment identified in the first stage of this study would lead to a clearer understanding of the nature of oral assessment, a clearer differentiation of the various forms that oral assessment can take, a better capacity to describe and analyse these forms, and a better understanding of how the various dimensions of oral assessment may interact with other elements of teaching and learning. The empirical study of oral assessment from the learner's perspective does not suggest that the dimensions of oral assessment, derived as they were from a teacher-centred perspective, should be modified. However, while the dimensions continue to provide a structure for planning and describing oral assessment, the empirical study of oral assessment from the learner's perspective does suggest a number of issues for teachers to consider in relation to some of these dimensions. Importantly, assessment should be designed so that:

- students are encouraged to develop a personal position in relation to what is being assessed,
- students are encouraged to develop an argument in support of their position,
- vigorous interaction is emphasised, with understanding being probed and 'presenter' and audience alike being challenged, and
- the audience plays a well-defined role in responding to the student being assessed.

Preparing students for oral assessment

A design that affords the conception of oral assessment as a position to be argued is an essential starting point in good oral assessment practice. However, in light of this study, much more is required. While the dimensions of oral assessment provide a useful planning framework for teachers, this study highlights that what matters is how students perceive the dimensions, that they will perceive them in a variety of ways, and that these ways will often be contrary to what the teacher intends. Hence students' conceptions of oral assessment need to be explicitly addressed by teachers, beginning with teachers' awareness of the variety of ways in which students can experience each aspect of oral assessment, and leading to teaching strategies designed to enhance students' conceptions of oral assessment.

Teacher education

The potential for oral assessment to impact powerfully on student learning suggests that oral assessment should be an important component of teacher education programs. A developing awareness of the nature of oral assessment on the part of teachers should help to enhance practice in this area, particularly given the prevalence of oral assessment in schools, universities and colleges. Reflective processes that encourage teachers, and teachers in training, to consider oral assessment from the learner's perspective are likely to be particularly valuable.

Recommendations for Further Research

The nature of this study as an exploratory investigation conducted in a particular context, and the nature of its findings, suggest a number of directions for further research, particularly the following —

- There is a need to research students' experience of oral assessment in different contexts. The present study was conducted in a context that included highly motivated adults studying in a particular discipline, theology, in self-managed study groups and participating in a particular kind of oral assessment involving relatively short 'presentations' to peers. The interviewees were all adults, most of whom were school teachers, and most of whom held degrees. Moreover, they were participating in an open learning program rather than a traditional, face-to-face program. All of these factors limit the generalisability of the findings of this study. It would seem reasonable to expect that studies of different types of oral assessment, in different disciplinary contexts, and with different kinds of student populations, may produce different results that will extend our understanding of students' experiences of oral assessment.
- The data used in this study were derived from a single interview with each interviewee, an appropriate method for a study focused on oral assessment from the learner's perspective. Other sources of data, and other research methods, could be used to study other aspects of the oral assessment context and experience. Data could be obtained from the audience, from tutors, from peer- and self-assessment pro formas, and from students' written notes for the oral assessment and from their

written assignments. A careful analysis of the quality of learning outcomes could be particularly informative.

- Hounsell and McCune (2001) have conducted some research into how students learn to present. Further research is called for into how students learn to ‘oralise’ in a broader sense, including how they develop their conceptions of oral assessment.
- Research into how students can be helped to develop enhanced conceptions of oral assessment would be of considerable practical importance.
- This exploratory study, with its broad focus on students’ experience of oral assessment, identified six aspects of oral assessment. Each of these aspects warrants further, more detailed investigation.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICUM

What is a practicum?

The practicum is an oral presentation of a particular theological topic, relevant to the module you are studying.

For example, in Module 2, *Revelation and the Old Testament*, your focus will be on the subject of revelation itself or on some aspect of the Old Testament.

You should select the topic first (perhaps with the help of your cluster group), and consult with either your mentor or coordinator.

Once you have settled on a topic, you then:

- research it;
- write it up carefully as a paper or in note form (the choice is yours);
- rehearse it thoroughly beforehand;
- present it.

Presenting the practicum

Each practicum consists of three parts:

- 5 minute presentation;
- 5 minute question time;
- 1 minute personal reflection.

Before commencing your individual presentation, put the title and plan on an overhead transparency or butchers paper. Make your plan simple and clear.

Allow the group 30 seconds to read it. Then launch into your presentation.

After 4½ minutes, the chairperson sounds a warning bell.

You have 30 seconds to wrap it up before you move on to the 5 minute question time.

Time limits

The practicum is an exercise in digesting and presenting the results of valuable research within these specified time limits. Its value is in being lean, clean and succinct.

The chairperson is the timekeeper.

Structure of the individual presentation

The structure of the practicum is straightforward. Say you choose to treat the Old Testament Book of Job.

As **introduction**, put the Book into context. Briefly explain something of the literary nature of the Book of Job and why it forms part of Wisdom Literature. That should take about 30 seconds.

In the **body** of the presentation, give a two minute outline of the story. Spend the remaining two minutes on the main theological issues the story wrestles with.

In your half-minute **conclusion**, you could speak of the relevance of the Book of Job for today. You might make use of a commentary like *On Job: God-talk and the suffering*, by the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez.

The plan you show your cluster group before your presentation would look like this:

Topic title:	The Book of Job
Introduction:	- put the Book of Job into the context of Wisdom literature. ½ minute
Body:	- outlining the story - its main theological issues 4 minutes
Conclusion:	- relevance for today ½ minute

Question time

Firstly, let us focus on the person answering the question.

Remember, question time is prime time for the person presenting the practicum. It is an opportunity to think on your feet and to wrestle with issues.

It is also an opportunity to elaborate on a particular point; to refine it or to define a particular technical term.

In answering questions:

- Do not try to anticipate them.
- When asked, pause first, think out your reply.
- Give your considered answer.
- If need be, ask the person to repeat the question.
- If you don't know the answer, say so and move on to the next question.

Above all:

- Trust yourself.
- Trust your insights and gut feelings.
- If you do, you may be pleasantly surprised at the result.

Now, let us focus on the person asking the question:

- Think out your question beforehand.
- Make it short, snappy and relevant.
- Like the individual presentation, questions should be lean, clean and succinct.

Remember, do not expect the presenter to be the expert on the subject. Try not to put the person on the spot by asking irrelevant or tricky question.

The 1 minute personal reflection follows immediately.

Personal reflection

The one minute personal reflection is an integral part of the practicum. So it needs to be just as thoroughly prepared as the individual presentation.

Your topic was the Book of Job. You have just presented it in an objective way. Now, in the personal reflection, we invite you to say what the topic means to you personally.

For example you might say:

- why you undertook the topic;
- what insights you have had in doing it;
- what questions have been raised for you;
- what implications you can see for your life.

Each member of the group is invited to spend a few minutes giving positive feedback to each participant.

APPENDIX B: FINAL PLAN

(MASTER SHEET – For photocopying purposes)

Certificate III in Systematic Theology

FINAL PLAN:

Name: _____

Topic: _____

Introduction: _____

Body: 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Conclusion: _____

Do not forget to include with your plan: * the practicum report
* the completed Feedback sheet
* correct cover sheet

APPENDIX C: FEEDBACK SHEET

(MASTER SHEET – For photocopying purposes)

CORRECTOR: _____

GRADE: _____

Certificate III in Systematic Theology

FEEDBACK SHEET:

(please include with your practicum report)

Name: _____

Student Number: _____

Module: _____

Topic Title: _____

- What are major insights/questions for you from this practicum?

- What aspects of your practicum are you most confident about?

- What aspects of your practicum are you least confident about?

- What are major insights/questions for you from this Module?

- Further comments (e.g. concerning your glossary/journaling or suggestions, observations, enquiries you wish to make)

APPENDIX D: PRACTICUM TOPICS

Student 1	Homosexuality
Student 2	Assisted reproductive technologies
Student 3	Martin Luther and today's church
Student 4	Feminist theology: the use of words to define women's role
Student 5	Images of Jesus in Matthew's gospel
Student 7	The Lima Report
Student 8	Reshaping the future church in Brisbane
Student 9	Macabbees – politics, history and theology
Student 10	Papal infallibility
Student 11	Wik
Student 12	Suicide
Student 13	Jesus and his ministry (Papal encyclical)
Student 14	The Gilgamish Epic and the Old Testament
Student 15	The theology of hope