Approaches to learning of postgraduate healthcare professionals in an outcomes-based curriculum

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Declaration

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

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Abstract

This thesis has explored the approaches to learning of postgraduate students from the healthcare profession. Their experiences are placed within the perspectives of their lecturers and external examiner for the programme. I employ a phenomenological approach, through the lens of fourth generation evaluation, to gather student' experiences as insider stakeholders. Previous research relevant to this topic has tended to focus on exploring deep and surface approaches to learning using phenomenography or psychometric inventories, from the students' perspectives. Research on conceptions of teaching has been carried out separately. It is not clear from the studies reviewed what type of curriculum was in use. Moreover, despite evidence suggesting that learning approaches are complex and vary across disciplines and cultures, this line of research has tended to portray learning as a single phenomenon which can be understood in isolation from the contextual influences of the teachers and the curriculum itself.

Prior to in-depth interviews with students I analyse the curriculum as documentary evidence and interview lecturers and the external examiner to contextualise the student experiences. This pluralistic evaluation allows the relationship of experiences to be understood in the context of external influences. I draw on Barnett and Coate's domains - knowing (learning as knowledge), acting (learning as doing) and self (learning as personal and professional development), as the conceptual framework, to understand and communicate findings from all stakeholders. The main engagement of students in learning is in the domain of acting, with a focus on application to practice and alignment of the learning outcomes. However, there are variances in emphasis within all domains from the stakeholders.

The findings suggest a need to restructure the curriculum model of the programme to better represent the dynamic nature of an engaged and living curriculum for postgraduate students with different learning agendas. A curriculum model is proposed which captures the current external influences of alignment within an outcomes-based curriculum and the characteristics and diversity of a postgraduate student group. Suggested internal influences include signature pedagogies and peer learning. Central to the model is a spiral of learning needs which link with domains of learning during the lifetime of the programme. These include challenges and supports (domain of self), evidence-base and mastery (domain of knowing), communications and application to practice (domain of acting). The study highlights the impact of outcomes-based education on learners at postgraduate level in higher education. It provides recognition to the importance of exploring approaches to learning from a pluralistic stance.

Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the focus of the research, which explores how an outcomes-based curriculum influences approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals. It provides some personal reasons for carrying out the study. It contextualises the research providing background and description of the study site. The rationale for the study places the topic within current thinking on quality of learning and lifelong learning at higher education level. The concept of lifelong learning is particularly applicable for students in this research as they are mature learners, studying part-time with work and family commitments. The notion of learning being influenced by economics is suggested, as are the changes in direction and pacing of learning which challenges higher education in this century. An analysis of the curriculum of the programme is outlined to provide background rather than as a data collection process and a brief overview of the students as participants on the programme is provided. The general purpose and research questions are discussed and the structure and organisation of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Background to the Study

The background and origin of the research emanates from my experience with teaching postgraduate students. Teaching adult learners at postgraduate level in higher education for over ten years influenced me to explore how the curriculum might impact on students' approaches to learning. This interest led me to search studies on teaching and learning. I was particularly keen to explore further a qualitative in-depth approach of this topic. Most of the qualitative research to date has explored people's experience of learning in different contexts and it is this contextualised view of learning which most appealed to me. The challenges of an outcomes-based programme inspired my interest in exploring the students' and other stakeholder' perspectives, (presented as insider and outsider

perspectives), on approaches to learning. In particular I wondered if an outcomes-based curriculum restricted students' learning.

All programmes in the study site are part-time with students at postgraduate level. The programmes have been developed to provide healthcare professionals, working in a climate of healthcare transformation, with the knowledge and skills to meet their everyday challenges. Higher education plays numerous and diverse roles in adult learning through academic, professional and short training programmes (Teichler, 1999).

The study site was set up, as a school, in 2005, in a well-established third-level institution, and is growing rapidly since its formation, increasing in student and staff numbers and developing in its Irish and overseas market. It now has in excess of five hundred students and fourteen staff members, seven of whom have teaching roles. In approaching the thesis I was cognisant of being an insider researcher, but was convinced that carrying out the research in my own organisation had more benefits than limitations. This decision was tested by the Ethics Committee who approved the study. I was aware of current influences on learning by the internal environment of the organisation and the external environment of the market from which students are recruited. Although seen as relatively independent of the environment in the past, higher education colleges are now subject to external pressures such as funding (Kezar, 2001). This study site is no exception, functioning as an education institution and as a business with its own budget targets. These are environmental challenges to which the school must respond.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Universities place a huge value on the quality of learning, even if their perception of what quality learning means varies across different contexts and centuries. The quality of learning may be judged by the students' readiness for lifelong learning, the relevance of this learning to their workplace and the transferability of skills in their career progression. In fact the concept of lifelong learning has become embedded into educational discourse, suggesting a continuum of updating

people's knowledge throughout their lifetime (Schuetze and Slowey, 2000; Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development 2008). Lifelong learning in this context assumes the notion of university students being mature combining their part-time studies with work commitments and family. Many of these students study for vocational reasons with expectations of career progression and improved earnings. Others study for non-vocational reasons and because they study at home they are often invisible and not recognised as constituting part of the student body (Jamieson *et al*, 2009). In reviewing the way that lifelong learning is managed at universities the overarching theme of globalisation is to the forefront. The Bologna process has been an important influence, in particular, at a European level, in progressing the implementation of university lifelong learning using learning outcomes, credit systems, flexible pathways and the recognition of prior learning.

According to Skilbeck's (2001) analysis, nearly ten years ago, Irish universities are facing choices around shaping and managing their futures, acting ahead of events, maintaining control of agendas, seizing opportunities on the basis of well-prepared strategies and reviewing and reforming procedures for taking decisions. Referring to the third-level sector in Ireland, Mitchell (2001) criticised the growing concentration on technical skill development to the detriment of education. There is currently an agenda for universities to sell education and to provide for the market needs of a knowledge economy, thus viewing education as a commodity (Havnes, 2008). Ireland is currently undergoing a review of its higher education system with a national strategy eminent in the next twelve months. As well as political influences on education, managerial concerns demand curricula which are modularised and credit-based and which can be measured for quality assurance and accountability purposes. In addition, modules can be undertaken as units of learning which can be banked for later use in keeping with the curriculum principles of progression, transferability and flexibility (Nash, 1995). In fact a recent position paper on flexible learning calls for a national database of modules to enable learners to identify those which best meet their needs (HEA, 2009).

Barnett (1992) claimed nearly two decades ago that learning was no longer the sole province of the academic community. He argued that higher education was 'big business' and its students are adults and attend voluntarily (Barnett 1990:3). This student maturity, according to Barnett, may affect the direction, pacing, evaluation and assessment of learning. Large numbers of students work long hours, learn in flexible ways and live at home supporting their families so their expectations of higher education are as varied as their experiences and backgrounds. According to Ramsden (2008) students may have limited views of higher education before they engage with it and they often anticipate a substantially different environment from the one they experience. He also suggests that there is a growing acknowledgement that students have a major part to play in the enhancement of teaching and assessment.

Some challenges which are likely to become trends in higher education include the pattern of shaping the knowledge society, generating employability, and development and use of new forms of teaching and learning (Wittenberg, 2008). These challenges will identify the need to prepare students to make decisions in complex settings and to use forward-looking teaching and learning approaches. This viewpoint is echoed by Crosier *et al* (2007) stating that institutions are slowly moving from a teacher-driven system of higher education to a student-driven one, enabling students to become engaged in their own learning. Research indicates that it is not possible to gauge the impact of teaching on student learning. Ramsden (2003) suggests that the educational and environmental context affects students' thoughts and actions and they react to the demands of teaching and assessment in ways which are not easy to predict. So too, I entered this journey with the belief that the curriculum has an impact on students' approaches to learning and can be viewed by them as a demand to be met. Prior to outlining the research questions for the study a brief analysis of the curriculum of the programme is presented.

1.4 Curriculum Analysis

In analysing the programme, on which the students were enrolled, I teased the curriculum apart into its component pieces, examining how these pieces fit

together to constitute the official curriculum. The analysis is an effort to identify the beliefs and ideas to which the curriculum developers were committed and which shaped the curriculum, either implicitly or explicitly. I believe that it is important to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum for the student group studied and to examine if the lecturers' perspectives on approaches to teaching/learning are aligned with the curriculum assumptions. Finally the implications of the commitments and the philosophy of education, underpinning the programme, are suggested. This analysis was guided by Posner's (2004) framework of four sets of questions, centred on curriculum documentation, organisation of the curriculum, implementation of the curriculum and the strengths and limitations of the curriculum (Appendix A). The analysis has allowed me to probe beneath the surface of the curriculum in order to identify its meanings. Although this research has taken a qualitative approach I deemed the document analysis of the curriculum to be important to frame the findings of the study. Prior to presenting this analysis I focus on its historical development and outline the old curriculum from which it developed.

The old curriculum was at diploma level, was not modularised and pre-dated the National Qualifications Framework. It did not include any learning outcomes or statements of what the learner was 'expected to know after completion of a process of learning' (Kennedy *et al* 2007:5). The total theory hours were stated and a list of the programme content was divided under the label of six 'modules'. On analysis the diploma curriculum was judged to contain six lists of indicative content under broad headings. There was a sense of student learning being controlled as there was no context of the type of students that this programme was aimed at. The assessments included a written examination, case presentation and practical assignments. These were all related back to the indicative content of the classes and seemed to be assessed for their accuracy of content and understanding rather than any higher order achievements. The curriculum document of the diploma programme was brief and did not allow for an in-depth analysis of the level of learning.

In contrast the new curriculum is structured around a learning outcomes-based approach, using language which suggests a masters' level of learning. The

rationale for the programme (MSc in Quality and Safety in Healthcare) was to provide healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills to take significant responsibility for managing and leading a quality service into the future. The key influencing political forces at the time of its development were stated as the Irish health strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2001). This identified the need for clinical leadership in the provision of a quality patient-focused health service and the establishment of the Irish Health Services Accreditation Board and Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). My analysis revealed that the curriculum document language was guided by the accreditation body's standards, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which is a 10 point framework, this programme being at level 9. In particular, module details were guided by the requirements for a 10 (ECTS) credit module. In my reflective diary I noted that there were many external influences on the curriculum document and in particular the choice of language contained in it. This realisation connected to the literature on the Bologna process which admits that learning outcomes are not just devices to express curricula. They can represent and communicate external points of reference at institutional, national and international levels (Adam, 2008). At institutional level they have implications for teaching and learning; nationally they play a wider role in linking to the national qualifications framework and tools used to describe it; while internationally they can aid transparency, recognition and comparability by using common reference points and language, bringing a greater degree of 'convergence' (Adelman, 2009:108). My judgement at this point was that learning outcomes and outcomes-based curricula have now become orthodoxy, not just in Europe but globally. My questions is my reflective diary included – "How much have we involved the students in this thinking?" (Diary entry 17/5/09).

In the curriculum of the programme analysed there are some limitations in the lack of an explicit link between the overall programme aims and the module learning outcomes (Appendix B). In addition the curriculum model on which the programme was framed (Appendix C), although chosen by the school rather than the institution, was not woven through the document. It is referred to again when outlining the evaluation of the programme but this is quite brief.

In the second set of curriculum analysis questions the purpose and content of the curriculum was explored. The purpose of the programme was stated in the context of national developments such as HIQA -

> Education to masters' level will provide students with enhanced critical thinking skills and develop the student's ability to challenge assumptions and question values, beliefs and policies underpinning health and healthcare, at individual and organisational levels to ensure a high quality healthcare service.
>
> (Curriculum Document:3)

For the purposes of the study, the first year (postgraduate diploma level) was analysed as the students interviewed had just completed this part of the programme. The curriculum was structured into six modules (Appendix D); each allocated ten credits (ECTS). Each module included a rationale, aim and learning outcomes (the first module is presented as a sample in Appendix E). The teaching/learning strategies included a mix of lecturers, tutorials and self-directed learning. The assessment methods, such as assignments, examination and presentations in the classroom, linked back to the learning outcomes to determine if students achieved the outcomes (see sample feedback sheet in Appendix F). The wording of the learning outcomes was pitched at masters' level reflecting levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. Although not a requirement by the accreditation body, the school chose this taxonomy to guide level nine learning for NFQ. This taxonomy was also used to guide the marking of assessments and for providing feedback to the students. The learning outcomes from module one (Introduction to Quality), presented here as a sample are stated as

On successful completion of this module students will be able to:

- Critically discuss the national healthcare system and the role of regulating bodies of quality.
- Critically discuss the historical development of quality and safety.
- Debate the drivers of quality and safety in the context of their area of practice.
- Evaluate how the dimensions of quality apply to the national healthcare setting.
- Demonstrate a critical awareness of patients' perceptions of service quality.

(Curriculum Document:23)

Each module is assessed once, either by course work, an examination or presentations via posters and debates. Learning is supported by an online learning portal and students submit their assignments using this technology. Assumptions underlying the curriculum as described from the philosophy of the school rather than the institution are:

> Management is about getting things done through people and for people. At the centre of healthcare management is a focus on the importance of ensuring effective health and social outcomes for patients, clients and service users who are often at their most vulnerable when they come to the health service. Thus, at its core, healthcare management is person-centred and has a strong ethical commitment to the optimal use of healthcare resources to most effectively meet the needs of those who use its services.
>
> (Curriculum Document:5)

Here the focus is clearly on learning as doing, a finding which comes through as a dominant theme from the outsider and insider perspective experiences of the study. In addition, the findings reveal the influence of the interprofessional groups' backgrounds on approaches to learning (Chapters 4 and 5). The challenging task of healthcare delivery is also carried through in the student experiences of working full-time, studying part-time and returning to study as adult learners, with many years experience in practice. The philosophy of the school focuses on the teacher as 'the educator, who is a facilitator for learning, has the primary function of assisting in the personal development of individuals by focusing their minds into areas of skill development and critical thinking analysis' (Curriculum Document:7) . Here again this analysis demonstrates the strong link to learning as doing, and, learning as personal and professional development. It also states that 'Teaching is delivered through interactive sessions. Case studies and class discussion facilitate the application of learning and ensure that the programme imparts a theoretical framework of understanding whilst maintaining a practical focus' (Curriculum Document:7). The emphasis on application to practice is stated a number of times throughout the curriculum document. The programme is guided by:

- An educational philosophy which is adult learning-centred. The primary focus is helping individual learners to develop themselves, their organisation and the health system.
- An approach to teaching which is participative and interactive. This means providing the environment for clients to learn from experience, reflection, dialogue, advocacy and enquiry.

(Curriculum Document:6-7)

The curriculum model (Appendix C) which underpins the programme is the 3P (presage-process-product) model of learning and teaching (Biggs, 1993a). This was chosen by the academic staff in the school. Presage factors include constraints and opportunities, such as requirements for professional registration, funding, tutors' expertise and enthusiasm, participants' prior learning and beliefs. Process factors include the selection of particular approaches to learning and teaching, the balance between workplace and classroom learning, whether the interprofessional learning is optional or compulsory. Products include collaborative competencies and attitudes, knowledge and skills and actions in practice that reflect the focus of the course content. This model is further discussed in chapter two.

Analysing the curriculum in use reveals that students attend the study days in four day blocks. This means that teaching/learning direct contact is condensed and students are expected to assimilate the learning and focus on understanding the assessment in a short span of time. The 3P curriculum model provides the structure for evaluation of the programme. In addition to the outcomes of the programme the process factors, such as, interaction, decision-making, approaches to learning and teaching, levels of engagement and so on, are evaluated during programme team meetings each semester providing qualitative data. Both summative and formative evaluations take place on the programme, with end of module feedback and end of year feedback surveys. A modified version of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation provides the framework for the overall programme evaluation (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 – Model of Evaluation (Adapted from Kirkpatrick 2006)

1. Reaction	Learner's views of the learning experience
2. Learning	The acquisition of attitudes, skills & knowledge
3.Behavioural Change	Identifies the individual's transfer of learning to their practice setting
4. Results	These are related to the programme learning outcomes e.g. wider changes in the quality of the organisation and delivery of care

Kirkpatrick's four level model is very much in the Tylerian behavioural objectives measurement tradition and is still widely utilised in the evaluation of skills training programmes (Thackwray 1998). Initially a four-level model (Table 1.1) it was later adapted to include a fifth level to measure return on investment. Each level measures different but complementary aspects of training and development. In essence, Kirkpatrick sought to stimulate those with responsibility for the management of training and development to increase their efforts in evaluating training and development actions. Critics of Kirkpatrick (Holton, 1996: Kaufman *et al*, 1996; Galloway, 2005) assert that his evaluation process may not always produce genuinely meaningful, long-term results. This model can imply that evaluation is a standardised, prepackaged process, which is clearly not always the case.

The fourth set of questions in the curriculum analysis refers to the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the curriculum. The strengths of the curriculum could include the applied nature of the content and learning outcomes to meet the needs of the student profile. The philosophy of education and the teaching/learning styles seem to meet the diverse approaches of the group studied. The limitations of the curriculum relate to the lack of curriculum mapping of the learning outcomes with the programme outcomes, as highlighted by the external examiner (Chapter 5). In judging the curriculum against Barnett and Coate's (2005) domains of learning, the curriculum could put more emphasis on learning as knowing. It is evident from the curriculum document itself and interviews from an insider and outsider perspectives that the focus is on learning

as doing and learning as personal and professional skills. There is further discussion in chapter 6 on how this imbalance can be addressed as a way of engaging the curriculum further. Prior to addressing the research questions an overview of the students on the programme is provided.

1.5 Students on the Programme

There were thirteen students, all from healthcare backgrounds, except for one student, enrolled on the programme and all were invited to take part in the study. Two students declined the invitation. The profile of the group varied with the majority coming from the nursing profession. The time since professional qualification or primary degree was from three to thirty four years.

Their reasons for joining the programme, for the most part, were focused on gaining knowledge and theory to compliment their experience in practice. For some participants this further education was in anticipation of a career move and the need for a qualification. One participant, at the top of her career, was attempting to achieve two outcomes; she felt she *needed something* to substantiate her current role and she hoped that by her partaking in the programme she would *encourage the other staff to think about further education* (Fionnuala). Others, like Majella had not engaged in further education in a formal way for many years, but had thirty four years experience as a nurse (now in nurse management), while, Regina had recently qualified with her primary degree. Breda joined the healthcare sector within the previous three years, having previously worked in the arts, and was hungry to gain the knowledge and theory to support her role in risk management. Other professions which were represented in the sample include medicine, pharmacy and radiography. These students have demanding work commitments and are coping with conflicting demands, creating their individual learning agendas.

1.6 General Purpose and Research Questions

The general purpose of the study was to explore approaches to learning of postgraduate students from their perspectives and those of their lecturers and external examiner. The main research question examined in this study is:
How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?

The secondary questions used to guide the interviews with participants (to gain both insider and outsider perspectives) were:

- How do healthcare professionals, as postgraduate students, approach the experiences of learning?
- Does an outcomes-based curriculum influence students' approaches to learning?
- Does an outcomes-based curriculum influence teacher activity, selection of content and selection of learning activities?
- What are the understandings of students' approaches to learning from the lecturers' and external examiner's perspectives?

This research was guided by a phenomenological approach within a fourth generation evaluation methodology. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with students, lecturers and the external examiner to the programme. Embedded in a constructivist paradigm, findings are presented under the themes of the domains of *knowing, acting and self* proposed by Barnett and Coate (2005). Three significant papers have been published from the study process thus far. A paper on evaluation (McNamara *et al*, 2010) focuses on appropriate approaches for adult education and training programmes. Papers on leadership and organisational effectiveness tease out context issues in the education and healthcare settings (Joyce, 2009; Joyce 2010).

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised in a linear fashion although the process resembled more of a spiral one. This chapter provides the reader with a background to the study

and the study site. The challenges currently facing the university sector, in meeting the needs of students who work full-time and who have complex lives, as adult learners, are discussed. The rationale for the study is highlighted against this backdrop and a brief analysis of the curriculum of the programme is presented. The general purpose of the study and research questions are outlined. Chapter two gives an overview of the current studies and literature on curriculum, in particular, an outcomes-based approach and conceptions of teaching and learning. Chapter three addresses the general assumptions about evaluation research and in particular, fourth generation evaluation. The philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological approach are discussed and the research process followed is examined. The findings are presented and discussed in chapters four and five and experiences of learning generated from the interviews are connected back to the literature. The research question is threaded through each chapter. Chapter six provides a synthesis of the study findings. Strengths and challenges of the research are suggested, contributions to higher education and implications of the findings for curriculum development are proposed. Finally, a curriculum model for healthcare postgraduate students is presented prior to sharing some recommendations for further research and reflections on the overall study findings.

1.8 Summary

In this study I tried to capture the lived experience of the participants in their approaches to learning on a postgraduate programme. I attempted to frame these experiences within the context of their lecturers and external examiner as outsider perspectives. Accordingly, I used the iterative movement of the hermeneutic circle (Hoy, 1978) in the research and in writing up the thesis. This involved a dynamic interplay of the assumptions that framed my original research question, my developing philosophical framework, literature on curriculum, outcomes-based education, conceptions of teaching and approaches to learning. This process includes the effects of all stages of the study on the development of my understanding. This also meant that I revisited the literature through the lens of my study findings.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I drew attention to current influences and changes in higher education nationally and internationally. These influences have had a number of consequences on curriculum developments in the study site, at a pace which staff are still trying to catch up with. This chapter focuses on the literature on outcomes-based approaches to teaching and learning. The first half of the chapter provides a background to the emergence of an outcomes-based approach and to curriculum alignment. In particular, I discuss how an outcomes-based approach is different from other curriculum models. The work of John Biggs on constructive alignment of the curriculum is discussed as a development of enhancing the outcomes-based approach.

In the second half of the chapter the research on conceptions of teaching and approaches to learning which have dominated the literature since the early 1990s are presented. The key concepts are identified and the methodologies are critiqued. My intention is to argue that some of this research has adopted a relatively narrow focus on learning itself. In particular many of the studies failed to bring out the richness of learning experiences of students in their approaches, focusing as they did on the mental orientation of the way learning material is approached. Moreover, they have tended to assume and sometimes over-emphasise the relational nature of learning to explain the activity of the student and the nature of what is learned. The neglect of this awareness of the richness and individuality of the students' approaches is highlighted. The need to shift from examining an individual approach to learning, within the social understanding of where learning takes place, is proposed. The importance of focusing more on the context of learning is suggested in order to appreciate the particular instance of learning within the lifeworld of the individual.

In this chapter I explore these influences on my research design for the study and I argue for research which provides a description of the richness of the lived experience of learning for the student in exploring the research question – 'How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?' I suggest that this experience can best be understood in the context of gaining descriptions of learning from the main stakeholders of the programme, i.e. students, their lecturers and the external examiner for the programme. This argument is introduced in this chapter and taken up in the subsequent chapter on research design.

2.2 Curriculum in Higher Education

In my view, if the curriculum is understood to be an educational means of promoting the development of a student then the conceptualisation of curriculum and curriculum design is necessary. How we talk and think about teaching and learning and these influences on planning the learning experience for the student warrant discussion. According to Fry *et al* (2009) the more attention we pay to the design and development of the curriculum, the more likely we are to provide transparency to our students on how we match up our learning outcomes to assessments and teaching strategies. The literature on curriculum planning, development and implementation demonstrates diverse views on what is understood by the term 'curriculum'. The idea of curriculum has been conceived as a body of knowledge to be transmitted, as a product in attempting to achieve certain outcomes with students, as a process and as praxis (Smith, 2000). It is a term used with several meanings and many definitions. The term which fits well with my view of curriculum, is that of praxis. In this approach the curriculum develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection and '…is not simply a set of plans to be implemented, but rather is constituted through an active process in which planning, acting and evaluating are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process' (Grundy 1987: 115). At its centre is praxis - informed, committed action. The literature varies in its focus on different aspects of the curriculum, from curriculum planning and development in the context of policy and reforms, teachers examining their own practice and

alignment of the curriculum. I will argue later in the chapter that we must actively encourage a dynamic interaction of students as stakeholders in evaluating the curriculum and its influence on learning approaches.

2.3 Curriculum Development

The way curriculum has developed and is understood has changed over the years. It is useful to revisit these developments by summarising their main approaches. The curriculum as product was heavily influenced by management thinking and practice. Theory and practice of curriculum in this tradition was advocated by Ralph Tyler (1930, 1942, 1967). This product curriculum focuses on what people needed to know in order to work and live their lives. Content is selected by the teacher, student learning is controlled and the curriculum outcomes are viewed as tangible products (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006). A major criticism of the product model was that it assumes a passive model of the individual. Yet, Tyler's work is seminal and set the stage for how evaluators viewed programme evaluation over a number of decades (further discussed in chapter three).

During the fifties the work of Bloom (1956) and his colleagues developed taxonomies for educational objectives and these were used as benchmarks in the development of criteria to establish if learners had obtained acceptable standards compared to the desired learning outcomes. This mastery learning style or aims and objectives model was viewed as a combination of the product model and broken down targets for ease of delivery (Kelly, 2004). The hypothesis underlying mastery learning is that if most students can master what teachers have to teach them then it is the task of instruction to acquire the means which will enable students to master the subject (Bloom, 1968). The teacher therefore must determine what is meant by mastery of the topic or subject and search for the means to enable that mastery. This concept highlights the need to determine how individual differences in learners can be related to the teaching/learning process.

The programme, researched for this study, is guided by Bloom's taxonomy for assessment setting and marking. Bloom (1968:2) believes that a basic task for

educators is to take these individual differences into consideration in such a way as to promote 'the fullest development of the individual'. The principle defining characteristic of mastery learning is the establishment of a criterion level of performance which is held as representing the mastery of the skill or concept, assessment of student progress towards that mastery and provision of corrective instruction to enable students who do not initially meet the mastery criterion to do so at a later assessment (Block and Anderson, 1975). However, when applied to group-based mastery learning Slavin (1987) concludes that mastery learning has little or no effect on student achievement. One suggestion for this finding is that the amount of corrective instruction given in practical applications of group based mastery learning may not be sufficient or may be too little too late. Mastery learning has been characterised by Bernstein (2000) as a performance mode of pedagogic practice because the emphasis is on content which is broken down for ease of delivery. Kelly (2004) argues that Bloom's linear model assumes that we acquire knowledge and then, at some later stage, understanding and so on through the taxonomy. I agree with Kelly's argument that learning is more subtle and may fit more with a spiral than a hierarchy so that we can return to understanding from higher levels of complexity such as analysis and interweave modules together in such a way that students can revisit content from earlier modules. Bruner's (1974) spiral curriculum emphasises learning from action and interaction — interaction with the material to be learned, with the teacher, with our peers and with ourselves. He believed that learning is an active process where learners construct new learning or ideas based on current or past knowledge. For transfer of learning to occur Bruner argued that connections needed to be made between different experiences rather than just mastering facts. Much of his theory is based on child development research but he has expanded his theoretical framework more recently to include social and cultural aspects of learning (Bruner, 1996). The underpinning features of a spiral curriculum are that there are increasing levels of difficulty to be overcome and the competence of students increases as they increase their proficiency at assessments and practical experiences (Harden & Stamper, 1999).

On the opposite side of the continuum to the product curriculum, the curriculum as process views learning as a social activity with students and teachers

interacting so that students become active creators of knowledge (Cornbleth (1990). While Tyler in the US was a proponent of a product curriculum, Stenhouse (1975) in the UK was a supporter for a process curriculum. The emphasis in the process curriculum is on principles to be adhered to in the classroom rather than specifying any learning outcomes. It places the focus on developing and understanding the student rather than the delivery of pre-determined content or the achievement of pre-determined behavioural changes. Connections back to these historical developments are helpful when exploring current theories on curriculum. In fact Biggs (2003) argues that Tyler was an advocate of curriculum alignment and an outcomes-based model of curriculum. I agree there are some similarities in both.

2.3.1 Engaging the Curriculum

Research on curriculum planning in the context of policy and reforms has been studied by a number of authors (Cowley and Williamson 1998; Beck and Appel 2003; Hayward *et al* 2004). Other studies exploring curriculum planning focused on teachers examining their own practice (Hausfather, 1997; Spillane, 1999; Peters, 2004; Whitehead and McNiff, 2004; Ravitch and Wirth, 2007). However, many of these studies were carried out in primary and secondary level education settings. Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that curriculum in higher education is quite different from curricula in the basic education system. They propose a general framework incorporating the three domains - knowing (learning as knowledge), acting (learning as doing) and self (learning as personal and professional skills), to provide a lens in understanding and communicating these differences across curricula. Within this framework they identify nine zones of influence that may act on patterns of curriculum change. These zones are as follows: 1. internal and external to the academic community, 2. epistemological, practical and ontological, 3. criteria of truth and performance, 4. managerial, academic and market orientations, 5. local, national and global focuses, 6. past, present and future orientations, 7. context specific and context generic, 8. endorsing and critical orientations, 9. reflexivity and the promotion of self. In analysing the curriculum Barnett and Coate (2005) suggest that one or more of the domains may form the dominant component, for example, in an applied

curriculum such as that guiding the programme studied here, the dominant domain is acting, with a focus on learning as doing. This may be expected on a management programme, where students are required to carry out action related to their workplace. Nevertheless they suggest that the domains of knowing and self warrant some attention to create a balance. This analysis must be considered within the zones of influences predominately operating around the programme. My belief is that there is a challenge therefore to identify where the curriculum development ends and pedagogical strategies begin in our alignment with the domains of acting, knowing and self. Barnett and Coate's (2005) domains are chosen as the conceptual framework for this research in presenting and discussing the findings of the study.

Barnett (1990; 1997) has earlier advocated the need for critical thinking in teaching and learning in higher education and claims that a critical edge is a priceless tool for the professional. According to Barnett (2007:39) the educational process should be understood as a 'space in which students' educational being can flourish'. He is not convinced that this space is offered to allow students to express and develop their voices. Furthermore, Knight (2001) believes that what matters in curriculum design is getting the ingredients—the processes, messages and conditions—right and trusting that good outcomes will follow. In this way a curriculum can be checked against standards and level descriptors.

2.4 An Outcomes-based Curriculum

Although the terms *outcomes* and *performance indicators* appeared within education in the early 1980s the evolution of outcomes-based education (OBE) is claimed to be traced by some back to the objectives movement of Tyler in the early 1950s (King and Evans, 1991; Brady, 1996; Allan, 1996). However, this is contested by Jansen (1998) who claims that OBE does not have any single historical legacy. It is acknowledged that outcomes-based education (OBE) shifts the focus of teaching away from objectives via content or textbooks, to desired changes in students' learning (King and Evans, 1991), leaving the methods of education in the hands of teachers themselves (Smyth and Dow, 1998). I believe

this is not so straightforward. From the findings in this study alone some students joined the programme to attain knowledge on specific subjects. In addition the methods of education are influenced by the size of the group, the experience level of the teachers and the skills of the students. Harden *et al* (1999: 8) suggest that OBE is 'easy to conceptualise but difficult to define', yet, Spady (1988:5) offered his definition over a decade earlier as

> …a way of designing, developing, delivering and documenting instruction in terms of its intended goals and outcomes.

In other words the curriculum is developed from the outcomes you want the students to demonstrate as opposed to writing objectives for the curriculum already developed. This approach presupposes that someone can predetermine what the students need to know and be able to do. I would argue that this is what happens in practice when a new curriculum is drafted. Within Spady's (1988) definition of OBE there are two broad approaches. One approach emphasises student mastery of subject based outcomes and the other approach emphasises long term outcomes for the student's future life roles. These two approaches correspond to what Spady (1994) calls traditional/transitional OBE and transformational OBE. Spady and Marshall (1991:72) claim that transformational OBE is the 'highest evolution of the concept', and is future-oriented stepping beyond the givens of a curriculum to embrace cooperative learning and a commitment to success for all students on 'outcomes of significance' in life. I suggest the programme evaluated here is in a transitional phase between traditional and transformational, as the mix of mastery and outcomes for future life roles are equally important for the student group. In fact some have traced the roots of OBE to behavioural psychology and Skinner; others to mastery learning as adopted by Bloom; yet another claim is its link back to competency education models and vocational education (Mahomed, 1996). Yet, Brandt (1994) suggests that mastery learning is different to outcomes-based learning. With mastery learning the emphasis is still on what the teacher does, whereas in outcomes-based learning the student needs to be self-directed and get involved in self-assessment (Brandt, 1994). OBE linked with competency-based education which was introduced towards the end of the 1960s in America in reaction to

concerns that students were not taught vocational skills, supporting the notion that the learner is accountable for his own achievements (Malan, 2000).

The impetus for the spread in outcomes-based education through the United States and the UK was, in Killen's (2000) view caused by a return on investment from education. Killen claims that the influences came from political, economic and education sources. In some cases the focus was on efficiency and standardisation. Gosling and Moon (2001) confirm that the outcomes-based approach had been increasingly adopted by those in higher education using national qualification frameworks and credit ratings such as ECTS. In fact the overall aim of the Bologna Agreement signed in Bologna, Italy in 1999 by 29 countries (now signed by 46 countries) is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education in Europe. As part of the Bologna Process all modules and programmes in third level institutions throughout the European Union must be written in terms of learning outcomes. They are seen as one of the essential building blocks for transparency within higher education systems and qualifications (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications' Framework, 2004). In addition learning outcomes are seen as critically important in the development of national qualifications' frameworks and for improving access to and progression within education and learning (Bologna Process Stocktaking, 2007).

2.4.1 Advantages of Outcomes-Based Education

Exploring the need for a core curriculum with identified learning outcomes in the discipline of medicine Harden *et al* (1999) outline some advantages of OBE. They suggest that outcomes have relevance as they can help focus the level of study and can encourage higher level objectives, not just rote learning. Yet, this study suggests that some professions prefer this rote style of learning. OBE can provide clarity as it is easily understandable and is not constrained by educational jargon. Yet, such clarity was not obvious to all students in this study at least until they were mid-way through the programme. According to Harden *et al* (1999: 9) it can prevent fragmentation of the curriculum and can be seen as 'glue that holds the curriculum together'. They assert that OBE emphasises accountability and quality assurance, it encourages self-directed learning and is a potentially flexible

approach to education. This focus on accountability is also highlighted by Maher (2004) and is clearly high on the agenda of the external examiner of this programme.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) has been accredited with helping to guide assessment, encouraging participation in curriculum planning, providing a tool for evaluation and making explicit the outcomes for each of the stages of education, promoting continuity between undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education (Harden *et al,* 1999). From a medical perspective Prideaux (2000; 2003) and Rees (2004), warn against adopting a narrow specification of outcomes where curriculum designers and teachers control product-orientated curricula leading to the disempowerment of students. I suggest a return to a product curriculum is a risk here. If outcomes are so tightly set there may not be any room for manoeuvre. One means of trying to avoid this situation is to ensure curriculum development is as transparent as possible. Curriculum mapping can make all the links explicit between the elements of the curriculum, displaying the essential features in a clear and succinct manner (Prideaux, 2003). Futhermore, by displaying clearly these links it will support communications between teachers and students. Students can identify 'what, when, where and how they can learn' while staff are enabled to see their role in the bigger picture (Harden, 2001: 123). Thus the scope and sequence of learning for the student is explicit, links with assessments are clear, making curriculum development transparent for all stakeholders. In the process learning outcomes are matched to learning opportunities, different learning outcomes are linked to each other and assessment is linked back to teaching. The curriculum map can provide a framework for teachers to chart student progress. It can be useful to highlight further areas for attention such as feedback, as highlighted in this research.

The relationship of learning approaches in the context of learner characteristics and teaching styles to outcomes has been represented by Biggs' (1979) presage-process-product model (3P model). This model was adapted from Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) version which was constructed from findings on classroom research. Presage concerns experiences before learning takes place and can include, from a context perspective, relationships with managers and employers,

constraints on time and the political climate. From the teacher's perspective this can include their expertise and their conceptions on teaching. Process pertains to strategies while learning is taking place, for example, interprofessional groups, work-based learning or assessments. Product can refer to subject matter learned, skills and attitudes attained or impact on practice. Work on the relationship among these three components is extensive. It has been found that student characteristics and learning context (presage) can have a strong impact on learning approaches (process) that students take (Watkins and Hattie, 1981; Biggs, 1988; Sadler-Smith and Tsang, 1998) and that learning approaches (process) impact on students' achievement (product, for example –Biggs, 1988; Albaili, 1995; Watkins, 1998; Zhang, 2000). The presage and process parts of the model are particularly relevant in the study undertaken.

Hargreaves and Moore (2000) argue that outcomes which are defined too broadly are experienced as too vague and if prescribed in too much detail, as difficult to measure. Recent discussions around 'threshold concepts' might aid our understanding of the difficulties in achieving learning outcomes where there are barriers to student learning. Meyer and Land (2003:1) compare a threshold concept to 'a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something'. They believe that it can represent a new way of seeing, of interpreting and understanding and is different from core concepts in a curriculum. Without grasping this concept the learner cannot progress. Once it is understood they may even have a new world view or a transformed view of the subject matter. The timeframe for such a transformation will vary. It may be sudden or take a considerable time. Hay (2007) argues that this suggests learning is likely to proceed incrementally rather than as a continuous progression and it is open to empirical assessment. Concept mapping may be a useful tool to capture the progress across such thresholds within an outcomes-based curriculum. A threshold concept can thus represent what Perkins (1999:7) terms 'troublesome knowledge' i.e. knowledge that is alien or counter-intuitive. This type of knowledge may come from a perspective different from our own. In addition to being transformative, a threshold concept can be integrative. It can expose previously hidden interrelatedness of something (Meyer and Land, 2003).

With an experienced group of postgraduate students, such as the sample in this research, there may be many different perspectives emerging.

Entwistle (2005) highlights the wide range of differences in learning outcomes across subject areas in higher education. While clarity of outcomes is essential he suggests that these may fail to communicate the essence of the individual disciplines. According to Entwistle (2005) learning outcomes are affected by a complex array of influences, from student characteristics to the teaching-learning environment. In fact the Tavistock Report (Cullen *et al*, 2002) noted a trend that is a particular concern for science educators. This was a preoccupation with learning outcomes and assessment and less interest in the organisation of the curriculum and its substantive content. They suggest that there is a shift away from mastering knowledge towards the management of knowledge which is consistent with the accountability agenda. With a strong emphasis on *learning as doing* on the programme in this research, it could be argued that there is a management of knowledge.

Equally influenced by accountability of higher education to the public is the view of the student as consumer (McMillan and Cheney, 1996), as customer (Sharrock, 2000; Lomas, 2007) as client (Bailey, 2000) and as co-producer of knowledge (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2009). One of the main arguments against these terms for students is that they create undue distance between the student and the educational process. There is a debate currently around the term used for the student in the study site with lack of agreement on a term. Thus, if students are not appropriately aligned to the desired outcomes of the programme their relational nature with learning may be jeopardised and the educational experience may be ultimately a product rather than a process (McMillan and Cheney, 1996). Students need to actively engage in higher education, not passively consume education as a customer would food at a restaurant (Sharrock, 2000). Academics may often need to intervene in deciding the most effective way for students to learn, for example, to challenge them and encourage them to question. Bailey (2000) proposes the student-as-client within the context of a professional/client relationship, as this will embody responsibilities and expectations for both lecturers and students. Such a relationship will involve a

greater degree of trust, respect and understanding. It will also encourage engagement of the student in the pursuit of learning. Accountability thus lies with student and teacher in ensuring a high quality of the learning experience.

2.5 Developing the Curriculum through Alignment

As far back as the 1960s Carroll (1963) claimed that fundamental to effective instruction is the degree to which learners have a clear picture of the outcomes of the instruction. Revisiting this idea of instructional alignment Cohen (1987) concluded that lack of excellence in American schools was not caused by ineffective teaching but by misaligning what teachers teach, what they intend to teach and what they assess as having been taught. Instructional alignment is thus a long-standing behaviourist approach to curriculum planning. According to Talbot (2004) ensuring a precise match between what is taught, what is measured and what is intended to be learned, instructional alignment is proposed as the essence of competency-based training. Constructive alignment is explained by Biggs (1993a, 1996) as a constructivist understanding of learning and an aligned design for teaching. Biggs and Tang (2007) explain the use of constructive alignment to incorporate the theory that learners use their own activity to construct their own knowledge or other outcome. Such alignment proposes to ensure compatibility within the curriculum, between intended learning outcomes, teaching, learning activities and assessment. They argue that constructively aligned teaching is likely to be more effective than if it were unaligned because of maximum consistency throughout the system. This notion of constructive alignment has been embraced by quality assurance system managers and by lecturers and practitioners (Lahiff, 2006).

The value of such alignment of the curriculum and the need for teachers to be concerned about it has been outlined by Anderson (2002) in four key areas. First teachers need to be more focused on what students have learnt as a result of their educational experience than on what they know and can do regardless of the source of that knowledge or those skills. Second, good alignment of the curriculum enables understanding of the differences of the effects of educational experiences on student achievement. Third, a poorly aligned curriculum can

result in us underestimating the effects of teaching on learning. A fourth area is a concern for educational accountability. If students are held accountable for their learning, then teachers and education institutions must be held accountable by demonstrating they have met the standards that have been set in the curriculum. This supports an agenda of quality and accountability.

However, some writers (Hounsell and Litjens, 2005; McClune and Hounsell, 2005) suggest curriculum alignment or curriculum congruence might be more accurate than constructive alignment which, in their view, represents what many academics have been doing for years. The use of the term constructive has been criticised by Jervis and Jervis (2005) who claim a difficulty in expecting science students to do things which will achieve the learning outcomes yet allowing them to be free to construct the knowledge they may or may not acquire during this process, in their own way. Also, within science education, a three dimensional alignment, with constructive, horizontal and vertical alignment is proposed for an engineering curriculum by O'Leary *et al* (2006). They accept Biggs' (1996) understanding of constructive alignment above and explain horizontal alignment to require the student to transfer problem solving knowledge between domains at the same stage of the programme. Vertical alignment focuses on the structure of elements being built on foundational knowledge, providing a platform for future elements.

With alignment, the education system therefore needs to be carefully and thoughtfully planned and managed instead of 'merely left to happen' (McDonald and Van Der Horst, 2007:2). According to Cowan *et al* (2004) the challenges facing higher education are improving the quality of the curriculum, putting into practice a basic pedagogy for adult education and encouraging staff commitment to programme development. Moving away from a linear or chronological model of curriculum development Cowan *et al* (2004) develop a model where the intended learning outcomes of the curriculum are central and are assumed to influence all that occurs during the preparation and delivery of the curriculum. Involving the staff in the study had an added advantage of staff development. Cowan *et al* (2004) suggest that curriculum development flourishes when it is as a result of explicit institutional development. This in turn will call for staff

development leading to boundaries between educational and staff development becoming blurred.

The premise is that learning is currently fragmented in its focus on individual learning and competition does not prepare any professionals for cooperative efforts, extending their work into other disciplines or inviting interdisciplinary collaboration. Taking the educational experience from a theoretical to a practical level will, in Cortese's (2003) view, impact on the way the institution will interact with the external community and so create a sustainable world. Taking this concept further to a 'thinking curriculum' is an exercise promoted by Nisbett (1993). The idea is the process of thinking can be analysed into skills and strategies in the hope that these will prove transferable. In this way thinking is infused into the curriculum. The concept of an infused curriculum is further proposed by Bath *et al* (2004:325) within the concept of a 'living curriculum'. The development of a curriculum can create a tension with the realities and complexities of learning causing constructive ambiguity (Lampert, 1985). To avoid such ambiguity it is pertinent to understand teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning.

2.6 Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

The literature on teaching and learning in higher education reveals several terms such as beliefs, approaches, conceptions, and orientations. The most commonly used term is 'conceptions' defined by Pratt (1992) as 'specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena' (p.204). There is an abundance of studies focussing on conceptions of teaching and learning in higher education (Dall'Alba, 1991; Eley, 1992; Vermunt, 1996; Trigwell and Prosser 1997a; Cliff, 1998; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Bond, 2000; Byrne *et al,* 2002; Marton *et al* 2002; Trigwell *et al* 2002, Äkerlind, 2007, 2008; Edmunds and Richardson, 2009) and on approaches to teaching based on teacher's beliefs (Kember and Gow, 1994; Kember, 1997; Entwistle *et al*, 2000; Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001; Dunkin, 2002). Some of these studies were carried out simultaneously during the early and later 1900s with little or no insight into what the other groups were doing.

Based on substantial European and Australian studies Trigwell and Prosser (1997b) identify a hierarchical list of six conceptions of teaching. These span from 'Teaching as transmitting concepts of the syllabus' to 'Teaching as helping students change conceptions' (p.246). The hierarchical nature of this typology is important for Trigwell and Prosser and links directly with their approaches to teaching. Samuelowicz and Bain (1992, 2001) concur with the implication that the way in which teaching is conceived and conducted in higher education is dependent on the presumptions and educational beliefs of academic staff. Their 1992 study proposed a five level classification of orientations to teaching and learning which was later amended to seven dimensions (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001: 308). These are described in the context of nine qualitative belief dimensions. The implication of their framework is that the way teaching is conducted in higher education is dependent on the educational beliefs and presumptions of academic staff. The seven dimensions are divided into teaching-centered orientations- imparting information, transmitting structured knowledge, and providing and facilitating understanding. Within the learning-centered orientations there are - helping students develop expertise, preventing misunderstandings, negotiating understanding and encouraging knowledge creation. These are all described in the context of the following qualitative belief dimensions; desired learning outcomes, expected use of knowledge, responsibility for organising or transforming knowledge, nature of knowledge, students' existing conceptions, teacher-students interaction, control of content, professional development and interest motivation. The relational nature of teaching and environment to approaches to learning has, more recently, been highlighted by Kember *et al*, (2008). They suggest that teaching in the arts and social sciences seems more inclined to promote a deep approach than in science and engineering.

Drawing on previous and current research Entwistle *et al* (2000) examine the conceptions of good teaching in higher education, with a group of student teachers, contrasting between teaching as teacher-centred and content-oriented and teaching as student-centred and learning –oriented. Some influences identified in the study included teachers' experiences as students themselves and

experiences in teaching practice. Further exploration by Dunkin and Precians (1992) and Dunkin (2002) contrasts findings from interviews with novice and award-winning or expert teachers, to explore their beliefs about teaching. They found that expert teachers had more complex and flexible concepts of teaching effectiveness, utilised a broader range of criteria in evaluating their teaching and relied more on personal feelings and were more analytical than the novices. In addition the expert teachers were more inclined to adopt systematic, formal procedures for getting feedback and to act on this feedback to change their teaching than the novices. Although this study supports some of these findings (Chapter 4) I would contradict Malcolm and Zukas (2001) that teaching behaviours are seen as predictable and controlled.

In a case study on teachers' conceptions of their teaching, Micari *et al* (2007) investigated how teachers conceive of and approach the experiences of learning and teaching themselves. They identified two dimensions of the learning experience; 'learning intention' or the students' conceptions of the ideal learning state and 'learning constraints' or the barriers to that ideal state that students identified (p.465). Under 'learning intention' were conceptions such as reducing anxiety by finding clarity, increasing involvement through application of ideas and gaining control over learning through developing an integrated system for understanding ideas. Constraints to learning included fear, low self-confidence, watching rather than doing problems and seeing concepts in isolation. Factors which may moderate these constraints were –friendly peers and facilitator with more study time, being encouraged to actively work through problems and being coached to see how diverse concepts are related. Micari *et al* (2007:469) conclude that a 'one-size-fits-all approach' in running a programme is not appropriate and is later borne out in the findings of this study.

Taking a view that good university teaching is neither teacher-centred nor student-centred but subject-centred Palmer (2007) suggests that good teachers find a way of teaching that is integral to their own nature. He highlights the importance of teachers undertaking self-reflection in order to recognise this in themselves. In addition to being true to themselves Palmer (2007) believes good teachers must be true to their subject so that they teach the subject in an

enthusiastic and engaged way. Taking up this concept of good teaching Kreber (2009) explores these essential characteristics with the teachers themselves in the first instance. They all identify a love of their subject, a depth of knowledge of the discipline and caring for students. Their undergraduate students comment that good teachers are very knowledgeable and very interested and passionate about their subject, made them feel as an equal, are prepared to give extra time to them and made them feel inclusive. Students, more than the teachers, place strong emphasis on their teacher's ability to engage them with the topic in a meaningful way. In particular the good teachers communicate clearly and effectively, engage with them, offer well-prepared and thought-out explanations, strongly encourage student participation, encourage new ideas and discussion, instil confidence, encourage a healthy debate, independent thinking, challenge and go beyond that which is required for assessment drawing connections to the real world. Kreber (2009) concludes that the teachers' ways of presenting the subject and connecting the students with it seems to be critically important. Good teaching has also being characterised by authenticity (Kreber *et al*, 2007; Kreber, 2010). Having the interest of students at heart is the first level of authenticy; conveying how the subject matters in the real world and in their own lives constitutes a second level; and learners involvement in conversations around significant or unresolved issues in relation to the subject comprises the third level of authenticity.

2.6.1 Signature Pedagogies

In the same way we link back to teaching and characteristics of teaching so as to understand learning, we can link back to the professional preparation of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals to understand why professions develop as they do. Shulman (2005) coins the term signature pedagogies to refer to the characteristic forms of teaching and learning in which professional novices are instructed to think, perform and act with integrity. This concept may well fit with Barnett's (2009) discussion on disciplines and fields of professional endeavours, which he suggests are identifiable in their having key concepts, truth criteria and forms of life in their ways of reason and judgement. In other words they have their own standards which are characterised by certain rules and procedures.

Other writers have adapted the concept of signature pedagogies for education (Wilson, 2006; Golde, 2007) again linking back to undergraduate education and training.

Shulman suggests that the three dimensions (thinking, performing, acting with integrity) do not receive equal attention across the professions. Measuring up to the profession in addition to the university, professionals must learn huge amounts of theory and knowledge as they must understand in order to act and they must act in order to serve (Shulman, 2005). He gives an example for medicine with the classroom being the hospital. He argues that signature pedagogies are important because they are pervasive and implicitly define what counts as knowledge, how it is analysed, criticised, accepted or discarded. The first dimension of a signature pedagogy has a surface structure, consisting of 'concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing' (Shulman 2005:54-55). The second dimension has a deep structure which is a set of assumptions about the best way to communicate knowledge and know-how. Its third dimension is an implicit structure. This comprises a moral dimension with a set of beliefs about professional attitudes and values. Finally, a signature pedagogy can be considered by what it is not, or the way it is created by what it does not exemplify.

One of the common features of signature pedagogies is that they are routine (Shulman, 2005). He explains this as learning to do complex things routinely allows the professional to focus on increasingly complex issues. A second feature is that they nearly always entail public student performance. Without students actively performing their roles as student doctors, for example, on clinical rounds, the instruction cannot proceed. Thus they are expected to actively contribute in discussions, rendering classroom settings unpredictable. This uncertainty can, in Shulman's view, raise the emotional stakes of the classroom. Shulman (2005) acknowledges that substantial changes can occur in signature pedagogies, for example, with shorter hospital stays, medicine and surgery teaching takes place in other venues or via the internet. He concludes that the way we teach will influence the way professions behave. Benner and Sutphen

(2007) discuss these pedagogies as apprenticeships, from the nursing and medical professions' perspective. They suggest that this is a metaphor incorporating cognitive, skilful, ethical and experiential learning which is required in such practice-based disciplines. They argue that knowledge in this profession is a complex practice, demands practical reasoning and is situated and socially embedded. They explain:

> Professional practitioners develop the capacity for innovative action and problem solving in open-ended, high-stakes situations, in keeping with the actual responsibilities and goals of practice. (Benner and Sutphen, 2007:104)

They suggest that in undergraduate nursing education the emphasis is usually on a linear problem-solving process, which they believe exemplifies technical rationality.

Using another pedagogy, Barnett (2007:125) presents the importance of a teacher's inspiring ways of teaching, calling this a 'pedagogy of inspiration'. He suggests that the inspiring teacher will breathe new life and energy into the student but the student then needs to be open to these. Teaching that brings about such inspiration is demanding for the teacher and sometimes impossible, so making teaching much more difficult than learning, especially in this age of supercomplexity, which requires handling multiple frames of understanding, action and self-identity (Barnett, 2000). These three dimensions of understanding or knowing, action and self-identity resonate with what Baxter Magolda (2009) labels as self-authorship. She believes that the complexities young adults now face during and beyond their college years require more than skill acquisition and application. They require a transformation from authority dependence to a capacity to internally define their beliefs, identity and social relations, or what is termed as self-authorship (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2001). However, most of the participants in Baxter Magolda's (2001) twenty year longitudinal US study made little progress towards self-authorship during college, relying on externally derived formulas of what to believe and how to relate to others on leaving college. As they entered the workforce they found these formulas wanting. Thus, the evolvement of self-authorship takes some time. Baxter Magolda's (2009)

learning partnership model was developed to simultaneously promote self-authorship and learners' current meaning-making. In this model an evolutionary bridge is created by merging three supportive components with three challenges in the learning environment. Support is offered through the principles of validating learners' ability to know, situating learning in learners' experience and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning. These supports in turn assist learners in engaging in the three challenges of learning environments that promote self-authorship. These challenges are that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, self is central to knowledge construction and expertise and authority are shared among knowledgeable peers. The partnership adjusts as the learner takes on more complex ways of making meaning.

2.7 Approaches to Learning

According to Ramsden (1992) research has shown that outcomes of students' learning are associated with the approaches the students use. Research on students' approaches to learning in the context higher education is frequently taken to refer to that originated by Ference Marton and colleagues which developed around the idea of deep and surface learning. It started with a series of studies (Marton *et al*, 1985) in Sweden in the 1970s. The phenomenographic method was used in these studies as an alternative method of researching student learning and, almost without challenge, came to dominate the theory and practice of education developers in the UK and Australia. For several decades following these studies research into students' conceptions of learning indicated that learning was conceived in qualitatively different ways. Many people are familiar with the two metaphors of learning proposed – surface learning and deep learning, which has been universally adopted by education developers. Surface learning reflected an understanding that involves the acquisition, storing, reproduction and using of knowledge. Deep learning, on the other hand, reflected a construction of meaning and personal change. Within these categories a number of subcategories were identified by Saljo (1979). The surface approach contained the following subcategories: the increase of knowledge, memorising and the acquisition of facts or procedures which can be retained or used in

practice. The deep approach to learning was subdivided into the abstraction of meaning and an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality.

A major five year research programme at Lancaster University in the early 1980s exploring approaches to learning built on the phenomenographic foundations and research from Sweden. Previously, in studies at Lancaster (since 1968) attempts had been made to develop inventories to measure important aspects of study methods and motivation. Some of these researchers identified a third approach to learning, called the achieving or strategic approach to reflect a student visibly achieving through high grades (Entwistle *et al*, 1979; Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Biggs, 1993b).

Following Saljo's study researchers proposed that better learning outcomes are achieved by students who have deep approaches to learning or are at the upper end of the hierarchy. In fact the viewpoint that students' conceptions of learning were related to the quality of learning was common (Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984; Boulton-Lewis *et al*, 2004). This idea of students holding just one conception of learning was challenged by Fuller (1999) who found insufficient evidence of a connection between their academic achievement and this conception. Previously, Saljo (1987) clarified that learning is not a general phenomenon and needs to be defined within the educational context researched as there may be social and cultural influences to bear. Other studies (Cowman, 1998; Wilson and Fowler, 2005; and Balasooriya *et al*, 2009) support the argument that these approaches are context dependent. Wilson and Fowler (2005), for example, investigated whether students' approaches to learning were influenced by using small group teaching, namely, action learning. Students who reported themselves as typically surface in their approaches were influenced to adopt deep strategies in the action learning sets. The authors particularly highlighted the limitations of using the Study Process Questionnaire alone for this study as it did not explain the causes of different effects of the two courses which were compared. They followed the quantitative data collection with a focus group interview three months later. In addition to the environmental context, the way in which students regulate their learning and studying is dependent on their mental models of learning (Vermunt, 1998). Some of the

issues considered internally by the students were how much they valued studying with fellow students and sharing tasks with them.

Greasley and Ashworth (2007) argue that the research carried out by Marton and colleagues focus primarily on the mental orientation with which learning material itself is approached. This focus, they believe, is to the detriment of not addressing the meaning, for the student, of the learning material itself. The meaning could include such things as the difficulty of the experience or the interest in the learning. In other words, the context issues around the learning situation, possibly the meaning of studying and generally their lifeworld as a student are discounted, failing to bring out the richness of student approaches to learning (Ashworth and Greasley, 2009). Ashworth has reiterated this complaint that phenomenography detaches the person from their world, neglecting that learning lies within the broader experience of the student (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998, 2000). Linking back to Husserl, Ashworth and Greasley (2009) argue that full attention must be given to the conscious mode (the mental orientation to learning) and the object (the whole meaning of the thing to be learned) in order to give a full account of the field of experience. They further argue that research on approaches to learning must be understood within the situation where the learning takes place and that these require qualitative, first-person analysis. In the phenomenographic design one variable (the experience of learning) is hypothesised to affect another variable (the learning situation) causally.

From a cross-cultural perspective studies exploring conceptions of learning were carried out by Watkins *et al* (1991); Watkins and Regmi (1992); Marton *et al* (1993); Zhang (2000), Purdie and Hattie (2002) and by Zhang and Watkins (2001). The findings of these studies highlight the different interpretations of memorisation and understanding. While memorisation is equated with repetition and rote learning in Western cultures and is in opposition to understanding, in non-Western learning environments each process may be enhanced by the other. Purdie and Hattie (2002), following their development of the Conceptions of Learning Inventory (COLI) suggest that what is important is the motivation behind the memorising behaviour. In addition to cultural values, Lonka *et al*

(2004) suggest that the way students relate their current studies to their self-concept or self-belief has an effect on their study orientation.

Inventories which explored university students' approaches to learning were developed as far back as 1979 by Biggs (the Study Process Questionnaire) and by Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) (the Approaches to Studying Inventory). Many other inventories have been developed and used since e.g. the Reflections on Learning Inventory by Meyer *et al* (1990), the Approaches to Teaching Inventory by Trigwell *et al* (1999) Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire (Heikkilä and Lonka, 2006) and the Epistemological Questionnaire (Rodriquez and Cano, 2007). Inventories such as the Study Process Questionnaire, or revised versions of it, are still popular (Duff, 2004; Gijbels *et a*l, 2005). In reviewing some of these studies and inventories Richardson (2004) points out that the university setting has changed in many ways over the past decades and that the student population are more complex in terms of their social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds as they are more representative of the general population, with groups within society who were previously excluded. He also suggests that discourse in academia and in everyday life has become less formal and more flexible while many of the items in these instruments are 'wordy and elaborate' (p.353). Fuller (1999) had earlier suggested that knowledge of students' conceptions of learning is not in itself sufficient to provide useful information about their possible approaches to learning and their academic results or learning strategies. In congruence with this standpoint Bond (2000) argues that, rather than comprising a single phenomenon, learning is multi-dimensional and that each part of the learner's journey plays an important role in the growth of skill and competence in learning. Furthermore, Hall and Moseley (2005) propose a model of learning which recognises the variety of approaches by each individual in different circumstances.

Part of this journey can involve peer learning, a form of learning beyond learning of the curriculum. Havnes (2008) suggests that students create niches for peer interaction and learning. Peer learning has been depicted as 'students learning from and with each other in both formal and informal ways' (Boud *et al*, 2001:4). A peer can be someone of the same social standing or within the same class and

values cooperation over competition. In this way greater respect for the variety of experience and backgrounds of participants can occur (Boud *et al*, 1999; Sadler 2008; Nicol, 2009). Students can create their own learning space, being free to make up their minds about the curriculum, and programme, without interference from lecturers (Havnes, 2008). Peer learning is fostered in small group teaching where there is more engagement between individuals. It is within small groups that confidence can be improved, interpersonal communication developed and students engage more deeply with the content of their subject (Griffiths, 2009).

2.7.1 Impact of Assessment

There is general agreement that one of the most significant contextual variables impacting on a student's approach to learning is the method of assessment for that student (Thomas and Bain, 1984; Crooks and Mahalski 1985; Scouller, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; Jones and Asensio, 2001). Because students must interpret the demands of the assessment they vary their study approaches, whether consciously or subconsciously, in order to meet these demands. According to Segers *et al* (2008) it is generally assumed that when an assessment is judged to require high-level cognitive processing or deep-level demands students are more likely to engage in a deep approach to meet this assessment task. But, Entwistle (2009) argues that assessment can also interfere with deep approaches to learning. He suggests that the type of questions asked and the type of feedback provided to students about their performance will influence the approaches the students will adopt. Entwistle (2009) proposes the need for teachers to focus on understanding in their feedback if they want to encourage deep approaches to learning. Despite teachers intentions of providing guidance to support learning, students may not be able to make sense of some of the comments because their meaning may depend on their broader knowledge of terms such as 'descriptive' or 'analytical' and some of the tone of the comments can be off-putting to inexperienced students (Entwistle 2009:85). Using feedback to help students learn will require a number of processes for success. Race (2005), Yorke (2005), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and Rust (2007) highlight the importance of feedback being received in a timely manner, as soon

as possible, after the assessment. They recommend a focus on feedback that is positive and empowering so that it opens doors rather than close them.

With an assessment requiring reproduction of details or a surface level demand, students then apply a surface approach. Brown and Hirschfield (2007) investigated secondary school students' beliefs on the purpose of assessment and its relationship to learning outcomes. Their findings indicate that students with the highest scores considered assessment as a means of taking responsibility for learning, using assessment to improve their learning. Segers *et al* (2008) investigated student teachers' perceptions of their assessment demands with the introduction of a case-based assessment in a teacher education programme. The hypothesis that this approach stimulated the student teachers to adopt a deep approach to learning was confirmed. They recommend that it is important to give feedback to students, not only around mastery of knowledge but also concerning their approach to learning as this might contribute to a better understanding of assessment demands as well as to adopting deep learning strategies.

2.7.2 Impact of Adult Learning

With adult learners as students on the programme researched, it is important to highlight key learning characteristics of such a group. Using the term andragogy for the theory of adults learning, Knowles (1984) describes five assumptions underlying its understanding. He suggests that an adult learner (1) has an independent self-concept and can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles, (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. Years later he refined his theory suggesting that andragogy is defined more by the learning situation than by the learner, therefore alerting educators to the importance of involving learners in as many aspects of their education as possible (Houle, 1996). Andragogy has its critics (Darbyshire, 1993; Grace, 1996) who claim that it focuses solely on the individual and does not embrace social change and critical theory. However, it can be a guide to practice, a window through which

educators view adult education and can engender some debate and discussion around our understanding of adult learners (Holton *et al*, 2001). Recently, study support for this profile of students was explored by Hallett (2010). Her findings suggest that tension and conflict can arise because of a lack of shared meanings indicating a need for a common understanding of the student profile and what is meant by study support. The students interviewed experienced technical and remedial support but she recommends the importance of academic staff conceptions to fully understand the complexities of the topic.

2.8 Criticisms of Outcomes-based Education

Despite its popularity and the global adoption of outcomes-based education, and in particular its impact on major European initiatives, such as Bologna, it is not without its critics. These criticisms have gained ground since the mid 1990s but the range of critique is no longer convergent (Oates, 2004). One author sees the outcomes-based approach as, little more than an umbrella term for mastery learning, limiting enquiry (Towers, 1994), another accuses it of being a chameleon, changing its form e.g. from traditional to transformational learning (Berlach, 2004), and yet a further criticism is that it ignores or even squeezes out emergent learning outcomes (Megginson, 1996) neglecting the opportunity to respond to students (McAlpine *et al*, 1999) to achieve a new learning outcome. This study contradicts such criticisms.

There is generally a requirement in outcomes-based curricula to specify the learning outcomes at the outset of a module or programme. This requirement has been criticised for its potential to stifle creativity in student learning and can be interpreted as a 'results-orientated thinking' where 'product defines process' (Harden *et al,*1999: 8). Yet, these outcomes are not wholly predictable as Barnett (1988: 248) suggests:

> …the outcome is to a considerable degree unpredictable; the tutor cannot fully control it, for it is the student that is, or is not, successful.

Kemp (1999) considers OBE as reductionist where the essential goal is to reduce academic activity to its component skills and knowledge for it to be measureable

and that this approach portrays outcomes as technical and rational with their organisations as mechanistic, consensual, and hierarchical. Barnett *et al* (2001) labels such a focus as a performative shift in the relationship of higher education to the labour market where there is emphasis on efficiency and outputs. This benefit to the employer is seen as an advantage for some (Knight, 2001; Maher, 2004). Meanwhile Hussey and Smith (2002) argue that learning outcomes can be valuable if used appropriately, but that they have been misappropriated and adopted widely at all levels within the education system. They suggest that pre-determined learning outcomes cannot specify exactly what is to be achieved as a result of learning and that they restrict and inhibit emergent learning. The findings of this study contradict such a viewpoint.

Learning outcomes in higher education encompass not only, core subject-based outcomes but personal transferable outcomes and generic academic outcomes (Allan, 1996). In addition, rather than being a once off activity defining learning outcomes is an iterative process (Wisdom, 2001). Placing their arguments within an Australian context, Smyth and Dow (1998) claim that education has undergone dramatic changes in response to economic imperatives and has moved from liberal education to vocationalism and managerialism, thus responding to the needs of a capitalist enterprise. Hargreaves and Moore (2000: 28) however, dispute these criticisms as taking a 'monolithic stance'. They draw on their Canadian research to support claims that teachers can be motivated intrinsically to empower their students concerning learning outcomes. This sharing of learning outcomes gave the students a lot more responsibility for their own learning. In addition to involving students, teachers in the study collaborated with colleagues around outcomes to share ideas and perceptions. Marsh (2007) suggests that learning is enhanced when students are made aware of the mastery expectations of their programmes. Such activities seemed to increase their self-confidence in using and assessing outcomes and supports Boud and Falchikov's (2006) suggestion that higher education provides a foundation on which a lifetime in work and other social settings can be built.

Moon (2002) cautions that students may aim merely to achieve a pass threshold if the learning outcomes are used to specify this level. In support of this

argument, Orsmond *et al*'s (2006) study suggests that students and tutors perceived the assessment as the end point. They further suggest the need for active discussion to take place regarding the role of learning outcomes, whether formal or informal learning outcomes, at an early stage, and that these be reinforced throughout the module or programme to ensure they underpin how students approach the assignment. Hussey and Smith's (2003) proposal of an articulated curriculum which embraces both intended and emergent learning outcomes may be helpful here, suggesting a need for them to be reclaimed from, rather than continuing, their current functions in monitoring and auditing. They suggest a return to their function of aiding good teaching and learning categorising learning outcomes according to the unit of activity involved, for example, an individual teaching event, a module or a programme.

Caution about aligning learning outcomes particularly in science education is raised by Jervis and Jervis (2005). They propose that being expected to identify all possible learning outcomes for courses is unnecessary and undesirable. Suggesting that this is the death of originality and serendipity they argue that as long as students are assessed as individuals and as long as exceptionally talented original thinkers are rewarded 'absolute alignment and strictly specified outcomes cannot be helpful' (Jervis and Jervis, 2005:7).The argument that education must be valued for its own sake, not because it leads to some outcome, or is target-driven, is raised by McKernan (1993). He suggests that outcomes-based education has serious limitations and that it is time to put this approach in check and re-examine curriculum thinking. Taking a focus on process and outcome, Barnett and Coate (2005) propose moving from a traditional curriculum to an emerging curriculum which engages the student, is action oriented, applied to practice and focuses on experiential learning.

2.9 Approaches to Learning: a New Focus

The substance of the above sections of the literature reviewed suggests that research, on approaches to learning and teaching from the perspectives of teachers and students, may have different contextual influences. It is not explicit in the studies reviewed what type of curriculum was in place when students and

teachers were interviewed or surveyed. The debate on outcomes-based learning is important in the context of this research. However, taking into consideration the findings of the studies reviewed and the debates around the complex issues occurring in higher education currently, it is apt to try and understand how the curriculum is influenced by many forces. At any point in time these forces can include support for student learning, challenges of relationships, changing external environments, institutional cultures, available resources, theories on teaching and learning and issues of accountability and quality.

Acknowledging the difficulty of controlling, shaping and prioritising these forces, what appears to be required as a basic unit of analysis is a shift from a focus on teachers, external examiners or students to that which is inclusive of an individual's whole experience within the social constructivist context in which the learning takes place. It is clearly the case for this sample of students that they participate in learning from the standpoint of their backgrounds in healthcare. The students are active participants, rather than passive customers and this programme contributes to their ongoing process of transformation and development. These students have to be met in the process of their demanding work and empowered to cope with conflicting demands, creating their individual learning agendas.

Thus, analysis of the data of the research reported in this thesis focuses on the similarities and differences between student, external examiner and lecturer interview transcripts, and themes are uniquely applied to the overall experiences of individuals. The students are mature and already have a lot of experience and are very different from students in some of the studies reviewed above. They work full-time and have family responsibilities and need to see these responsibilities of work and home life as linked to their university studies rather than as separate silos. Likewise, in carrying out this research, interviewing the students and their lecturers and external examiner gives a richer description of the learning experience and helps to understand the learning within the situation where the learning takes place.

2.10 Summary

Three main threads run through this chapter. The first one is curriculum as a foundation for exploring approaches to learning. The second is outcomes-based education and alignment of the curriculum and the third is the relationships between studies on conceptions of teaching and approaches to learning. All three threads are intimately related to each other. I have argued that conceptions of teaching and learning cannot be packaged as something neat and controlled and that context and backgrounds play major roles in the learning approaches adopted by students. This relationship between learning outcomes and different approaches to learning from the perspectives of students and their lecturers, in a higher education setting, needs further exploration.

Many of the studies and writings on learning outcomes and outcomes-based education focus on primary and secondary school levels. In the 1990s, in particular, there was a flurry of papers on learning outcomes related to school reform. Later papers focus on higher education but most of the papers are discussion documents and critiques of learning outcomes rather than research. The project by Entwistle (2005), part of a series of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) projects in higher education in the UK and the study by Orsmond *et al* (2006) used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Hargreaves and Moore (2000) interviewed teachers to explore their understanding of learning outcomes. The studies reviewed on approaches to learning used qualitative and quantitative approaches. These vary from phenomenography in exploring deep and surface approaches to learning, to psychometric approaches, based on inventories established, based for the most part on the Approaches to Study Inventory (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983). Some studies exploring alignment of the curriculum used action research. Overall there is a paucity of research exploring the influence of outcomes-based curricula on approaches to learning from the perspectives of postgraduate students. No published research was found incorporating perspectives from students and their lecturers on approaches to learning within an outcomes-based curriculum setting. Recent critiques of the phenomenography approach to studies on approaches to learning are analysed in the next chapter and these have influenced the methodology of the research.

Accordingly, the study is concerned with a phenomenological qualitative approach to exploring how an outcomes-based curriculum influences approaches to learning of postgraduate healthcare professionals. Phenomenology is framed within a Fourth Generation Evaluation methodology. Conceptualisation of curriculum around three domains of acting, knowing and self provide a framework to represent the data (Barnett *et al*, 2001; Barnett and Coate, 2005). The research data suggest that there are variances in emphasis on each of these domains, from different stakeholders. The lecturers and external examiner give an external view looking inwards on learning while the students give an internal view looking outwards.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter addressed literature on approaches to learning and outcomes-based education. It highlighted methodological issued of research reviewed. Studies on approaches to learning vary from phenomenography, exploring deep and surface approaches to learning, to psychometric approaches, based on inventories. The paucity of research exploring the influence of outcomes-based curricula on approaches to learning from the experiences of postgraduate students was noted. No published research was found incorporating perspectives from students and their lecturers, in the same study, on approaches to learning within an outcomes-based curriculum.

This chapter addresses the research design and method chosen for the study to explore how an outcomes-based curriculum influences approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals. Fourth generation evaluation is discussed in the context of evaluation methods. The constructivist paradigm and the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology (the chosen approach), are outlined. A critique of phenomenology in relation to this research is presented. The remainder of the chapter addresses data collection and analysis, pilot testing the interview questions, reliability and validity of the study and ethical considerations.

3.2 Evaluation Research

Evaluation, as a form of systematic inquiry, occupies an increasingly major place in making decisions about public policies (Virtanen and Uusikylä, 2004). Calls for accountability through evaluation research, particularly in the USA have increased the demand for measurements of performance (Cousins and Aubry, 2006). The demand for an appropriately skilled workforce in an evolving global economy makes evaluation of higher education a high priority. Effective evaluation can be a significant contributor to quality but does not necessarily

guarantee that those in authority will heed the outcomes of evaluation and take needed corrective action. The term quality assessment has been used synonymously with evaluation in the context of regulating higher education. According to Kells (1992) institutions and programmes can be strengthened substantially through effective evaluation.

Some writers place evaluation as a distinct research school with its own identity (House 1993; Scriven 2005) while others consider it a specialism within social science, placing emphasis on meeting information needs of decision makers and policy makers (Patton, 1997, 2002). Many authors have highlighted debates about various approaches within evaluation (Shadish *et al* 1991; Chen 1996; Ong 1996; Pawson and Tilly 1997; Shaw 1999; Tones and Tilford 2001; Robson 2002) while others have focused on analysing the contributions of influential evaluation theorists and the congruence of their theoretical positions (Shadish *et al* 1991; Clarke and Dawson 1999; Shaw 1999). The developments which have taken place in evaluation over the last 40 years or so reflect broader movements which have taken place around research paradigms and methods in the social sciences. There has been a tendency to break away from the classical, objectivist, outcome-based and performance orientated evaluation or traditional evaluation towards a multiplicity of models. Among these models or alternatives to traditional evaluation are responsive evaluation as illumination (Stake, 1983), utilisation-focused evaluation (Patton, 1997), fourth-generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), empowerment and self-evaluation evaluation (Fetterman, 1996) and others. In the recent past there has been a move from debates between positivists and post-positivists to a dialogue between paradigms.

The term education evaluation can be related back to the seminal work of Ralph Tyler in the early 1930s (Tyler, 1930). His approach was distinguished by its concentration on clearly stated objectives, as discussed in chapter two in the context of a product curriculum. The resulting behavioural objectives movement influenced curriculum design away from the content to be taught towards the student behaviours to be developed. Tyler's approach concentrates on direct measures of achievement, as opposed to indirect approaches that measure such inputs as quality of teaching or community involvement. This approach set the

stage for how educators and other programme evaluators viewed evaluation for the next twenty-five years. During the 'Tylerian Age' in the US and subsequently in many other countries standardised tests were developed to reflect the objectives and content of the curricula. However, the influence of Tyler began to wane. Cronbach (1963) sharply criticised these approaches for their lack of relevance and utility and argued that the purpose of evaluation differentiates it from scientific research. Calling for a reformation in evaluation years later he recommended that its mission should be to 'facilitate a democratic, pluralistic process by enlightening all the participants' (Cronbach *et al*, 1986:1)

More recently Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) assessed evaluation approaches by classifying them on the basis of their level of conformity to the definition of evaluation given by the Joint Committee of Congress' standards which focuses on the systematic assessment of the worth or merit of an object. Twenty six evaluation approaches were analysed under five categories: pseudoevaluations; questions- and methods-oriented evaluation or quasi-evaluation studies; improvement- and accountability-oriented evaluations; social agenda and advocacy approaches; and eclectic evaluations.

Pseudoevaluations categorise those evaluations which fail to produce and report valid assessments of worth or merit and are often motivated by political objectives (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2007). The questions- and methods-oriented evaluation or quasi-evaluation studies group evaluations tend to narrow the evaluation's scope, often delivering, according to Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007), less than a full assessment of merit or worth. An example of this approach is the objectives-based evaluation and theory-based evaluation. These approaches list the programme's activities and desired end results with the main strength of such an approach lying in its causal inferences (Weiss, 1998). Improvement- and accountability-oriented evaluations summarise approaches that stress the need to fully assess a programme's value. The central thrusts of these approaches are to foster improvement and accountability through informing and assessing programme decisions, assist consumers to make wise choices among optional programmes and services and to help accrediting associations certify meritorious institutions and programmes for use by consumers. This

approach is represented by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) as the Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) model. Context evaluations assess pertinent needs, assets, opportunities and problems to assist in formulating or judging goals. Input evaluations identify and assess competing programme strategies for meeting beneficiaries' assessed needs. Process evaluations assess the implementation of a selected programme strategy. Product evaluations search out, analyse and judge programme results.

Challenging the privileged status of traditional evaluation Lincoln and Guba (1985) encouraged a 'paradigm wars' (Caracelli, 2000:99) type of debate in the field of evaluation. From a constructivist viewpoint Lincoln and Guba argue that each truth is socially constructed. The following approaches developed from such debates. The social agenda and advocacy approaches are aimed at increasing social justice through programme evaluation. These approaches seek to ensure that all segments of society have equal access to educational and social opportunities and services. They favour a constructivist orientation and the use of qualitative methods. They provide for democratic engagement of stakeholders in obtaining and interpreting findings. The classic responsive evaluation approach by Stake (2003) is included in this category, which emphasises the evaluator's role in interacting continuously with, and responding to, the needs of clients and stakeholders. This approach contrasts with Scriven's (2005) objectivist orientation in that the client must be willing to endorse a quite open, flexible evaluation plan as opposed to a well-developed, detailed one. Clients must also be receptive to ambiguous findings and multiple interpretations. They must be sufficiently patient to allow the programme evaluation to unfold and find its direction based on ongoing interactions between the evaluator and stakeholders. Stake's approach calls attention to the complexity and the uncertainty of the programme, the difficulty in measuring outcomes and the importance of descriptive and judgemental data (Viser, 2009). Again the evaluators and programme stakeholders are placed at the centre of the inquiry process.

Fourth-generation evaluation (FGE) follows three earlier generations of constructivist approaches to evaluation by Guba and Lincoln (1989). They suggest that the first three generations were focused on measurement, description

and judgement. Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify inherent flaws in these evaluation methods as a tendency towards managerialism, a failure to accommodate value-pluralism and overcommitment to the scientific paradigm. I would generally agree with these criticisms as in many cases managers have had the ultimate power in determining what questions the evaluations pursued and how the data was collected and interpreted. Evaluations have not always acknowledged differences in values of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation. Finally, the overuse of the scientific method has ignored alternative ways to think about evaluation. Presenting quantifiable data as hard facts does not always encourage a responsibility in following up on findings. FGE was designed to counteract problems with classical experimental or quasi-experimental designs in evaluation. Some of Guba and Lincoln's harsh attacks on quantitative evaluation methods were viewed as one-sided interpretations (Virtanen and Uusikylä, 2004). FGE was introduced as a participatory pluralistic process that provides a framework through which the interests of stakeholder groups and individuals can be put onto the agenda and renegotiated. It was thus presented as a responsive evaluation methodology.

Personalising evaluation (Kushner, 2000), in the tradition of responsive and democratic evaluation, grew out of concerns about the distortions generated when a programme is seen as the principal or exclusive context within which to attribute significance to people's lives and work. It proposes instead, the portrayal of people's lives and work as contexts within which to read the significance of the programme. Personalised evaluation promotes the view that evaluators must be their own methodologists and seek personal voice and personal meaning in their evaluations.

The newest addition to programme evaluation under the constructivist paradigm is the deliberative democratic approach advanced by House and Howe (2003). It envisions programme evaluation as a principled, influential societal institution, contributing to democratisation through the issuing of reliable and valid claims. Equity of all interested stakeholders is stressed and power imbalances are not tolerated. Methods employed include discussions with stakeholders, surveys and debates.

Eclectic evaluations include those approaches which draw on a broad and diverse range of sources. The most widely used of these approaches is Patton's (1997) utilisation-focused evaluation. The approach is geared towards maximising evaluation impacts and fits well with the key principle of change. It engages stakeholders to determine the evaluation's purposes and procedures and uses their involvement to promote the use of findings. Rather than trying to reach all stakeholders a select, representative group is chosen. A limitation may include the possibility of its vulnerability to corruption by user groups, since they are given much control over what will be examined, the questions asked, methods employed and questions to be asked. Stakeholders with conflicts of interest may influence the evaluation inappropriately.

Many of these models represent a form of evaluation which involves judgements made through the eyes of the external evaluator and the connotation persists of evaluation as an external monitoring of professional practice. In contrast, fourth generation evaluation takes a constructivist position, allowing access to participants' interpretations of their world, because they can construct and interpret realities which are shaped and perceived by cultural and linguistic meanings. Evaluation within a naturalistic stance requires the analysis and description of participants' meanings and interpretations of the social world examined within the world settings they occupy (Brewer, 2003). A key assumption underpinning this type of evaluation is that evaluators' interactions with their participants is itself part of the evaluation exercise (Galvin, 2005). Critiquing evaluative techniques which have been used over the years Guba and Lincoln (1989) draw attention to a tendency towards managerialism, where researchers determine what is to be evaluated and what will happen to the findings, so disempowering other stakeholders.

3.3 Fourth Generation Evaluation

Fourth-generation evaluation (FGE) is presented by Virtanen and Uusikylä (2004) as a goal-free evaluation (portraying a holistic portrayal of the programme) rather than a goal bound approach (where the evaluator maps causal

links between objectives, inputs and outputs). The role of the evaluator is to provide a methodology through which different concerns and constructions of stakeholders can be understood and critiqued. Stakeholders are asked to provide their own (emic) constructions and evaluators include their own (etic) constructions as well as constructions from other sources e.g. relevant documentation and academic literature (Lay and Papadopoulos, 2007). The use of a hermeneutic dialectic circle (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) is proposed in FGE. Being *hermeneutic* means it is interpretative and being *dialectic* means it represents a comparison and contrast of divergent views. It therefore allows a cross fertilisation of data with a connection between them that allows for mutual exploration by all stakeholders (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Participation between the stakeholders and the evaluator is recommended in following up on the findings, indicating a responsive evaluation. Continuing a search for illuminating constructions the evaluator posits that there can be no definitive conclusions (Stufflebeam, 1999).

FGE has been criticised for representing an 'over-socialized' interpretation of programme reality, in neglecting the programme goals in favour of attention to negotiations between stakeholders and consensus building (Virtanen and Uusikylä, 2004:83). Having used the methodology for this research I refute this claim as the interviews connected back to the overall programme aims and the learning outcomes. FGE begins with a philosophical base in constructivism, where the evaluator shares constructions of other stakeholders in order to form a joint construction around which some consensus can be built. It is therefore a democratic methodology where as many people as possible can agree on the outcome (Heap, 1995). However, the research presented here did not fulfil democracy to this level. Moreover, the findings are presented so that the reader can make a judgement on the holistic viewpoints and experiences based on the data presented.

The approach chosen, for the study, in keeping with social constructivism is phenomenology. This approach is presented, first outlining its philosophical underpinnings and then locating it within a social constructivist paradigm.

3.4 The Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology has existed as a concept in research for about two centuries but Edmund Husserl is generally accepted as the inaugurator of phenomenology as a modern philosophy and research approach (Kockelmans, 1994). Husserl's conception was an alternative to positivism, a shift in focus from cause and effect, linking the phenomenon of interest and being in an inseparable way. In other words there is a phenomenon only when there is someone who experiences the phenomenon. He based his thinking on the principle that scientific knowledge begins with an unbiased description of its subject matter. It is a return to the lived world, a world of experience, which Husserl sees as the starting point of all science. Taken up by many thinkers, such as Heidegger and Jean-Paul Satre, Husserl's ideas were further developed. This study is framed around hermeneutic phenomenology, first presented by Husserl with emphasis on the phenomenon being described instead of being explained.

3.4.1 Philosophical Assumptions in Phenomenology

Phenomenology is first perceived as a philosophy rather than a scientific research method (Giorgi, 1997, 2006). It is guided by a philosophy that is based on the premise that human experience is an inherent property of the experience itself, not constructed by an outside observer. It has been described as an

> …anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that, is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer (Moran, 2000:4).

Implicit in this definition is the importance of avoiding impositions placed on the experience in advance. Characterised by its emphasis on consciousness, it is a philosophy based on intuition, a technical term meaning that it is based on how objects present themselves to consciousness. It is more than empirical in that it incorporates values, possibilities and imaginative variations (Giorgi, 1999). The philosophical assumption in phenomenology is that theory should be based on experiences and, as these are varied, there is no one reality. Furthermore, subjectivity is welcomed, context is vital in explanations, biases need to be acknowledged and ideas evolve and change over time (Cohen *et al*, 2000). The

focus is therefore on the person's experience, aiming to describe this experience, just as it is experienced, whether or not it is in tune with the actual evidence of 'reality' or not. Its distinctiveness in its approach is the setting aside of all reference to objective reality. Husserl used the metaphor of bracketing for a procedure called epoché, meaning to set aside one's prejudices and personal commitments in order to understand meanings as they are for those describing the experience. This phenomenological attitude is an important process in addressing trustworthiness in phenomenology and according to Finlay (2008: 2) involves

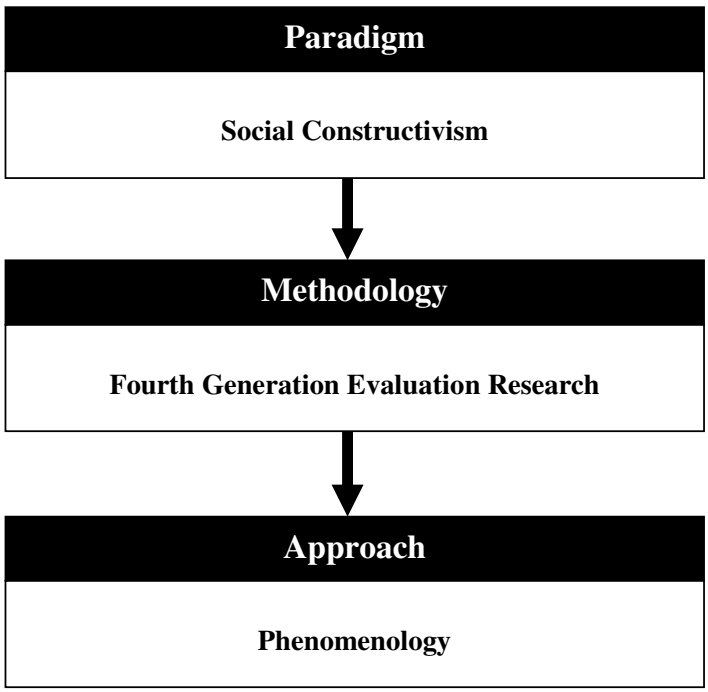
> …a radical transformation in our approach where we strive to suspend presuppositions and go beyond the natural attitude of taken-for-granted understanding. It involves…engaging in a sense of wonder and openness to the world, while…restraining pre-understandings.

If maintaining a given assumption can subvert entry into the life-world (the world of lived experience) then such presuppositions must be set aside, so that we can open ourselves to the phenomena to see what emerges for us (Ashworth 1996; Crotty, 1998). The focus on experience was referred to by Husserl as the phenomenological psychological reduction because it reduces the investigative field to the psychological, allowing the investigator to describe reflectively the meaning and psychological performances of lived situations (Wertz, 2005). This is achieved through reflecting on what is important in the taken for granted aspect of the phenomenon.

Moving from objective reality to experience Husserl used the term 'intentionality' to mean 'directed toward something', expressing this philosophical assumption as - the study of experience revealing consciousness (awareness) (Cohen *et al*, 2000: 11). Intentionality expresses the interdependence of the subject and object and, for Yegdich (2000), encapsulates Husserl's radical departure from positivistic objectification. In interpreting Husserl, both the inner world and outer worlds are not separated so that the act of consciousness (noesis) and the object of consciousness (noema) are within personal experience or awareness (Ashworth and Greasley, 2009). Taking, as an example, the mental orientation to learning as the noesis and the thing to be studied as the noema, Ashworth and Greasley (2009) suggest that the relationship between both is

unbreakable. In other words, consideration of the noema or the personal experience of learning cannot be omitted in preference to the mental orientation to learning alone. Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between phenomenology, as an approach and fourth generation evaluation (FGE) research methodology. Both phenomenology and FGE fit suitably under the paradigm of social constructivism.

Figure 3.1 Methodology



3.4.2 Phenomenology within a Social Constructivism Paradigm

Phenomenology concurs with the view that knowledge is constructed and it connects abstract knowledge with being and acting in the world as the basis for genuine understanding. Social constructivism is described as a paradigm which focuses on people's behaviour (i.e. interaction or what people do) rather than meaning (or what people are thinking or feeling) and in so doing it explores the way culture shapes our world (Crotty, 1998; Silverman, 2000). In other words, knowledge is sustained by social processes so that knowledge and social action go together. Rather than constructing our interpretations in isolation we construct them against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices and the like

(Schwandt, 2003). However, Gergen (2001) argues that social constructivism and realism are two sides of the same coin in acquiring meaning through the existence of difference. Crotty (1998) believes that in stating that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real, suggesting that constructivism in epistemology is compatible with realism in ontology. Proposing its links with relativism Crotty (1998: 64) advises that when we say that things are the way they are we are really saying that this is just 'the sense we make of them'.

3.5 Challenges and Criticisms of Phenomenology

The popularity of phenomenology, as a research approach, has created problems and challenges. Several writers in nursing have suggested that the way in which traditional phenomenology has been interpreted by phenomenological researchers in nursing is open to error (Crotty, 1996; Paley, 1997; Lawler, 1998; Paley 2005). In fact Paley (2005) insists that nurses have not only misread Husserl and Heiddegar, but, in this process, have derived a new split between reality and experience. According to Paley (2005) there have been underlying assumptions made in some studies, for example, what respondents say is authoritative and taken at face value. Another assumption may be that reality consists of meanings in a person's lived experience or "if I experience the world in a certain way, then that is what the world is really like" (Paley, 2005:108). Thus, while believing that knowing is subjective and involved, some phenomenological studies have presented their findings with a focus on objectivity. However Giorgi (2000a, 2000b) refuted many of the arguments of Paley and Crotty, stating that they failed to make a distinction between philosophical and scientific phenomenology by using universal procedures to find faults with scientific procedures.

Noë (2007) adds to this debate from the stance that phenomenology can view its subject matter as autonomous. He argues that it is not autonomous because experience depends on the brain and the physical world so that it is important to bracket issues about the theoretical upshot of the phenomenological findings. Seen as a philosophy of experience, phenomenology has been criticised in its

practice of positing experience as a source of knowledge and insight (Stroller, 2009). The criticism centres on the idea that taken as an unquestioned given, the understanding of the experience does not question whether or not there may be underlying conditions which may be the cause of this experience. However Stroller (2009) suggests that although experience is fundamental to phenomenological analysis it makes visible the structures and context of the experience and does not take it as an unquestioned starting point.

3.6 The Phenomenological Perspective in Relation to the Study

The phenomenological perspective in relation to this research is the argument that the students' ways of experiencing their approaches to learning needs to be understood in the context of the curriculum type, namely, outcomes-based. It is in keeping with Ashworth and Greasley's (2009) consideration that the noema (personal experience of learning) cannot be omitted in preference to the mental orientation (approaches to learning). The integration of the phenomenological approach with evaluation research is framed within fourth generation evaluation.

3.7 Data Collection

Data collection for this study comprised interviews, documentary evidence of the curriculum, reflective accounts from my diary and pilot interviews.

3.7.1 Interviews

Phenomenology, as a research approach, relies on in-depth interview data, viewing the person as inseparable from the phenomenon being studied. The epistemological presumption of interviewing in this study concurred with Kvale and Brinkman's (2009: 48) metaphorical description of the interviewer as miner where 'the knowledge is waiting in the subject's interior to be uncovered…' The researcher, as miner digs for knowledge which is uncontaminated by leading questions. The data was collected by semi-structured interviews using a face-to-face format and aided by an interview guide (Appendix G). The interview questions primarily focused on a conceptual analysis of the topic and so related to the 'what' or the thematic questions. These questions were integrated with the

'how' questions which attempted to promote the dynamic or positive interaction with the interviewee to keep the flow of the conversation going (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Semi–structured interviews can be described as guided conversations (Ribbins, 2007) and in phenomenological studies are typically audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, so that the transcripts are the focus of analysis (Äkerlind, 2005). The main focus of the interview was to get a deep understanding of the students' learning approaches in the context of an outcomes-based curriculum. For the lecturers and external examiner it was to get their perspectives on approaches to learning. Such a focus fits with a responsive interviewing style where depth is achieved by going after context, paying attention to specifics of meanings and situations (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

The interviews were conducted in a venue chosen by the participant. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. A non-directive style of questioning, using open-ended questions, was used initially where participants were encouraged to express their experiences. This was followed by more direction as appropriate, for example, where the researcher required some clarification of information provided. The students were asked, during the initial stage of the interview, what learning meant for them. This was included to gain an understanding of the concept before asking them about the approaches to learning that they engaged in during the programme. The questions were refined following two pilot interviews. Similarly, for the lecturers, the interview opened with a question around their understanding of student learning. The focus of questions, for the external examiner, centred on his perspective of the students' approaches to learning, based on their written work and his meeting with them. Following each interview, I listened to the audiotape and noted any particular emphasis on particular parts of the interview. The interviews were scheduled so that there were a few days between each one in order to allow me to listen to the interview a few times and to start preliminary data analysis.

3.7.2 Documentary Evidence

Despite using a qualitative approach in this research I felt it necessary to analyse some documentation to inform the context of the research questions. I collected relevant written material via the curriculum document, assessment guidelines and feedback sheets. Documentary analysis was carried out by examining how aligned the learning outcomes of the curriculum were with teaching and learning activities and assessment. It was noted that there were some modules which were very aligned in all activities. For others, in particular, where creativity in assessments was introduced, there was some confusion in what learning outcomes were being achieved. In approaches to learning for these modules the participants made some references to a new skill set being introduced.

3.7.3 Reflective Accounts

As a phenomenological researcher I recognised that I was participating in making the data (Koch, 1994). I kept a reflective diary throughout the study as I was aware from the outset that reflection was important to increase my awareness at each step of the process, helping me to unearth deeper held frames that might limit my responses to issues as well as my capacity to formulate strategies to move the project on (Chiu, 2006). Reflections on the interactions between the researcher and the participants can illuminate many underlying issues of power, culture and emotion. Gladwell (2005) states that, '…as human beings, we are capable of extraordinary leaps of insight and instinct' and that 'insight is not a lightbulb that goes off inside our heads. It is a flickering candle that can easily be snuffed out' (p.122). I interpreted these thoughts to mean that, for me to benefit best from my insights, I needed to capture the essence of them. I could only do this by reflecting on the insight before the lightbulb was extinguished. In my reflections I noted my changes in direction with my data analysis of my findings. As I prepared to collect the data I continued to read the current literature on the methodology. From presenting my study outline to peers, and being questioned by them about the methodology of the study, I delved further into the literature. I became less convinced of the appropriateness of phenomenography for the study, which was where I started out. I noted in my reflective diary:

> I read Ashworth and Greasley (2009) again. I think my study is more suited to phenomenology and that the title should read 'Postgraduate students' experiences of learning in an outcomes-based curriculum.
> (Diary entry 6/9/09)

At this stage I decided to revisit my data with a phenomenological lens. Other reflections during the data analysis stage included:

> The quotation from the surgeon is very much linked back to his previous education and training. (Diary entry 14/11/09)

This brought me to literature on signature pedagogies where Shulman (2005) uses this term to describe a form of teaching and learning in professional preparations. Other reflections are included in chapters four and five, as appropriate, to support the study findings.

3.7.4 Pilot Interviews

Pilot studies refer to scaled-down versions of a full-scale study, also called feasibility studies (Polit *et al*, 2001). They allow the researcher to test the research instrument, such as the interview guide. Pilot studies are a crucial element of good study design and provide the qualitative researcher with a 'clear definition of the focus of the study' (Frankland and Bloor 1999: 154).

Although conducting a pilot study does not guarantee success in the main study, it does increase the likelihood of success (Patton, 2002). Pilot interviews, rather than a full pilot study, are important to perfect interviewing skills and test interview questions. Two pilot interviews were carried out with participants who were in the final year of the masters' programme. Teijlingen and Huntley (2002) suggest including pilot qualitative interview data in the main study. However these were not used as there were a number of amendments made to the pilot interview guide following these interviews (Appendix H). I realised on analysing the pilot interviews that I needed to be more direct with my questions and I needed to probe more on how the participant actually approached learning, for example I added the questions: What does 'learning' mean for you? and What

do you think 'learning' is? The analysis of the two pilot interviews demonstrated that the two experiences of learning approaches varied in the way students learn. The first pilot interview revealed that the participant did not like active learning or 'learning by doing' while the second participant needed to 'act it out', 'talk about it' and 'get involved in the topic'. I piloted my interview guide for the lecturers with an academic staff member who had carried out a study on a similar topic previously with undergraduate students and was familiar with the methodology.

3.8 Sampling and Access

Purposive sampling is where the researcher handpicks the cases to be included in the sample, on the basis of them possessing the particular characteristics being sought (Cohen *et al*, 2007). It fits well with phenomenology, as the choice of participants (as experts) is driven by that aim. The number of students undertaking the masters' programme was thirteen. All were invited to participate in the study, thus sampling comprised a total population sample. Two of the student group declined to take part, making a sample of eleven. The lecturers facilitating the programme included those who were committed to facilitating a full module, or more than one module. This number totalled four lecturers, two were internal staff and two external. All four agreed to take part. Finally, the external examiner for the programme was invited to participate as a key stakeholder in the programme and accepted.

As a researcher I have a duty of care to ensure that I do not deliberately mislead participants about the research (Busher and James, 2007). The stakeholders of this evaluation research comprised students, lecturers and the external examiner. I was cognisant of providing transparency in my role as researcher to the participants. The issues highlighted by Coghlan and Casey (2001) regarding the insider-outsider researcher were important considerations. I was aware of the tensions between my reasons for carrying out this study (as part of my doctorate) and my role as researcher. Such role duality can be difficult and awkward and can affect relationships with fellow organisational members (Adler and Adler, 1987). However, these relationships were not damaged in the process of the study.

Reassured by the belief that an insider has a greater depth of knowledge about the organisation than an outsider, I was also aware that my analysis of the situation may have been hampered by organisational politics (Roth *et al*, 2007) but this was not the case.

On the advice of the Ethics committee I recruited a gatekeeper for the study. Access can be gained via gatekeepers who can exercise surveillance over the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The gatekeeper's role in this study included contacting the potential sample, receiving and storing the consent forms (Appendix I) from the participants and anonymising the data. To this end the gatekeeper's details were documented on the Study Information Sheet (Appendix J). According to Cohen *et al* (2007: 124) compromises may have to be reached in sampling and access and 'it may be better to compromise rather than to abandon the research altogether'.

3.9 Data Analysis

My data analysis strategy comprised concurrent analysis during data collection and retrospective analysis. In approaching data analysis for this study I was cognisant of Silverman's (2007: 61) advice '…collecting data is not even half the battle. (Data *analysis* is always the name of the game)'. Concurrent analysis was achieved via a process of self-reflection and critique within these reflective conversations. Enhanced understandings and insights created through the ensuing dialogue were used to inform my further actions. The retrospective analysis took place when all data was collected. Data was guided by phenomenological analysis, using Giorgi's (1985) framework and the hermeneutic dialectic circle. The hermeneutic analysis attempted to consider various interpretive vantage points. Giorgi's (1985) framework focuses on the psychological meaning of the phenomenon in the participants' life-worlds. Their descriptions are based on their experiences within the context of that experience. This was particularly relevant for the study in analysing a phenomenon such as learning in the context of its relationships with such particulars as an outcomes-based curriculum. Throughout the process I remained open to the messages of the text and was prepared to change my biases and prejudices.

Giorgi's method comprises 5 steps:

Step 1 **Getting a sense of the whole**

The entire set of interviews was read several times to get a sense of the whole experience. The focus was on gaining a description rather than interpretation or explanation (Giorgi, 1989). Some of the raw data is presented in chapters four and five in the form of verbatim quotes.

Step 2 **Discrimination of meaning units**

Following the first step Giorgi recommends that the whole description be broken into several parts. Meaning units (which refer to the participant's own meaning of the experience) were highlighted in the text and extracted so as to focus on their meaning. In some cases this was a word, in others it was a phrase or a full sentence. The meaning units were then correlated with the researcher's perspective, while withholding existential judgement about the experience. This part of the analysis is known as reduction. In an effort to achieve this reduction I kept in mind Giorgi's (2006) advice to bracket personal past knowledge and to withhold the positing of the reality of the state of affairs I was exploring. I saw the findings as presenting themselves to me. The meaning units were correlated with my perspective of the interviews, as researcher, and therefore I did not involve a second researcher as this person may not have had identical meaning units (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003). The following is an example of some meaning units extracted from the interview with Cara.

Researcher: *What do you think, for you, learning is? What comes to mind when I ask you that?*

Line No.	*Phrases*
22	I suppose learning for me is exploring possibilities
23	by opening your mind up to more than you know yourself,
24	maybe it's finding an echo in what you are looking at
25	learning new frontiers
34	more than what you can put into practice

35 you can never put into practice everything you learn.
42 having other people in the class to debate things with and to talk out ideas with is helpful
46 people enable me to go further because of their differing experiences and their differing approaches
48 like a prism, there are different elements that you can see
54 It lets us open up to different ideas (Cara: 1-2)

Step 3 Transformation of the lived experience into psychological language

Here, the meaning units identified in Step 2 were transformed into psychological language. For example, in the interview with Cara above, the participant's (first person's) own everyday expression is changed into a psychological scientific language which is the third person. When Cara was asked what learning meant for her I transformed her experience into the following:

> She seemed enthusiastic about her response to the question and did not delay in communicating her views that learning for her is a positive experience where she was able to explore new possibilities and further develop herself at a personal and professional level.

The idea was to critically analyse the meaning units for what they revealed about learning approaches in the context of an outcomes-based curriculum. This step contrasts with Colaizzi (1978) who goes from the natural meaning units to a search for the essential elements of the general elements. Thus, the focus is not on the situated context in which the phenomenon occurs, as is the case with Giorgi (De Castro, 2003).

Step 4 Individual description of the situation

Following the transformation of the lived experience the meaning units are then synthesised in order to describe the particular and specific experience of the individual. This step involved making judgements about the data, its organisation and relevance to the research question. What was communicated in the interviews with the students, lectures and external examiner seemed to involve some similarities and differences. The data from the various stakeholders seemed to jump around at times and there was difficulty in recognising how the

individual interviews intertwined to give a picture of the lived experience. The meaning units above from Cara suggested an approach to learning which could fit under a personal and professional orientation. Later in the interview Cara drew on her background experience in healthcare and referred to the context in which she works, as a team member, to compare with her experience of working with fellow students on the programme to carry out a team assignment. These contextual descriptions and background knowledge helped me, as researcher, to get a clearer picture of the approaches to learning taken by Cara. This step was very helpful in understanding the relevance of the data before organising it into themes.

Step 5 The general description of the situated structures

In this step each individual interview is compared to the others to establish similarities and differences in meanings. From meaning unit line no. 34 above "more than what you can put into practice" a theme around learning for 'self-development' was identified. This theme dealt with perspectives on learning which were more than assessment orientated or which were immediately seen as applicable to practice. Identified themes from each participant were clustered into a number of general themes that appeared to have common ground with students', lecturers' and the external examiner's descriptions. The idea was to link identified themes to meaning units. Appendix K shows examples of the meaning units that were assigned to the themes.

3.10 Validity and Reliability of the Study

The incompatibility of the terms reliability and validity, with their underlying assumptions to qualitative research resulted in the translation of terms which are believed to be more aligned with the interpretive perspective. In order to strengthen the contribution that qualitative research offers to knowledge development, the concept of validity, in particular, has undergone many transformations (Whittemore *et al,* 2001). Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research involves criteria such as credibility (in place of internal validity), dependability (in place of reliability), transferability (in place of external validity) and confirmability (in place of objectivity) (Lincoln and Guba,

1985). These criteria go beyond the assessment of data alone, but are also concerned with evaluations of interpretations and conclusions.

Credibility is established when the participants' perspectives have been reported as accurately as possible. Strategies for ensuring credibility included prolonged engagement in the field and regular meetings with my supervisor in order to disclose any blind spots and discuss results. I interviewed the participants over a three month period but, in my role in the study site, I was engaged with them over the course of the programme. The credibility or truth value of the study is dependent on how rigorously and effectively I, as researcher, am explicit about my subjective experience with the phenomenon.

In phenomenology the task of sorting out the qualities that relate to my subjective experience of the phenomenon is referred to as bracketing (Drew, 2004). Debate ensues in the literature as to when bracketing begins in a research study. Some writers suggest that it is an element of interviewing style, highlighting the difficulty encountered in phrasing questions without implying personal beliefs and values (Munhall, 1994; Beech 1999). However, Giorgi (2006) cautions that reflecting on biases before data analysis takes place is no guarantee that biases might still occur. I engaged in bracketing for this study prior to data collection and right through to data analysis. I uncovered the viewpoint that the learning outcomes in this programme were restrictive for the students and that they might feel they were stifling their creativity. Some of these thoughts were reinforced with literature I had reviewed on outcomes-based education. I also felt that aligning the curriculum, although useful from a quality audit perspective, might be too restrictive for the lecturers. I documented these thoughts and discussed them with a critical friend.

When I analysed the data I was quite prepared to look at the findings with an open mind and realised that my previous thoughts were not confirmed. In order to discover essential characteristics of the phenomenon being investigated Husserl also recommends the use of imaginative free variation. Connected with the notion of reduction Husserl suggests that we open up new aspects of an experience by letting our imagination and fantasy to come into play. The

essential features of the phenomenon or experience are those that cannot be varied in our imagination (Moran, 2000). In this study I teased out various interpretations of the interviews, sometimes going well outside my research question, to connect up my findings with various contextual elements of the data. I focused on approaches to learning, as influenced by the participants' undergraduate education background. This allowed me to check essential features of my findings which could not be varied when I linked back to my original research question and objectives.

Dependability of qualitative data analysis is described as the assessment of stability of the data over time and conditions (Polit *et al*, 2001). I analysed the data and developed the themes from meaning units, using the Giorgi framework. There was much reflection, on my part, around the naming of the themes. The application of Barnett *et al*'s (2001) conceptualisation of curriculum change around three domains of acting, knowing and self helped to agree on naming the themes. Transferability or transferring the findings to another setting was enhanced by describing the context of the study in-depth. Transferability links essentially to generalisability of the data. It questions the extent to which the findings can be transferred to or have applicability in other settings or groups. In order to translate findings between settings thick contextual descriptions of the setting was required (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). However, I took cognisance of Giorgi's (2006) stance on generalisability that by employing imaginative free variation and eidetic reduction I attempt to describe an essential finding that is intrinsically general. In other words a phenomenological analysis can deal with issues, the individual's experience and the general phenomenon across all the participants.

Confirmability links with objectivity and is the degree to which study results are derived from the characteristics of the participants interviewed and the study context, rather than the researchers biases. It is achieved by making all data from the research available for inspection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These criteria are closely linked with the audit process where there is careful documentation of the decision trail. I achieved this mainly by my reflective diary entries, Gantt chart,

filing of the interview data and explicitness of the data analysis process. Although I did not use a second researcher to analyse the data I presented by study progress on a number of occasions as a peer review attempt to respond to questions at different steps of the process. Some questions which challenged me to revisit the literature and critically examine my thought process were around the methodology, the focus on learning primarily and not assessment and my choice of data analysis framework.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

According to Cohen *et al* (2007) what may appear to be a neat, clean, tidy, neutral educational research study may very often raise deep sensitivities. Their advice is to be cautious and treat all such research as sensitive. Ethics should be regarded as contingent on particular situations rather than on ethical codes and guidelines (Simons and Usher, 2000). Therefore, researchers must weigh up often conflicting situations and dilemmas which are specific to the research situation. Ethical considerations are structured ingredients necessary for credible and useful research. Using the interview approach involves the participant entering a close relationship with the researcher. The ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Beauchamp and Childress, 2001) were applied in this study. Respect for the research participant was achieved by the following:

- study information letter was sent to each invited participant (Appendix J).
- informed consent was obtained: prior to the interview, all participants received a letter requesting participation via a gatekeeper for the study and prior to the interview a consent form was signed. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any time (Appendix I).
- confidentiality was assured as much as was possible and the participant was told that the tape would be destroyed following data analysis.

Beneficence and non-maleficence ensures respect for the person is maintained (Cohen *et al* 2007). The participants were assured of this and that every effort would be made to protect their anonymity in the research report and in any publications. Pseudonyms were used in place of names for each participant and

all participants were assured that confidentiality would be upheld and the transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Participants were given copies of their interviews and the relevant chapters on findings were sent to them to allow them to highlight any issues with how their perspectives were represented.

The guiding principles for evaluators, as set down by the American Evaluation Association (American Evaluation Association, 2008) were also adhered to. These principles focus on the evaluation being a systematic enquiry which adheres to the highest standards, exploring with the client the shortcomings and strengths of evaluation questions and approaches. With regards to competence, evaluators practice within the limits of their competence and display honesty and integrity in their own behaviour. The principle of respect for people includes that evaluators respect security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, programme participants, clients and other stakeholders.

Busher and James (2007) propose that if the study is to be believed to be pursuing the truth it needs to be designed to create trustworthy (valid) outcomes. I secured ethical approval from the study site following some amendments to my application and clarity of my relationship with the participants of the study (Appendix L). Although frustrating at the time the process was an important learning point for me. It made me cognisant of the discussion on the distribution of power in qualitative research by Gubrium and Silverman (1989). My position could have been perceived as one of status by the participants in my own academic institution. Data from interviews were stored securely in a password protected computer file, with access limited to the researcher and supervisor. Strike (1990) links anonymity to the principle of privacy, which requires that procedures are not overtly intrusive, protecting the confidentiality of evaluation information. In embarking on this research journey I was very conscious of the interview inquiry as a 'moral enterprise' (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009: 62) and that ethical issues prevail from the start of the investigation to the final report. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate integrity and rigour of research. I have striven to make it possible for others to judge its trustworthiness laying an audit trail of the process.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has addressed the research design and method of the study. It opened with a description of evaluation research with a particular focus on Fourth Generation Evaluation. The phenomenological approach, its phenomenological underpinnings and its methodology as it was applied to this study was outlined and included a summary of some of its challenges and criticisms. The data collection, sampling and access, pilot interviews, data analysis and ethical considerations were discussed. Some examples of data analysis using Giorgi's framework were presented. Finally the reliability and validity criteria as applied to the study were discussed. The next two chapters present the findings of the studies from the outsider and insider perspectives.

Chapter 4 Findings – An Outsider Perspective

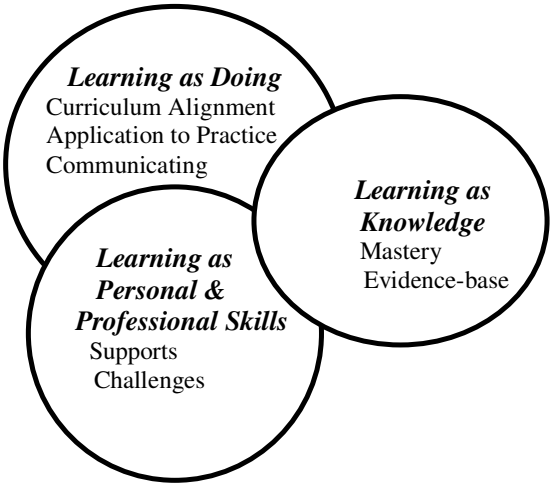
4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented the methodology for the research. In keeping with fourth generation evaluation I interviewed the lecturers and external examiner as stakeholders in the programme to place the student experiences within the context of these perspectives. I present the findings here from the interview with the external examiner (Philip) and the lecturers (Denise, Pat, Fintan, Claire) portraying their approaches to learning from an outsider perspective. The findings from the students can be viewed as insider perspectives. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants. Two of the lecturers were more experienced (Denise and Pat) than their colleagues. In addition, these experienced lecturers are currently undertaking further studies themselves and relate to these experiences as students in the interviews. One of the novice lecturers (Fintan) also draws on his recent experience as a student. From both perspectives the findings are grouped under the themes of learning as doing; learning as knowing; and learning as personal and professional skills. These themes follow the general framework (Figure 4.1) incorporating the domains of knowing (learning as knowledge), acting (learning as doing) and self (learning as personal and professional skills) proposed by Barnett and Coate (2005) and discussed in chapter two. The findings indicate that the greatest emphasis is placed on the domain of acting so this is presented first. Sub-themes which emerged under learning as doing are curriculum alignment, application to practice and communications. Under learning as knowledge the sub-themes are mastery and evidence-base. 'Supports' and 'challenges' are sub-themes under learning as personal and professional skills (Appendix M). The verbatim quotes are coded by page and line numbers.

The findings are connected to the literature and related back to the overall research question *How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?* This chapter constitutes the beginning of the experiences of how the outcomes-based

curriculum of the programme influences approaches to learning. The next chapter continues with a presentation and discussion of the experiences from the students' perspectives.

Figure 4.1 Themes



4.2 Learning as Doing

The findings presented under this theme reflect the focus of learning within the context of curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping, students being facilitated by lecturers to apply their learning to practice with particular focus on assessment and feedback and how learning is communicated back to lecturers and the external examiner. The domain of acting, as described by Barnett and Coate (2005) suggests that acting is about doing. This domain represents the parts of the curriculum which require practical skills and know-how. In addition Barnett and Coate (2005) relate to practical skills which students require for employment and communication skills around their ability to communicate effectively with each other and within the context of their subject area. For lecturers and the external examiner the acting domain was dominant in their outsider perspective of what the students needed from the programme and how they could judge their achievements around actions witnessed, either face-to-face or electronically.

4.2.1 Curriculum Alignment

Learning as doing portrayed under this sub-theme is linked to curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping (Appendix M). In particular the understanding of the module learning outcomes in the context of the overall programme aims and outcomes was emphasised by the external examiner (Philip). Alignment was especially judged in the assessments which were set for the students. In my opening question I asked Philip what was his viewpoint on how the students approached learning on the programme. He stated the following:

> What it should all come back to is what are the origins of the curricula and what are the programme outcomes and how that breaks down to achievements within the different modules. So what I would be looking at is how the module outcomes are assessed in the context of the overall outcomes. (Philip 1:9-13)

Clearly he concurs here with Biggs and Tang (2007) that alignment can ensure compatibility within the curriculum, between intended learning outcomes, teaching learning activities and assessment. His implicit belief is that aligned teaching is likely to be more effective than if it were unaligned because of maximum consistency throughout the system. His reference to the breaking down of achievements hints to mastery learning which has been characterised by Bernstein (2000) as a performance mode of pedagogic practice with emphasis on content, broken down for ease of delivery.

Further into the interview he explicitly recommended the need for programme improvement around curriculum mapping:

> I think what we could see is more mapping of the programme outcomes with the module outcomes and how they achieve the overall aims of the programme… (Philip 2:79-81)

This was recognised in the curriculum analysis discussed in chapter one. He emphasises curriculum mapping as being closely related to aligning the curriculum. Prideaux (2003) argues that mapping the curriculum can make

explicit all the links between the elements of the programme, displaying the essential features in a clear and succinct manner. Furthermore, clearly displaying these links will support communications between teachers and students. Students can identify 'what, when, where and how they can learn' while staff are enabled to see their role in the bigger picture (Harden, 2001: 123). Philip seems to believe that with curriculum mapping the scope and sequence of learning for the student is explicit, links with assessments are clear, making curriculum development transparent for all stakeholders. In the process, learning outcomes are matched to learning opportunities, different learning outcomes are linked to each other and assessment is linked back to teaching. The curriculum map can provide a framework for teachers to chart student progress. It can be useful to highlight further areas for attention such as feedback.

Again at the close of the interview Philip emphasised

> I think clarity needs to come around where the curriculum learning outcomes map with the module learning outcomes.
>
> (3:129-131)

Assembling the different pieces of the curriculum jigsaw is clearly important for Philip. In my reflective diary I noted that the curriculum analysis identified that module outcomes were already aligned with the assessments and feedback but there was room for development on matching the module outcomes with the programme outcomes. Thus, I wondered if there was a greater need for understanding on the part of the lecturers around curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping. The academic staff leading the modules revise the learning outcomes for the modules prior to delivery. In addition there is scope for emergent learning outcomes to be included in response to the student group need. Fintan suggests the need for alignment to be communicated to all lecturers involved in the programme – "I'd love to bring all the lecturers for a programme together and let them know what everyone is delivering. I have found that some of the lecturers themselves ask me what you have already done. So I would have a team meeting with all the lecturers together" (7:308-310). This supports the recommendation for more integrated teaching and making the curriculum more transparent, which could be improved by curriculum mapping (Harden, 2001). It

also suggests the importance of encouraging staff commitment to programme development (Cowan *et al*, 2004).

Although Denise does not explicitly refer to outcomes in her description of learning there is a sense of integrating the different aspects of the teaching/learning while, at the same time, highlighting her conceptions of good teaching. Her considered response was as follows:

> I like to think of a Tripartite relationship (a) Teacher – student(s) relationship (b) Student assimilating the learning and (c) Student demonstrating their understanding via the assessment process.
>
> (Denise 4:192-195)

Palmer (2007) highlights the importance of teachers undertaking self-reflection in order to be true to their subject so that they teach the subject in an enthusiastic and engaged way. By teachers being more focused on what students have learnt as a result of their educational experience, they will understand the differences in the effects of educational experiences on student achievement. Anderson (2002) argues that if students are held accountable for their learning, then teachers and education institutions must also be held accountable by demonstrating they have met the standards that have been set in the curriculum. Asked how she would know if students understood the concepts she teaches, Denise refers to assessment as learning by doing within the frame of curriculum alignment:

> I will know by the assessment if they reflect the course content, applied that content and look beyond my module and realise how my module fits into other modules. They should realise that the learning is not stand-alone and that it is about 'joined up thinking'.
>
> (Denise 1:13-17)

Rather than following a mastery learning type of style there may be room for using a three dimensional type of curriculum alignment as proposed by O'Leary *et al* (2006). Adding in horizontal alignment may focus the student to transfer knowledge between modules while vertical alignment may focus them on the elements being built on foundational knowledge, providing a platform for future elements. Pat believed that "you have to have learning outcomes. If you don't have some learning outcomes of some shape or description, you have no

direction" (2:94-96). He also volunteered that "I think I am very much guided by the learning outcomes of the module" (1:20-21). Currently, studying himself, he admitted that "…because I am a learner as well as a tutor I have a different perspective" (Pat 2:66-67). When I questioned if this had an influence on his approach to learning he responded that

> I would feel a fraud if I left that classroom without enabling the student to pass their assessment. (Pat 2:72-73)

Relating back to his experience as a student also Fintan admitted "…all I was interested in was passing the assessment" (5:204-205). This experience may have influenced his approach in focussing the students on the assessment by giving them some pointers for a forthcoming examination. In his words "it's just like waving a flag to bring their attention to it" (4:197-198). There is general agreement that one of the most significant contextual variables impacting on a student's approach to learning is the method of assessment for that student (Thomas and Bain, 1984; Crooks and Mahalski 1985; Scouller, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; Jones and Asensio, 2001). Pat was quite deliberate in admitting

> I have an assignment due next week which I haven't started yet. The first thing I will do this evening is go through the four or five main things that are required and I will go through the content that I need to address. …It is a means to an end. (Pat 2:90-94)

Stating outcomes may assist teachers to make their intentions explicit and to determine the means of achieving such an outcome (Brady, 1996) but Moon (2008) cautions that students may aim merely to achieve a pass threshold or that the assessment is seen as the end point (Orsmond *et al,* 2006). I would argue that this emphasis on assessment reinforces a product style curriculum.

Recently completing a programme of studies, Fintan agreed that he was influenced by the learning outcomes but his strategy was to

> …go back to the learning outcomes when I have completed a presentation or slide set to make sure that I can say yes. It doesn't guide me initially. It is more about being a reference check at the end so if I am missing

> something, then I will put it in.
>
> (Fintan 2:61-64)

His strategy is reminiscent of Harden *et al* (1999: 9) who compare alignment and mapping to a 'glue that holds the curriculum together' preventing its fragmentation. Rather than constraining him, Fintan suggests that the learning outcomes are "…a checklist at the end" (2:69). Nevertheless, this focus for Fintan on the learning outcomes, in his viewpoint does not necessarily transfer to the students. On questioning him if he believes the students are aware of the learning outcomes he replied that he does not "…have any great sense that they understand the learning outcomes" (2:77-78). Yet, this did not seem to connect with his adherence to the learning outcomes when marking assessments:

> I mark rigidly against the learning outcomes and against the additional requirement of the feedback sheet and …the marking grid.
>
> (Fintan 2:88-90)

Yet, Hargreaves and Moore (2000) advise that outcomes which are prescribed in too much detail are difficult to measure. The emphasis on alignment of the curriculum is carried right through to feedback for Fintan in his conviction that "…it has to be specifically related back to the outcomes" (5:224-225). This conviction, however, sounds somewhat contradictory to his own belief when recently being a student on a programme. I asked him if feedback has any influence on learning:

> From my own learning, absolutely none. I looked at the mark, I looked at the feedback comments and that was it. (Fintan 6:286-287)

Entwistle (2009) argues that the type of feedback provided to students about their performance will influence the approaches the students will adopt to their learning. He proposes the need for teachers to focus on understanding in their feedback if they want to encourage deep approaches to learning. Despite teachers intentions of providing guidance to support learning, students may not be able to make sense of some of the comments because their meaning may depend on their broader knowledge of terms such as "descriptive" or "analytical" and some of the tone of the comments can be off-putting to inexperienced students (Entwistle

2009:85). Using feedback to help students learn will require a number of processes for success. Race (2005) highlights the importance of feedback being received in a timely manner, as soon as possible, after the assessment. He recommends a focus on feedback that is positive and empowering so that it can open doors rather than close them. On exploring further why Fintan might have had this attitude towards feedback he stated that he worked with a "hugely autocratic manager who once said to me – no interest in feedback, just move on. So, that stayed with me" (7:299-301). Yet, he said that he has been influenced, in his lecturer role in working towards providing detailed feedback for the students and hoping they will refer back to it so as to learn and improve on their assignments.

Also focused on learning outcomes, Claire was keen to emphasise the importance of learning outcomes not being reductionist. Her argument was that, with the sample student population on the programme, the focus should be more on competences and being flexible in the teaching/learning approach to match the changing role of the healthcare professional. Having ensured clarity around contextualising the student sample she committed her opinion that learning outcomes are

> … a useful tool for the level you are looking after…To look at them critically in the context of what has occurred nationally; huge economical changes need to be factored in to the learning outcomes, because that influences significantly changes in education.
>
> (Claire 4:158-163)

Clearly her focus is on learning as action and in particular action for employability, or the extent to which the students are versatile in the labour market (Barnett and Coate, 2005). The potential for tension between curriculum designers in meeting the demands of subject areas of the programme and the requirements of external stakeholders for generic skills and competences can become obvious here. Claire continues that "The entire curriculum should be based on the rationale of a thinking curriculum" (4:167-168). According to Nisbett (1993) a thinking curriculum suggests that the process of thinking can be analysed into skills and strategies in the hope that these will prove transferable.

Somewhat linked in conceptual understanding of the curriculum Bath *et al,* (2004:325) use the term "living curriculum" to describe the alignment of the espoused and the taught curriculum. This perspective concurs with that of Philip who summarises:

> Your curriculum has got to be inclusive, its got to be robust, its got to have great clarity and its got to be revised and constantly reflective of all your stakeholders… You want something that's a living reality for the students, so they can take that and apply it. Students should feel that they're living the experience on the programmes, living what they want to achieve.
>
> (Philip 3:131-137)

Overall the findings from interviews with the lecturers and external examiner highlight an emphasis on learning as action primarily via assessment, feedback and alignment of the learning outcomes.

4.2.2 Application to Practice

Following the concept of a living curriculum the findings from Philip and the lecturers suggest that approaches to learning within an outcomes-based curriculum was one which aimed to meet the needs of the student population. Many references were made to knowing the student, meeting their needs, being practical and drawing on experience.

Claire referred time and again to the importance of knowing the learner, for example, "you've got to know who the person is, what their role is in the organisation" (3:116-117). All well established in their careers the number of year's experience of this student sample ranged from three to thirty four years since qualification with the average number of years being sixteen. Pat explained how he varied his teaching approach depending on the subject and when the module was scheduled. He stated that "the two modules are very different. Module two is very factual and can be drab whereas module four has more activity" (1:15-16). Pat suggests that "I think they find module two heavy where they have to read all this, whereas module four they put the knowledge to use and developing their own concept of what quality is" (1:37-39). Pat's strategy fits

well with Trigwell and Prosser's (1997a) hierarchical list of conceptions of teaching, spanning from teaching as transmitting concepts of the syllabus to teaching as helping students change conceptions. In addition it concurs with the finding that teaching in higher education is dependent on the presumptions and educational beliefs of academic staff (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001). Pat also recognised that

> They all learn very differently. They are a very diverse group. Some of them love the theory and would spend hours going through the theory, others want to use tons of examples from their work practice and others will just sit there and not really engage.
>
> (Pat 1:331-34)

Vermunt (1998) suggests that the way in which students regulate their learning and studying is dependent on their mental models of learning. Some of the issues considered internally by the students may include how much they value studying with fellow students and sharing tasks with them. The concept of signature pedagogies (Shulman, 2005) may be helpful in situating the link back to practice for some students. Viewing these pedagogies as apprenticeships Benner and Sutphen (2007) suggest that they incorporate cognitive, skilful, ethical and experiential learning which is required in practice-based disciplines. Knowledge in these professions is thus a complex practice and is situated and socially embedded.

Denise is also an advocate for applying learning in the classroom. She states "I have them up doing things as I feel that learning by doing is very good for them" (5;200-201). She was keen to give them the skills she herself acquired via her own studies: "I introduced a number of skills I had got myself from my MBA" (2:51). Focusing on the action domain of knowledge Barnett *et al* (2001) suggests there is a performative shift in the relationship of higher education to the labour market with its emphasis on efficiency and outputs. Fintan prefers this student engagement over didactic styles of teaching. He recalls:

> I can remember times as a student with certain sessions. Just totally switching off where I was falling asleep, where it was didactic, bordering on autocratic, the ideas were just shoved down our throats. Then I saw the

> sessions where I was hugely engaged and learning a lot more.
> (Fintan 3:113-117)

Entwistle *et al* (2000), suggest that teachers' experiences as students themselves and experiences in teaching practice influenced their teaching style. Fintan concurred with this finding in relating back to how his learning as a student influences his approaches to learning as a lecturer. His key message was:

> I think I was able to read the class and knew who wanted to get involved and who didn't. Things I brought from my student days are that we need to facilitate class participation but I don't dwell on it. You can pick up people fairly quickly. You know who is not going to contribute.
> (Fintan 4:165-169)

However, Fintan emphasises the need to balance the practical application with the theory: "…there was very direct feedback when lecturers came in and gave it totally practical and not enough of the theoretical. So it's a balance" (5:214-216). Although the curriculum is focused as an active process (Grundy 1987) there is a need for caution of the potential for fragmentation of learning if there is not a balance between the acting, knowing and being domains of the curriculum (Barnet and Coate, 2005).

Not having the day-to-day contact with the students did not deter the external examiner from being able to evaluate the students' application of their learning to practice. In response to a general question on learning influences in the context of their healthcare backgrounds Philip observed

> There probably is a link between these students' backgrounds and their achievements in their assignments… So for students, who are demonstrating this creativity and debate, they are linking this whole teaching and learning and applying it to practice… (3:105-111)

Again the domain of acting is very important from the viewpoint of Philip. For him creativity and innovation is the application of learning to practice. He suggests a link to the student backgrounds which may fit with the presage-process-product model by Biggs (1979). Action as knowledge was communicated to Philip, primarily, via the students' assessments. In addition, other forms of communicating have been helpful in evaluating the full extent of

the approaches to learning, as perceived by the lecturers and the students themselves.

4.2.3 Communications

How students apply their learning back to practice was communicated to Philip via their assessments. He seemed quite impressed by their discussions on the online learning portal. Being at a distance, Philip was dependent on various communication routes to judge the approaches to learning of this group. He got a sense of students "using their own interpretation of their assessment for the module and how they have interpreted that through the assignment… I get a sense of them using their own individuality in terms of meeting the outcomes" (1:42-46). According to Segers *et al* (2008) students are more likely to engage in a deep approach to meet this assessment task when an assessment is judged to require high-level cognitive processing or deep-level demands. Philip's evaluation of the online learning portal as a resource reflects the influence of this communication mechanism. He states:

> It is also a valuable mechanism and has been absolutely profound, to clarify, reassure, support.
>
> (Philip 2:63-65)

This observation is supported by Havnes (2008) who recognise that students create niches for peer learning. Peers can value cooperation over competition and in this way there is greater respect for the variety of experience and backgrounds of participants (Boud *et al*, 1999). From Philip's interactions with students in a face-to-face meeting he judged the communications between academic staff and students:

> They are happy with the different modes of teaching and learning that are offered through the various academics. They reciprocate that by saying that the academics respond by listening, responding to emails, to give them the support in order to meet the outcomes. There is a shared responsibility and this comes through the exam board so the academics certainly respond to the students.
>
> (Philip 2:69-74)

According to Barnett and Coate (2005) such interaction with the students is a form of engaging the curriculum. It also suggests a view of students as active participants, rather than customers (Sharrock, 2000), so that the programme contributes to their ongoing process of transformation and development. Philip could be suggesting that there is evidence of a professional/client view of the student here, as proposed by Bailey (2000) where responsibilities and expectations are shared between students and lecturers. Harden *et al* (1999) assert that OBE emphasises accountability and quality assurance and encourages self-directed learning. The importance of shared responsibility and accountability is highlighted by Fintan in how much he provides students with information, again reflecting a professional/client student perspective.

> Because I feel I need to get all the information across I would welcome a review to find a better balance between what we can deliver face-to-face and what is their responsibility to read… (Fintan 3:126-128)

When this student group are not satisfied with the learning they are quick to feed this back to the lecturer. According to Pat "if you take one of the learning outcomes and if we don't give a specific session to address this- they feel aggrieved –they say "you never covered that" (3:102-104). This could be viewed as a check on the quality assurance and accountability agenda.

Both Fintan and Claire believe that they can read the students via their interactions. Claire states "you'd pick it up by their role-modelling behaviour in class, the questions they ask in class and during the coffee break" (5:239-241). She notices the impact of them undertaking continuing education and speaks about healthcare professionals being under pressure in senior positions, having a high workload and responsibility.

> That anxiety on the student's part is visible and you can see it at breaks and at lunchtime, checking their mobile phones, checking emails. So that is visible. (Claire 3:100-102)

Ashworth and Greasley (2009) have argued that the context issues around the learning situation, such as the meaning of studying and generally their lifeworld as a student are discounted in the phenomenographic studies on approaches to

learning. However, if using the 3P model of learning, presage can include relationships with managers and employers, constraints on time and the political climate (Biggs, 1993a). The educational process can then be used as a space in which students can flourish (Barnett, 2007). I asked Claire how she might use this contextual information in dealing with her teaching/learning plans. She stated she would schedule a slot on time management and stress management. This, for her as lecturer, was important so that "…their head is in the zone" (3:111). She refers to the coffee room beside the education rooms where there is direct access to the lecturers. Claire feels this is very beneficial. She adds "the quick responses to email, mobile phone numbers given, the connections are very personable. In my viewpoint we're very student centred" (6:258-260).

The sharing of the details on the full curriculum rather than just one or two modules which they lead was highlighted as vital by Denise. She compares access to a curriculum as the same as having access to a strategy for an organisation. Everyone knows what to do and what they are working towards. Not having direct communication with two guest lecturers in advance of the module meant that Denise was not sure if lecturers were aware of the module learning outcomes. As a part-time external lecturer having more input to curriculum development would provide her with more ownership of the modules. Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) suggest that within their framework of academics teaching in higher education, control of content is one of the qualitative belief dimensions highlighted as an educational belief by academics.

Communication with the students via the online learning portal was advantageous and worked well in Denise's view. In particular she noted "Moodle is fantastic and there was a great amount of interaction from some of them as I can see all the emails" (3:137-139). However, she was also cognisant of the reality of teaching postgraduate healthcare professionals who sometimes had not had the time to look at the notes in advance of the direct contact days. Equally encroaching on the module resources was the issue of students not being able to "interweave content from other modules" (3:120-121) in their assignments, something Denise tried to promote and which hints at a belief in mastery learning.

4.3 Learning as Knowledge

Under the theme of learning as knowledge are findings around building knowledge from one module to another, building on knowledge they have had before joining the programme and gaining knowledge which is relevant to their professional practice. The notion of useful knowledge is evident in the findings presented here. In order to compete with other knowledge producers, universities have had to respond by generating knowledge that is useful, practical and immediately applicable to the workplace (Barnett and Coate, 2005).

4.3.1 Mastery

Learning as knowing presented under this theme represents mastery of a subject or concept, building on knowledge incrementally. For some mastery learning fits with an objectives model of curriculum (Kelly, 2004). This viewpoint suggests that mastery learning may not fit neatly in an outcomes-based curriculum. Denise encouraged the students to interweave content from a number of modules as student learning is "building on the knowledge they have before" (4:198) and relates how Bloom's taxonomy fits well with the learning outcomes.

Philip uses the term mastery when fulfilling his quality assurance role by asking how each module builds on the next one and how they achieve the learning outcomes in year one. He states that "it's all mastery" (1:28) and observes that "they are not just utilising one method of text, journal, online resources. Quite a number of resources are utilised to achieve their assessments and their own learning" (2:53-55). According to mastery learning it is the task of teachers to acquire the means which will enable students to master the subject (Bloom, 1968). The lecturer therefore must determine what is meant by mastery of the topic or subject and search for the means to enable that mastery. This concept highlights the need to determine how individual differences in learners can be related to the teaching/learning process. Bloom (1968:2) believes that a basic task for educators is to take these individual differences into consideration in such a way as to promote 'the fullest development of the individual'. I would argue that the theme of mastery learning in this study is broader than that defined

by Bloom. Within the modules students are expected to move to the stage of analysis in Bloom's taxonomy even in early modules if they are on a masters' level programme.

Building one module on the other is implicit in how Pat compares his delivery of two modules. In module two "I like to give them a taste of this, that and the other. In module four it is more like –let's chat about it, think about it, explore it – get them to critically think. Module two is about giving them knowledge and module four is enabling them to learn" (1:21-25). The delivery of module two may be characterised by what Bernstein (2000) labels as a performance mode of pedagogic practice because the emphasis is on content which is broken down for ease of delivery. Moving from one conception to the other may be viewed as moving from surface to deep approaches to learning (Saljo, 1979). This journey in the student learning is not dependent on the curriculum structure per se. It seems that the lecturers are primarily focused on encouraging the students to develop their learning to a more analytical level. Rather than just achieving learning outcomes students are supported to achieve them to the required level.

4.3.2 Evidence-Base

Learning as knowing under the sub-theme of evidence-base presents the external stakeholders' viewpoints of how best to provide the students with knowledge to support their practice. It also reflects the judgements made on their readiness for this evidence and the assessment of evidence via their assignments.

Keeping in mind the student group and their professional backgrounds, Claire uses current and recent policy documents and other relevant national documents to evidence-base the way health professions have changed. She gives the example of

> …how the role of pharmacists has changed in regard to medication management, health promotion, screening etc - it is a completely different role in comparison to 5 years ago There are a number of documents that would inform me in preparation for each session… (Claire 3:134-137)

This mindset is in keeping with what Barnett and Coate (2005) portray as providing knowledge which is relevant and useful to one's professional practice. It also supports Cowan *et al*'s (2004) suggestion that learning should be open-ended and not overly directive. Introducing new material and documents into the curriculum may stimulate the formation of emergent learning outcomes. Fintan refers to using evidence to support examples which might emerge in practice – "I can bring in examples and underpin it with reading materials" 2:54-55). Being interested, knowledgeable and passionate about their topics were traits linked to good teachers in Kreber's (2009) study. Such traits were linked with feelings of equality and inclusivity between teachers and students. Denise refers to an evidence-base in the form of new knowledge when asked what she understands by student learning. She describes it as "synthesising of new knowledge" (6:254).

Philip suggests that evidence is explicit in assignments of students who have had previous professional development. According to Philip he can "see through the works that are emerging, that those who are reflecting and applying things to their own situation can link it more to creating the evidence" (3:114-116). I suggest that here Philip is combining the three domains of learning - knowing (evidence-base) action (application to practice) and personal and professional skills (reflecting).

Overall this theme suggests that learning as knowledge is implicit in how the external stakeholders approach learning in their delivery and/or monitoring of the programme. However, mastery and evidence-base are not exclusive to an outcomes-based approach to education and could be findings on a programme at postgraduate level, regardless of curriculum structure.

4.4 Learning as Personal and Professional Skills

Under the theme of learning as personal and professional skills the suggestion is of development of the student as a person. Barnett (2000) labels such a dimension as self-identity. This domain fits with Baxter Magolda's (2009) learning partnership model where an evolutionary bridge is created by merging

supportive components with challenges in the learning environment for development of the student.

4.4.1 Supports

All the lecturers and the external examiner referred to support of the student in their teaching/learning experience. From the outset Philip acknowledged that, in his role as external examiner, he would check via the feedback how the academic staff were supporting the students. Having been privy to communications on the online learning portal Philip suggests that the introduction of this mode of learning is very supportive. He suggests that:

> In some ways it's a confidence building medium and I believe it compliments the teaching, in terms of teaching and learning, and the academics and how the students internalise that.
>
> (Philip 2:65-68)

Supporting learning, according to Baxter Magolda (2009), is reflected via the principles of validating learners' ability to know and situating learning in the learners' experiences. In his interview summary Philip encourages the academic staff to continue to offer support to meet the learning outcomes and assessments. For Denise support came in the guise of her facilitation style and support via the online learning portal. She also admitted to being empathetic to the students' needs, as she recalls her student days and transferring skills which she herself acquired during her studies. Fintan demonstrated support for the students in providing practical examples to the theory "…anything we can deliver which supports learning by doing I think that's very important. I would suggest that that's one of the best ways to learn" (6:277-279). Claire suggests that the orientation days at the beginning of the programme offered much support to this group of adult learners. Providing basic information about academia and key messages about processes, student roles, lecturer roles and learning levels were, in her view, all vital for a group of healthcare professionals. Knowing where the student was coming from, their context within the healthcare system and organisation were absolutes in order to provide the appropriate support and direction. Her support includes time management and stress management. Providing guidance on the assignment and giving detailed feedback, for Pat, is

supportive, in the context of feeling challenged in his current role as student himself.

4.4.2 Challenges

There are many issues around challenges expressed in the interviews of the lecturers and external examiner. Pat focuses on the demographics of the group when he says:

> I think they feel challenged…being mature students they have not studied for a while. (Pat 1:35-37)

As adult learners, members of this group have vast amounts of experience but some of them did not feel confident when it came to having the evidence-base to support their practice. Coming back to education in the role of a student meant that they were now in a less authoritative role than what they may be in the clinical setting of healthcare. Baxter Magolda (2009) suggests that self is central to knowledge construction. Pat believes that the assessments are a challenge for the students as he reflects his own challenges in this student role. Being focused on his own course assignment he empathises with the task of addressing the four or five learning outcomes that are required to give him direction. Taking a different perspective to Pat and also undertaking further studies, Denise challenges the students in her use of the learning outcomes:

> I challenge them a bit so they are comfortable about them and in the classroom situation they can discuss them so that's how I embed them. (Denise 4:157-159)

Focussing their energies around the contact study days is another challenge identified by Denise "only having the few days a month is a challenge for them" (4:198-199). She views this type of scheduling as concentrated and sometimes difficult for the student to embed the learning. The challenge identified by Fintan is one of a timing challenge for the lecturer to address all the content in the classroom, while for Claire trying to address the needs of such a diverse group of healthcare professionals is a challenge. She outlines such diverse needs as public versus private issues in healthcare, issues around responsibilities, authority and

accountability with a diverse mix of all professions. The online discussions among the students portray for Philip "where students challenge and look for clarification"(2:98-99). From an academic perspective Philip is encouraging of these challenges. He believes "…we have to offer creativity, we've got to offer innovation, and we've got to offer challenge…" (3:121-122).

The findings from the lecturers and the external examiner suggest that challenges are acceptable once used in the right way. They all agreed the importance of support so that any challenges set are presented with the implicit understanding of the supports being embedded in the first instance. This relationship of merging supportive components with challenges in the learning environment again fits with Baxter Magolda's (2009) learner partnership model.

It seems that developing the student as a person, by supporting yet challenging that student, was central to teaching and examining styles of lectures and the external examiner in the study. Again these findings are not dependent on a curriculum which has an outcomes-based structure. I would argue that these findings are more connected to the characteristics of the individual stakeholders interviewed.

4.5 Summary

The findings from the lecturers and external examiner as stakeholders in the programme clearly demonstrate an emphasis on learning as doing in their approaches to learning. The external examiner acknowledges the support given to the students via direct and indirect communications, written feedback and guidance on assessments. However, he highlights the need for more curriculum alignment. He particularly highlights the lack of alignment between the programme aims or outcomes with the individual module learning outcomes. Philip uses curriculum mapping interchangeably with alignment in communicating this message. The lack of communication around alignment, particularly for the part-time lecturers is obvious, with some discussion on connecting these outcomes with what had already been delivered on the module when guest lecturers may be scheduled. Overall the learning outcomes seem to

act as guides for the lecturers but the strict adherence to them is more relevant for the assessment rather than for teaching. The need to meet the students' ever changing environment in keeping up-to-date with documents appropriate to the professional background was noted by one lecturer in particular. This was linked with building on the knowledge they already have from other lecturers. The diversity of the student group was respected especially the reality of some students preferring theory over practice and vice versa. The lecturers were cognisant of providing the students with the evidence base and in guiding them to achieve mastery learning in the subject area. These strategies were observed by the external examiner. Providing the students with challenges, yet supporting them, was noted by all stakeholders. The next chapter continues with the presentation of findings from the students, as insider perspectives. Similarities and differences in findings from both groups of stakeholders are highlighted and further discussed.

Chapter 5 Findings – An Insider Perspective

5.1 Introduction

In chapter four I presented the findings from an outsider perspective. These comprised the views of the students' lecturers and the external examiner as stakeholders in the programme. These findings will be used to contextualise the experiences of the student group in this chapter which are presented as insider perspectives. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants. The themes are presented under learning as doing, learning as knowledge and learning as personal and professional skills. As with the outsider perspective the findings from the students indicate that the greatest emphasis is placed on learning as doing (Appendix N). The same sub-themes which emerged with the outsider perspective are relevant here also. Under learning as doing the sub-themes are curriculum alignment, application to practice and communications. Under learning as knowing the sub-themes are mastery and evidence-base. Supports and challenges are sub-themes under learning as personal and professional skills. The verbatim quotes are coded by page and line numbers, as in the previous chapter.

The findings are connected to the literature, to the perspectives of the lecturers and the external examiner and to the overall research question *How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?* In presenting the findings from the students I interweave some findings from lecturers as appropriate. By doing so the variances in perspectives on approaches to learning are highlighted. At other times compatibility of viewpoints are discussed. This chapter constitutes the focus of the students' experiences of how the outcomes-based curriculum of the programme influences their approaches to learning. The final chapter focuses on a discussion of the findings within the domains of acting, knowing and self.

5.2 Learning as Doing

The findings presented under this theme reflect the insider's view of learning on curriculum alignment and mapping, students' application of their learning to practice and the communications with lecturers, among themselves via face-to-face contact, telephone or online. As with the outsider view the domain of acting is the prominent one emerging from the interviews.

5.2.1 Curriculum Alignment

The experience of learning portrayed under this sub-theme is one of students relating back to the module learning outcomes in the context of doing the assignments and receiving feedback. The findings here differ from those of the lecturers and the external examiner as the students did not use the terms alignment or mapping when they related to learning outcomes. In fact there was no indication that they understood these concepts or that of an outcomes-based curriculum.

The students were not cognisant of the learning outcomes at the start of the programme. For some of them it was not until the third of fourth module that they understood the connection of the learning outcomes to the feedback on their assignments. In setting out to do an assignment there was no reference made to the learning outcomes, for example Dympna stated "it was very much a step-by-step exercise. I don't know how many drafts I would have prepared for a particular assignment" (3:106-108). This finding suggests that the link between learning outcomes and assessments are not appropriately connected or communicated, as advised by Prideaux (2003). Asked a direct question regarding awareness of the learning outcomes Caroline states

> …in the beginning I did not pay very much attention to the learning outcomes. Then by the 2nd, 3rd or 4th I did pay more attention …I don't know why it didn't just click, but then I spent a lot more time, when I was doing assignments, looking at the learning outcomes.
>
> (4:155-159)

Even though Pat assumed that the students would approach their assignment as he does (in his student role), in focusing on the outcomes from the start, this is not the case. Such a realisation seems to be understood by Fintan who believes that the students were not very aware of the learning outcomes. Majella admitted "I suppose by the 3rd or 4th one it was beginning to click in with me. Initially I didn't absorb it all" (2:64-65). Cara, on the other hand, seemed to have a better understanding of the learning outcomes when she explains

> The learning outcomes are much broader. They are tools for understanding the whole topic really while the assignment only focuses on a limited point, and can only, as it is short. So I definitely feel that I grew into understanding what they were but I could have looked at them more in the earlier modules and taken more advantage of them. I could have been more aware of what I could have learned or what perspective I needed. (3:112-118)

Although the lecturers on the programme agreed that the learning outcomes gave them direction, in preparing their teaching sessions, this direction did not transfer to the students. In fact the findings here suggest that stating the outcomes did not make the intentions of the lecturers explicit, as proposed by Brady (1996). Cara's experience indicates a conclusion that the learning outcomes cannot all be achieved in the assignment. However, for other students, the learning outcomes were forefront in their minds in addressing the assignments. Breda offers the following on her approach to learning when it came to assessments

> I suppose I approached it, by looking at the scoring grid, the learning outcomes and the core components of each module. I looked at the key words...
>
> (Breda 2:74-77)

Breda's approach to learning may suggest a product focus education where she sees the assessment as the end point, something Moon (2008) warns may encourage the student to achieve a pass threshold. Fintan may have, unintentionally, supported her approach in marking rigidly against the learning outcomes. In addition, the feedback sheet quite clearly centres on the achievement of the learning outcomes (Appendix F).

A concern with this approach may fit with Kemp's (1999) criticism of outcomes-based learning as reductionist, where the essential goal is to reduce academic activity to a measureable state. Fionnuala offers a similar perspective:

> I would start by reading the papers first. I would piece it together in my own head, using the outcomes from the course, what was expected.
> (1:48-50)

Working in a healthcare management position, as part of a profession which may be judged as predominately task focused, it could be argued that such an approach represents attention to efficiency and output. This experience mirrors Pat's approach to his assignments, and may warrant a caution of seeing the assessment as a means to an end, as in a product curriculum. When I reflected with Breda on her awareness of the learning outcomes she offered her judgement about them - "the information for the course was quite clear. There was one, maybe the … module, it wasn't quite clear. There were too many learning outcomes"(2:87-89). I suggest, from these findings, there may be a preoccupation with learning outcomes and assessment for some (Cullen *et al,* 2002). Fionnuala confirms that the focus on learning outcomes from the start of the programme was paramount for her:

> From the very start we asked what was expected of us in the assignments so they are a very good guide to go on. That would have been a starting point… I would nearly look at the outcomes before I would even start the module.
> (Fionnuala 2:58-62)

Being inflexible with pre-determined learning outcomes may restrict or inhibit emergent learning (Hargreaves and Moore, 2000). However, the sharing of learning outcomes with the students early in the programme may give them much more responsibility for their own learning. Marie was advised by colleagues who had recently graduated to adhere to the learning outcomes when doing her assignment. Her plan, as a result was that "when I'd read the title I would then read the learning outcomes and highlight the pertinent parts" (6:274-275). This seemed to work in her favour as communicated in her assessment feedback. In fact Marsh (2007) suggests that learning is enhanced when students are made aware of the mastery expectations of their programmes.

For other students the learning outcomes acted as a reference check in editing their assignments. This function fits with Fintan's use of them as a checklist. Sinéad acknowledged that she understood the importance of the learning outcomes after her first module feedback, because her unsuccessful attempt to achieve some of them was highlighted. Her reflection on that experience was that she "would have glanced over them to see if I achieved them" (6:294). This was the same for Sive who "would ensure that I met the learning outcomes in all my assignments. I found that they focused me. They acted as a guide" (2:95-97). Also acting as a reference check but not necessarily addressing them was Regina's strategy "Well you do look at the learning outcomes as they tell you what viewpoint you want but you may not necessarily go by them but they act as a guide for you" (2:70-72). This viewpoint contradicts Hussey and Smith (2002) who accuse predetermined learning outcomes as restricting or inhibiting learning. I would argue that Sive and Regina may be able to step beyond such restriction in order to demonstrate creativity in their learning, with application to practice where relevant.

5.2.2 Application to Practice

Applying their learning to practice was made explicit in students' descriptions of how they approached assessments and their evaluation of different learning/teaching styles of the lecturers. Some students joined the programme to support their practice with theory, yet all students were focused on the relevance of their learning back to practice.

Application of learning to practice was paramount for Sive, working in the area of practice development. On describing what learning meant for her she stated that "It means being able to use something and apply it to practice" (1:15). According to Allan (1996) learning outcomes in higher education encompass core subject-based outcomes, personal transferable outcomes and generic academic outcomes. Clearly, transferable outcomes are important for Sive and others in the group. Asking her to think of a time when she learned really well she suggested:

> I suppose it was the… module because we were going through accreditation and all the things we were doing were so relevant for me.
>
> (Sive 1:22-22)

This relationship of applying learning back to the workplace supports Barnett *et al*'s (2001) performative shift concept, also highlighted by Denise. Linking back to the workplace by understanding the student backgrounds was paramount for Claire, who referred time and again to the importance of knowing the learner. She was keen to be up-to-date with the recent documents which may impact on their practice. It could be argued further that this emphasis on application to practice makes assumptions about individuals and organisations where these skills will be employed (Kemp, 1999). A performative shift viewpoint is also evident with Regina who highlighted one of the modules as an example where learning for her was most beneficial – "the content was so practical" (1:28) and she felt "it is easier when you can apply it back" (1:33). If learning is open-ended and not overly directive, Cowan *et al* (2004) believes it is up to the student to direct their learning towards the intended learning outcomes in a self-directed way. Consequently, the student can draw on topics which are most relevant for them at that time.

Regina used the metaphor of a filing cabinet to outline her approach to learning. She described how she would collect and organise her resources for the programme. This metaphorical description could fit with Bruner's (1974) spiral curriculum with learning from action and interaction with concepts, teachers, peers and with ourselves. The metaphor of a filing cabinet may represent the need for Regina to go back and forth through the information a number of times before moving on with her assignment. Learning for Caroline was "…to be more competent, more qualified in the role" (1:24-25). Giving an example of how the application of her learning back to her current role might manifest, she offered:

> I would look at the service, every time I was up for the course and thinking back to where I was working. I was looking at the service we were providing and seeing if the service could be improved. I came at it from that angle.
>
> (Caroline 2:66-69)

Here, it could be argued that Caroline approaches her learning within a spiral fashion too, relating her learning to previous learning allowing her competence to develop. Although setting out with a pragmatic plan of doing "a little every day" she allowed it to "pile up" like, in her words "the ironing" (2:91-92).

Marie was keen on the practical application of her learning so that she "can utilise it to better my performance" (2:51). This emphasis on application to practice might best be linked to the signature pedagogies of nursing, the profession of Sive, Caroline and Marie who were nineteen, thirteen and twenty two years qualified (respectively). Where the emphasis is on experiential learning Benner and Sutphen (2007) label this a pedagogy of apprenticeship. For some learning was more than application to practice. Sinéad suggests:

> You want to get something that you can apply to your work practice. But I might see an article and say –that's very interesting and that it might be relevant for one of my colleagues… So I look at it like that. It's not just relevant to work. (2:61-69)

Equally, for Cara, from a pharmacy background:

> …learning is …more than what you can put into practice because you can never put into practice everything you learn. (1:34-36)

This supports Baxter Magolda (2009) who believes that the complexities now facing young adults during and beyond their college years require more than skills application. Similarly Barnett (2000) considers it necessary for learners, in this age of supercomplexity, to be able to handle multiple frames of understanding, action and self-identity. This diversity in student needs was recognised particularly by Pat and Fintan acknowledging the balance of the practical application with theory.

The use of teaching/learning strategies, which may enable application to practice in the classroom, was not well received by Majella. Her agenda on the programme was to gain as much knowledge as possible. Having in excess of thirty years experience as a nurse she did not enjoy the group work around role play. She was quite direct in her perspective on this:

> I love all the concepts of teamwork and love listening to that but I don't want to do the practical on the floor. The time is too precious. (Majella 4:169-171)

Taking a strategic approach Breda verbalised her understanding of learning, at this point in her career as

> …gaining new information that's relevant to what I already know and that I can then apply. I suppose learning is information and knowledge within context, with an agenda. It would have to meet my agenda and my needs.
>
> (1:37-40)

This perspective concurs with Philip recognising the need for inclusivity of the curriculum. On asking Breda where she felt learning had relevancy for her she offered the following

> I suppose if I take the example of working on the poster, as I learnt a lot from that and it is something which, I haven't yet but, will apply. This was a learning forum which I hadn't experienced before. I learnt a lot because I grew within which I was applying the knowledge with working on the poster and then working in a group or within a pair.
>
> (1:45-50)

Rather than this programme being unhelpful and possibly encouraging the death of originality and serendipity as an outcomes-based curriculum (Jervis and Jervis, 2005) Breda's experience suggests that she benefited from the creativity and teamwork of an outcomes-based curriculum. She acknowledged that the programme was quite different from her undergraduate experience which was outside of healthcare. Her reason for choosing this postgraduate programme from the beginning was not "just a qualification I wouldn't use and I wouldn't apply" (2:63). She was clear in communicating her need for application to practice as a personal outcome of her learning.

5.2.3 Communications

This theme represents issues that emerged from the students regarding their communications with each other, communications with the lecturers in class and

via feedback, and the modes of communication which best suited their learning needs.

Cara enjoyed direct contact with colleagues and lecturers, which was one of the reasons for choosing this particular programme. In fact this form of communication seemed to help her learning. She states:

> I think that having other people in the class to debate things with and to talk out ideas with is helpful. One of the reasons I chose to do the course was that you had to go somewhere and study with people and around a lecturer. That was the particular thing that was attractive.
>
> (Cara 1:42-46)

Cara's perspectives on communication here are echoed by Philip in chapter four. Havnes (2008) suggests that peer interaction and learning is important to create their own learning space, allowing them freedom to make up their minds about the curriculum and programme, without interference from lecturers. Meeting face-to-face was the preferred form of communication with colleagues for Regina. The power of peer learning is echoed by the external examiner when he states that they learn from interacting with each other via the online learning portal. Communication was further accommodated because of the small class size, an important issue for Marie, but not highlighted by the lecturers:

> The one thing I did like was the number that was in it. It was quite small. I can be quite shy when I don't know people. I will listen a lot and I will take a lot in. Sometimes I will be more interactive than others.
>
> (Marie 2:62-65)

According to Griffiths (2009) peer learning is fostered in small group teaching where there is more engagement between individuals. It is within small groups that confidence can be improved, interpersonal communication developed and students engage more deeply with the content of their subject. Later in the interview when probed about the group size she elaborated:

> Yes, it did work well. It was the right size. I liked the diversity. I didn't want to do a specific degree in nursing as I have been nursing 25 years. It was really interesting with the diversity within medicine. It was realisation that everyone was experiencing the same problems as yourself.

> I liked that. I wouldn't like it any smaller. There was much more interaction. (Marie 7:333-338)

The diversity, rather than the class size was a focus for the lecturers in the study. Sinéad concurred with the perspectives on class size and mix of professions. Because of her shift work Marie communicated with her colleagues between contact study days via text or email. When asked if she interacted via the online learning portal she admitted that it was easier to pick up the phone and talk as she was making new friends. She continues:

> You could ring and chat it through or someone would text you with an idea. Especially with my shift I might not always be logging on so it was easier to get a text. (Marie 7/8:347-350)

This suggests that Philip did not get a full picture of group and peer communication in his monitoring role. Communication in the form of written feedback on assignments was not as positive for some. Cara stated that she focused on what she did not achieve rather than on what was good about her assignment. However, she admitted "you look at what you succeeded in and what you didn't and then how that affected your approach to the next assignment" (Cara 4:156-158). Majella, Dympna, Breda and Sive were keen to get one-to-one feedback communicated to them in addition to the written feedback as there were some comments they were not clear about. According to Dympna:

> I might have been unsure about some aspects of the feedback and I maybe didn't agree with it and I should have taken it up with the individual. It's something I probably should have done and probably would have got more from it.
>
> (4:173-177)

Race (2005), Yorke (2005), Rust (2007) and others highlight the importance of feedback being received in a timely manner, as soon as possible, after the assessment. They recommend a focus on feedback that is positive and empowering so that it opens doors rather than close them. This message is particularly important for students who may doubt their ability to succeed (Yorke, 2005) but if done properly can contribute to the development of autonomy or self-regulation in learning (Nicol, 2009). Dympna continued "I

think when things are written on paper it doesn't get the same message across that is intended by the person writing it" (4:182-184). Yet, Caroline seemed satisfied with the written feedback and felt "…it gave you an idea where you were going wrong on something or approaching things differently" (4:194-195). The way lecturers communicated with the students was highlighted as an influence on their learning approaches. Fintan was the only participant, from the outsider perspective, who commented on feedback. This would suggest that the importance of this communication may not be fully taken on board by all. Breda captured her thoughts on how this influence was manifested by giving two very different experiences:

> I think they are just very engaging, very passionate about their subject area… she is coming from having had direct involvement and …has worked as a…I think that very direct passion and the depth of knowledge and being able to hold the group and strong control over the teaching session, very focused…he wasn't focused, he was looking at his watch, he was out the door. (3:119-125)

She continues later in the interview to say "it's obvious when someone walks in the room it is obvious that they are there for the right reasons" (3:141-142). Likewise Marie gave examples of two particular lecturers' styles to highlight how they influenced her learning in different ways:

> I find …is an extremely easy person to listen to, to talk to. He gets his point across and makes it sensible. He brings it to our capabilities and what we are doing. He also made it fun so that we did learn. Sometimes I feel other people like … referred too much to...
>
> (Marie 2:84-87)

Marie's viewpoint concurs with Palmer's (2007) and Kreber's (2009) findings on good teachers. I probed Marie further to explain why one of the lecturers made a positive impact on her learning. She explained that his approach helped them look at things differently so that "it broadened our horizons" (3:107). This experience could be linked to the grasping of a threshold concept (Meyer and Land, 2003), seeing something in a different way, perhaps transforming their view of the concept or subject.

The communication of confidence seems to be important for Regina. She suggests that "when you felt the lecturer had confidence and stuck to their point, they were giving the lecture on the topic and enjoyed it then you had confidence in them" (3:143-145). Equally for Caroline the communication of enthusiasm was highlighted "some of them were a lot more enthusiastic and gave examples" (5:231-232). This resonates somewhat with the view of Dympna who evaluated lecturers by their passion for their subject:

> I think some people have the drive or the ability to be much more passionate about their subject and deliver it in such a way…they instantly brought you into their world. Whereas other people –it was someone standing up there delivering a set of notes they didn't seem particularly passionate about so the learning for me wasn't as good.
>
> (5:241-246)

I noted in my diary entry (5/5/09) how Denise was very passionate and enthusiastic about teaching and learning. I noted how she reflected on her views prior to the interview, coming prepared with a typed summary of her views on the topic, addressing the different questions on the interview guide. I linked this analysis to Barnett's (2007) pedagogy of inspiration, where the inspiring teacher can infuse new life and energy into the student. From his interactions with students in a face-to-face meeting, Philip judged positive communications too between academic staff and students. Observations of student/lecturer interaction suggests a relationship of student-as-client within the context of a professional/client relationship (Bailey 2000) where responsibilities and expectations are understood encouraging engagement of the student in the pursuit of learning.

5.3 Learning as Knowledge

Learning as knowledge was reflected by the students' approaches to learning in their efforts to master subject content, skills and knowledge to the required levels for the programme. The theme includes the students' pursuit of knowledge as a reason for joining the programme, their approaches to their assignments, their interactions in class and their evaluations of how they have changed as a consequence of the programme. These meanings are sometimes in contrast to

those of the outsider views (lecturers and external examiner) who focus primarily on knowing and knowledge to fulfil the programme requirements.

5.3.1 Mastery

For some the programme was daunting as they had been out of study for many years, for others, more recently engaged with education, mastery learning took a different approach to what they were familiar with at undergraduate level.

Marie felt very overwhelmed when first introduced to the programme and she wondered if she would ever achieve success. She relates to the introductory day of the programme and recalls:

> I am never going to be able to do this. But there were a few of us chatting and we said sure we will give it a shot. I honestly came out of that feeling, am I ever going to be able to achieve this?
>
> (Marie 1:37-40)

Underlying mastery is the belief that the teacher must search for the means to enable that mastery determining how individual differences in learners can be related to the teaching/learning process (Bloom, 1968). Clearly some of the students in this group felt very daunted on their initial engagement with the programme. Further into the programme Marie gives an insight into how she did achieve this learning. For her assignments she states:

> I had ten versions written before I submitted…When I started writing…I'd be lost myself. But then I went back and I looked at the learning outcomes and I said this is what I need to show what I've learnt. So then I went back and divided it up into sections and said now I need to show how I understand that in my work… (3:142-148)

Mastering subject areas in order to converse about these with confidence was also important. Dympna describes her learning as "getting an insight into a particular area or subject to a degree that I would feel confident to be able to speak about that subject area with knowledge" (1:36-38). Again this suggests some underpinning features of a spiral curriculum where the competence of students increases as they increase their proficiency at assessments and practical experiences (Harden and Stamper, 1999). Fionnuala discussed how, for most of

her colleagues in the class, the focus was on getting the assignments done and "being confident in our own abilities to do it" (3:136). Such a sense of achievement may be linked to mastery. For some students the mastery of the assignment was reflected in their description of going about this task.

Sinéad seemed to benchmark her own mastery against others in the group, recognising where she could develop her skills further as portrayed here:

> One of the girls in the group had a great eye and she picked out things in the article totally different from how we did it. I would say "and how do you see that?" so we'd learn off each other. So that's something I feel I don't have, I'm not at the level I should be at. (4:154-158)

She believed that her colleagues as peers facilitated mastery of her learning in formal and informal ways. With the small number on the programme this seems to have been facilitated all the more. Giving an example around the use of debate as a learning strategy Cara also reinforced the benefits of peers enabling learning develop further. Mastery for Sinéad was acknowledged in her approach to writing assignments. For example, she compares her approach now to the first assignment:

> I am now writing my references in, whereas for the first assignment I left everything to the end. (Sinéad 4:164-165)

Likewise Majella approached her assignment systematically, highlighting what was relevant in the resources and then checking them for relevance to the assignment discussion. This method of approaching her assessments might be related back to the signature pedagogy concept that learning to do complex things routinely allows the professional to focus on increasingly complex issues (Shulman, 2005). Cara also acknowledges this experience and compares it to "going up the ladder in your approach to studying" (4:166-167), which might link to a spiral curriculum approach, with increasing levels of difficulty to be overcome (Harden and Stamper, 1999). Cara details her approach to writing an assignment:

> At the start I read my reference, I did a lot of reading, a lot of trawling through references and I would be trying to collate what particular references were relevant to particular sections of my assignment…Then I would just link up the piles of reading and put the piles in place.
>
> (4:168-173)

She then moved on to a more structured way of assignment writing:

> …the next time I trawled through the articles and put them in again into their areas but I didn't read them until the time of writing the assignment. So for me, everything was fresh in my mind then.
>
> (Cara 4:178-180)

This method could suggest a deep approach to learning which is subdivided into the abstraction of meaning and an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality. In the latter part of her interview Sinéad gives an insight into an evaluation of her own progress- "assignments were never my strong point so I am progressing more…the more articles you read the more you can argue your point. You can see how they write and you would say I could apply something like that to the way I write. You change" (5:241-245). Again I would argue there is evidence of a deep approach to learning here or a claim that transformational outcomes-based education is being revealed (Spady and Marshall, 1991).

Sive, on the other hand did not admit to getting to the point where she saw such progress for herself. She was keen to increase her overall results. In her own words she would like to "go the step further to get up there" (3:108). She felt that she needed to discuss some of the feedback from her assignments with her lecturers in order to improve on her profile of results, which remained consistent from her first module assessment, so that she could "make that shift" (3:109). The spiral curriculum features seem to fit here again. Mastery learning did not happen overnight for these students, as hinted by the quotes above, and in Cara's words "I think it was a gradual thing. The more I was getting into it the better I learned" (1:41-42).

Many of the students found that the learning around designing and presenting a poster was new and required skills which they had not been exposed to before. It was described by Cara as a "huge exposure" but "a great learning" (6:250-251).

Even though she was involved in producing a poster before the experience here was different as the requirements focused on less text and more visuals to communicate the learning on the topic. This finding contradicts Slavin's (1987) suggestion that group-based mastery learning has little or no effect on student achievement. However, not everyone was as enthusiastic about this experience. According to Fionnuala the difficulties were around PowerPoint, which was new, and trying to focus on the content. Perhaps PowerPoint was a barrier to Fionnuala's learning and needed to be addressed as a threshold concept before moving on.

From the outsider perspective the external examiner was most explicit about mastery learning of the students. He commented on the need for academic staff to be clear how each module builds on the previous one as it was all about mastery. Denise also talks about knowledge building on what they know already, while Pat compares his delivery of two very different modules, one at the start of the programme and the other one towards the end of the year. He explains his different approach to the teaching, suggesting a move from a surface to a deep approach, with a focus on knowledge delivery early in the programme, moving to a more empowering approach of drawing out their thinking and broadening their horizons.

5.3.2 Evidence-Base

This theme encompasses meanings which students give for pursuing the postgraduate programme at the current stage in their careers, their viewpoint on the types of assessments and their need to become more knowledgeable on the subject area.

Quite clearly some students joined the programme to acquire knowledge on the subject area so that they were able to discuss the subject area with some degree of confidence. This reason was to the fore for Kevin. He admits:

> I felt that when people asked me about management it was an area that seemed remote and a foreign language so I just wanted to get knowledge

> so that if the topic was brought up I could discuss it and I'd have a good grounding in it. (Kevin 1:9-12)

Perhaps Kevin was taking a surface learning approach here in reflecting his need in the acquisition, storing, reproduction and using of knowledge around management as a subject. In the interview I questioned Kevin further on this reason. He elaborated with a quote "every profession is a conspiracy against the laity" explaining that managers in healthcare use the excuse of policy not to get something done (1:17-18). His point being that experts do not necessarily know more but they are perceived to know more. From Kevin's perspective he was very knowledgeable on the clinical side but lacked knowledge on management. When reflecting on the assignments he relates back to his undergraduate education and training. Kevin was much more comfortable with the examination or terminal assessment as against a continuous assessment. This was quite different to the other students' experience. However, one of the common features of a signature pedagogy, such as that related to medicine, is that it is routine (Shulman, 2005), i.e. learning to do complex things routinely allows them to focus on increasingly complex issues.

In Kevin's opinion "you either know it or you don't. There is very little room for error. You can guess it but you won't do well." Assignments, on the other hand, are "very subjective" (2:96-99). He re-iterates:

> I am so used to evidence-based, when we are asked to give our opinion this is different. (Kevin 3:111-112)

This concurs with Shulman's view that uncertainty can raise the emotional stakes of the classroom. Coming from a professional background in medicine Kevin summaries his perspective again quite clearly:

> I have very much a mathematical approach to assessment and knowledge so this is very different for me… And as I am used to doing it the other way I would find it much easier rather than spending two weekends writing up an essay…But if I had to learn it off by heart and then had a test on it I would probably find it easier to remember it five or six months down the line. Then I think I could reinforce the learning a second time. (Kevin 3:119-129)

Coming to the programme, with a hunger for knowledge and evidence, Kevin is upfront on how the lecturers should approach the teaching/learning experience:

> I'd prefer lecturers to treat me as stupid as possible and say right from the start these are the basic things. (Kevin 3:150-152)

The surface approach to learning includes the increase of knowledge, memorising and the acquisition of facts or procedures which can be retained or used in practice (Saljo, 1979). The interview continues "I know, I may be backward…I just really think you need to test the knowledge first" (Kevin 4:170/175).

Cara primarily joined the programme to acquire an evidence-base and link theories to her already vast experience. During the programme she found herself gaining much more than the evidence-base. She acknowledged how she changed her practice as a result of learning how to do things differently. For her assignment she could spend weeks gathering the evidence to support her discussion. Having recently completed her undergraduate education Regina joined the programme with an evidence-base mind set. She felt that her approach to learning was quite systematic especially when approaching her assignment, comparing it to research. Joining the healthcare profession, in the previous five years, from a background outside of healthcare, Breda enrolled on the programme to gain a healthcare qualification. She described learning as gaining new information and knowledge which is relevant to her position.

Marie was not as explicit about her hunger for an evidence-base. She took a different outlook on learning which would help her "think outside the box" (3:116), perhaps suggesting a deep approach to learning. For Dympna participation in group work was new and rather than trying to absorb all the information it encouraged a new approach to learning so that she was able to "be more reflective" (2:78). Yet, Dympna was keen to engage with the evidence on the programme and described how she went to the library, browsing the shelves for the information or going online to check for a journal article.

5.4 Learning as Personal and Professional Skills

There is a strong emphasis on personal and professional skills in the programme evaluated here. Whether or not this theme naturally emerged from the philosophy of the school (chapter 1) or if it emerged from students requirements as adult learners, joining the programme, is difficult to gauge. Barnett and Coate (2005) suggest that there is an implied sense that a student's development as a person is in addition to that student's work or knowledge-related development. The subthemes under this domain are ones of supports and challenges.

5.4.1 Supports

Students described examples of support and supporting when they discussed different modules, different lecturing styles and the support of their colleagues and friends. For Majella joining the programme with over thirty years experience in healthcare meant that she brought a vast amount of experience but did not feel she had the same skills as others in the class as she had "come out of a different education" (2:83). She seemed to draw support from friends outside the class initially and as she progressed through the year she realised that the group were a core resource for her. Cara also commented on the changing education system from when she did her undergraduate degree. She suggested that lecturers need to be aware of the diversity of the group and their demographics. This knowledge could then act as a support in gaining a better understanding of the class. This diversity was discussed by Sive, in the context of students in the class being at different stages in their experience of a subject area. The discussions by different students in the class acted as a support for others who might be faced with similar challenges.

Baxter Magolda (2009) focuses on support as that related to situating learning in learners' experience and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning. However, the support verbalised by the students was more in touch with personal support from friends, family and colleagues. Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that to develop the student as a person the lecturers may first need to develop their way of knowing. For example, for Majella to develop the domain of learning as self she may need to engage in different ways and at a different pace to her peers.

Pat was explicit about his understanding of the group diversity and his empathetic relationship with the students because of being a student himself. Working in groups on an assignment, although difficult for some, provided support for others. Sinéad described her experience as a positive one. She explained:

> We worked really well as a group. You are still friends with people and you could see in some of the other groups it didn't necessarily go as well. (4:189-191)

Sinéad was fortunate to have support of work colleagues also during the programme as she acknowledges below:

> Everyone is quite supportive of me here and has made my life very easy. Support from people who have gone through the process of education, at a higher level, was an influence for me. Even in doing my PDP [Personal Development Plan] feedback from my boss was that my colleagues had given feedback to my manager saying Sinéad is just so motivated and is totally different, questioning things … (8:356-361)

The size of the group was deemed supportive by Dympna. The ease of sharing information and the participation was a good learning experience. In addition the access to course material via the online learning portal was also seen as a support.

> There was learning gained also from my fellow-students. We're all in a healthcare background but we're all in different organisations and it was very good to hear what was happening in some of those other organisations. The facilities were very good and I found the online learning portal excellent in terms of course material and being able to access it pretty much 24/7. (Dympna 6:259-264)

From a family support perspective Marie described how she gets six study days per year so her family would know that they would not see her for hours on end but that they got used to it. With reference to her student colleagues Marie believed that:

> Everyone was very approachable. As time progressed I got a bit more confident in myself and was not as daunted about asking someone things.

> It is building a confidence in yourself and getting used to the group. It took a while to get to know people (7:325-328).

This was also echoed by Fionnuala who believed that she learnt a lot from group work and she liked the contact with other students. She liked coming to classes for the group interaction, which she believed was really positive. This direct contact and support of colleagues seemed important for others in the group too. The lecturers' focus on support for the students, on the other hand, seems to relate to learning support rather than personal support. Denise's view of support was on the learning outcomes while Fintan's view was supporting theory with practical applications. Claire viewed the orientation day and the academic staff as main supports for the student. In particular, for Claire, knowing the background of the student was important in order to support their learning. Thus without making this support explicit the lecturers are constantly interweaving the domains of knowing and self in their everyday practices. It is only by reflecting what they do everyday with their students will they come to realise this support (Barnett and Coate, 2005). In the same way students can reflect on how they are developing the domain of self as they become more confident and competent in facing the challenges of the other domains.

5.4.2 Challenges

The experiences of the students under this theme reflect their responses to joining the programme at masters level, the challenges of doing the assignments and the examination and the challenges of academia in general.

The introductory day was challenging to Marie in a "daunting" way (1:30). Her reaction to the information on the programme was that "it is challenging but now I am delighted that I can do it. It took me a few assignments before I could figure it out" (4:182-183). Later again she felt challenged by the group assignment when one of the members of the group was sick and they had not realised this. She describes how "… eventually everything calmed down" (5:210). For Marie, the individual assignment suited her best because of her shift work and the challenges of trying to meet up with group members from nine to five. At the end of year one she summarises her experiences as follows:

> It was daunting but with practice and help and learning how not to do things and maybe eleven versions of my first assignment. The Moodle and all was daunting but it was challenging and enjoyable, very satisfying. The other part I found daunting was people looking ahead to next year. This was scary. I could just deal with year 1 now and then I would think about next year.
>
> (Marie 8:360-365)

The findings of Baxter Magolda (2009) that challenges focus around knowledge being complex and socially constructed are echoed here. The participation in group work and making presentations in class was highlighted as a challenge for Dympna. In her previous education experience the sessions were very didactic. She explains "you never had to participate like you do on this course, so it was new and it was difficult at first because for some people, like me, I was outside my comfort zone, standing up in front of people" (2:64-66). Dympna is referring here to the use of teaching/learning strategies which include group presentations. These are not part of the formal assessment of the programme but are linked to the learning outcomes of the relevant module. She admits that this was the best part of the learning experience for her. Organising a debate as part of group work in class was another major challenge for Marie but one which she again learned from and made recommendations to set out terms of reference for the group if she had to do something like this again. Not being in control in an examination setting was a huge challenge for Dympna on the programme. She described her experience:

> I don't enjoy the exam experience at all because I find even with a subject you could be very comfortable with, in the exam setting I find I have had the experience more than once where my brain just freezes. I actually felt that, very much, at that exam. (Dympna 5:218-222)

This experience was similar to Caroline who described how on the day of the exam "…everything just went blank" (3:144). Breda found the exam experience challenging in the way it caused her to feel pressurised into remembering all the information on the topics. Her sense of the preparation for the exam was one of "cramming and pressure" (4:177) and the results did not reflect the effort and time invested and Breda did not feel she benefitted from the experience in any way. I suggest this type of assessment supports an approach to surface learning.

Although the exam was stressful and challenging, Cara found the assignments to be "much more challenging" but empowering (5:224). She explains "it is very challenging because it forces you to open your mind and to think for yourself rather than be spoon-fed. From that sense I like the fact that you can think for yourself. I also feel empowered" (5:226-228). These context issues around the learning situation are paramount for students and are sometimes not highlighted in research studies on this topic (Ashworth and Greasley, 2009). The challenge of undertaking a postgraduate programme after a long absence from formal education was a milestone for Majella. This together with the use of online resources when computer literacy was minimal was a further challenge. She verbalised such challenges as follows:

> …it was the first time I had studied in a while so I had to figure all that out. Sometimes I'd be looking for something I couldn't find. I suppose I struggled with it all for a while, even the portal.
>
> (Majella 5:239-242)

Fionnuala decided to undertake the programme for personal and professional development needs. She was at the top of her career but welcomed the challenge of taking on a programme with a relevant subject speciality which fitted in well with her job. Another reason for joining the programme was to encourage her staff to do continual professional development. Sinéad also undertook the programme primarily for personal and professional development reasons. Exploring her options of programmes available Sinéad, with a view to career advancement, chose the programme as it was relevant to her current job. The benefits of the programme to her personal and professional development and skills seem to manifest themselves before the end of the year as Sinéad explains:

> Even my colleagues have said to me there's such a difference in the way that you are confident and everything since you did the course and your knowledge – that I would look at everything totally differently than I did last year from reading material of how you would critique stuff. Having the knowledge on things like quality changes my outlook completely
>
> (1:43-48).

From a challenging perspective Sinéad verbalised examples of being challenged herself by assignments but also of challenging her colleagues at work as a consequence of her learning on the programme. In addition she saw the opportunity to change as a challenge.

Overall the insider perspectives on the sub-theme of challenges seems to relate to personal challenges of the student as an individual, whereas from the outsider perspective the focus seems to be on learning challenges. However, on linking back to the literature, it is best to understand both supports and challenges as part of the domain of self which can be supported by the other domains of action and knowing. Thus, having overcome the challenge of being more knowledgeable and competent the self will become more confident and feel more supported.

5.5 Summary

The findings from the students as key stakeholders in the programme reflect an explicit emphasis on the domain of acting in their approaches to learning. However, their findings differ from those of the lecturers and the external examiner in that they do not use the same language around curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping which was some much to the forefront of the outsider perspectives. The experiences of the students using the learning outcomes as guides, as tools for understanding the topic, as core components of the programme or as starting points was balanced with students not being aware of them until half way through the programme.

The influence of their task-based professions, for some, in their application of learning to practice was clear. Many students were explicit in their judgement of a subject area around application to the workplace. Communications with colleagues and lecturers was paramount for their learning, especially where some students lived at a distance from others or were constrained by shift work. The domain of knowing reflected lecturers' and the external examiner's experiences of students mastering subject areas and needing an evidence-base to confidently work as an experienced practitioner. In contrast to lecturers the students focused on the need for knowledge to give them more confidence and credibility. Finally,

the domain of self (learning as personal and professional skills) was presented from the insider perspective but is seen as connecting with the outsider's perspectives in the way this domain links back to the other two domains. The next chapter discusses the key findings and the strengths and limitations of the conceptual framework chosen. The conclusions of the study are drawn through a critique of the research methodology and methods and an examination of the contributions of the study to postgraduate higher education. Lastly, the implications of the findings for curriculum development and future research are proposed and a curriculum model for healthcare postgraduate students is introduced.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

I began this thesis by exploring approaches to the learning of postgraduate students. My intention was to capture and convey these experiences using fourth generation evaluation research. My journey commenced with my view that an outcomes-based curriculum may restrict, rather than guide, students' approaches to learning, in any innovative or creative way. In this chapter I revisit my starting place in an attempt to synthesise the main events of the journey and suggest ways in which future research might continue this quest. I believe this journey has only begun for me and my experiences of this study will be on-going. My understanding of approaches to learning has been influenced by the findings of the combined perspectives from the inside (students) and the outside (lecturers and external examiner). The research has stimulated further questions and interests in future possibilities. In attempting to conclude one cycle of a continuing story this chapter comprises a montage of discussion, synthesis and conclusions.

The research question was *How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?* Secondary questions used to guide the interviews with participants (to gain both insider and outsider perspectives) were:

- How do healthcare professionals, as postgraduate students, approach the experiences of learning?
- Does an outcomes-based curriculum influence students' approaches to learning?
- Does an outcomes-based curriculum influence teacher activity, selection of content and selection of learning activities?
- What are the understandings of students' approaches to learning from the lecturers' and external examiner's perspectives?

I revisit these questions in presenting my key findings. The strengths and challenges of the conceptual framework, used to present the findings, are suggested. Conclusions of the study are drawn through a critique of the research methodology and methods and an examination of the contributions of the study to interprofessional postgraduate higher education. Finally, the implications of the findings for curriculum development and future research are proposed and a curriculum model for healthcare postgraduate students is outlined.

6.2 Summary of the Key Findings

Barnett and Coate's (2005) conceptualisation of curriculum around three domains of acting, knowing and self provided a framework to present the data. A strong feature of the data across the interviews was that there are variances in emphasis within each of these domains, from the stakeholders. The lecturers and external examiner give an external view looking inwards on learning while the students give an internal view looking outwards. The findings from all stakeholders clearly demonstrate an emphasis on learning as doing.

6.2.1 Outsider Perspective

Acknowledging support given to the students via direct and indirect communications, the external examiner highlights the need for more curriculum alignment of the programme, in particular between the programme aims with the individual module learning outcomes. The lack of communication around alignment, particularly for the part-time lecturers is obvious, with some discussion on connecting these outcomes with what has already been delivered on the module when guest lecturers may be scheduled. In relating back to the research question which explores if an outcomes-based curriculum influences teacher activity, selection of content and selection of learning activities, the findings vary, depending on the experiences of the lecturers themselves. The external examiner believes that aligned teaching is likely to be more effective than if it were unaligned because it promotes maximum consistency throughout the system. It could be argued that his thinking is influenced primarily by his role which includes quality assurance and accountability. He also emphasises the need for more curriculum mapping to provide clear links between the different

components of the curriculum so that communication between teaching staff and students can be further enhanced. Overall the learning outcomes, as part of an outcomes-based curriculum, seem to act as guides for the lecturers but the strict adherence to them is more relevant for assessment than it is for teaching.

In exploring the outsiders' understandings of students' approaches to learning the lecturers and external examiner related their understanding of what student learning was. All communicated how students learn in different ways. Some recognised this learning as a relationship with the lecturers. All judged learning by students' assessments. Some lecturers were more focused on the assessment as the end point than others. I argue that these variances to teaching and assessment are related to the experiences of the lecturers, as novices or experts and to their current or recent experiences as students themselves rather than an outcomes-based curriculum structure. In other words, their interpretation of the curriculum is primarily influenced by their own world views. Building on the knowledge they already have was important and dealing with the diversity of the group was respected, as was providing them with the evidence-base to achieve mastery learning in the subject area. Providing students with challenges yet supporting them was noted by all lecturers and external examiner. Challenges varied from a timing challenge for the lecturer to address all subject content to lecturers challenging students to meet learning outcomes. Supports judged to be important were mainly around resources for the students. These might be information about the programme and access to information via an online system.

6.2.2 Insider Perspective

The insider perspective (students) differs from those of the outsider perspective in that the participants do not use the same language around curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping as the lecturers and the external examiner. In revisiting the research questions healthcare professionals, as postgraduate students, approach their experiences of learning in different ways. Some students used learning outcomes as guides, as tools for understanding the topic, as core components of the programme or as starting points. This was balanced with other

students not being aware of learning outcomes until half way through the programme. In their approaches to learning students used such metaphors as doing the ironing, letting it all pile up and then reading everything together before writing the assignment. One student compared her approach to a filing cabinet, organising it from the start. Such variances in approaches may suggest that influences on learning are primarily from their previous experiences and backgrounds rather than an outcomes-based curriculum. For some students the influence of a task-based profession in applying learning to practice was clear. I suggest that their healthcare professional backgrounds and signature pedagogies have a greater influence than the curriculum of the programme. The student with a medical background was quite definite in his evaluation of assessments.

Other differences were highlighted too which seem to relate to the student's background. One student, for example focused on the learning outcomes at the start of the module and ensured that these were met for the assessment of the module later on. Another shares her understanding of learning outcomes to be much broader than a focal point for the assessment. I suggest that the variances in using the learning outcomes might be related back to the backgrounds of the students. The assessment focused student did not join healthcare until fairly recently while the student who took a broader view of the learning outcomes was a qualified health professional with more than twenty years experience in her area of expertise. I argue that one approach was product focused with the assessment as the end point, while the other may have been confident to take a more process approach. Supports for the students varied from peer and family support to support from individual lecturers. In particular, the small group size helped in easing communication networks and was deemed supportive. Challenges from the student perspective included the feeling of being overwhelmed with academia and assessment tasks. Students were challenged in different ways with assessment tasks such as presentations, debates, exams, assignments. Some students were also challenged with technology, for example, using the online learning portal system.

6.2.3 Outsider and Insider Perspectives

The domain of learning as knowing matched up with the lecturers' and the external examiner's experiences of students mastering subject areas and needing an evidence-base to confidently work as an experienced practitioner. Learning as personal and professional skills, from the insider perspective, seems to relate to personal challenges of the student as an individual, in particular dealing with learning tasks as challenges. The lecturers' focus on challenges centered on challenging students to achieve learning outcomes. Lecturers and external examiner viewed supports mainly around resources while students focused on supports of colleagues, family and lecturers and particularly being able to communicate easily in a small group. Supports and challenges are presented as part of the domain of self which can be further supported by the domains of acting and knowing. Thus, having overcome the challenge of being more knowledgeable and competent the self will become more confident and feel more supported. The research has suggested that the current curriculum model may not be adequate to reflect the curriculum proper (Appendix 1) as it does not highlight some key findings of students as postgraduates. The use of a spiral model may be more appropriate to capture the curriculum in use and to reflect the domains of knowing, acting and self (Barnett and Coate, 2005). However, the strengths and challenges of this conceptual framework are first addressed.

6.3 Strengths and Challenges of the Conceptual Framework

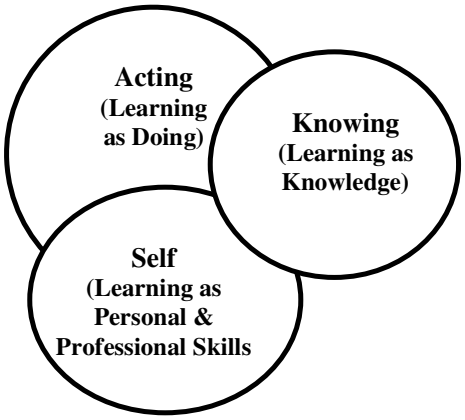
The conceptual framework guided the themes which emerged from the research. I was drawn to this framework because of the focus on learning as doing as a discreet domain within the framework. This seemed to fit well with the programme studied. Thus the emphasis was on knowing how, as much as or more, than knowing that.

6.3.1 Strengths

The strengths identified in the framework are threefold. First, there is flexibility in the weighting of the three domains across curricula. In representing these weightings visually (Figure 6.1) it may open up discussion on the appropriateness or not of the direction the curriculum is taking. For example,

where employers want some return on investment from staff undertaking further education, perhaps there is a danger that universities will react with a greater weighting given to the domain of acting. Mapping teaching/learning activities which link to the three domains may make these responses more explicit. A second strength is that the domains may be integrated or held separate (Barnett *et al*, 2001). I suggest that the extent of the integration can link to the aims of the programme, the student group and the subject area. In this study students came to the programme to learn about management in the areas of quality and safety in healthcare. In addition to this need the students had other agendas. Some, with over twenty or thirty years experience were hungry for a evidence-base to support them, while others with less than five years experience wanted to master the subject area in more depth. Students had backgrounds in nursing, medicine, pharmacy or other professions with different undergraduate experiences. A third strength of the framework is that it can be used by students in exploring, at the beginning of the programme, where their focus on learning is at. A visual representation of these individual weightings can then be viewed by the lecturers in order to meet the needs of the interprofessional group. The domains of learning may be useful in exploring students' approaches to learning at the beginning of the programme so as to contextualise their needs within an outcomes-based curriculum.

Figure 6.1 Domains of Learning (Barnett & Coate, 2005)



6.3.2 Challenges

In balancing the strengths of the framework the challenges of the framework need to be highlighted with suggested ways to address them. First, there is a potential for a lecturer to add excess weighting to one domain, such as the domain of acting, with a group of students whose main focus is on increasing their career advancement and employability. This can be counterbalanced by making the framework explicit with all stakeholders when developing the programme and communicating the need to balance the three domains of learning in order to engage and empower the student. Second, there may be tension within a student group, from different professional backgrounds, on the balance of the weightings of each domain. These tensions can be identified at the start of the programme so there is greater understanding of the diversity in approaches to learning which can be developed. A third challenge may be a potential for a dominant influence of one stakeholder group/individual whose agenda is not transparent. For example, an external examiner, who comes from a different education system, not familiar with the student group, may influence the direction of the curriculum in such a way that one domain may be weighted in excess of the other two, although this did not seem to be the case in this study. Unearthing this challenge draws awareness so that the curriculum development team can be more vigilant to the influences of all stakeholders in skewing the programme in any one direction. Thus, a pluralistic approach to evaluation of a programme is paramount. Finally the framework needs to be understood within the zones of influence (Barnett and Coate, 2005) which may be exerting pressure on the curriculum at a point in time. Some of these influences may work against each other, causing tensions. For example, in this study the zone of influence around managerial, academic and market orientations may cut across the zone of reflexivity and the promotion of self (Chapter 2). However, once these influences are made explicit key assumptions can be dealt with from the outset.

6.4 Critique of Methodology and Methods

I started my journey using a phenomenography methodology for the study. However, following my pilot interviews and my first draft of my methods chapter, I realised that phenomenography was too focused on a cause and effect

approach, hypothesising the experience of learning with the learning situation. My focus, on the other hand, was on the learning experiences of students on an outcomes-based programme within the context of perspectives of their lecturers and the external examiner. This focus fitted best with representing meaningful constructions of different stakeholders in making sense of situations in which they find themselves. Since students and their lecturers form part of the context for each other I was enticed towards fourth generation evaluation research as the research design. Since I was particularly interested in exploring the students' experiences of learning within the social constructivism paradigm I chose the phenomenological approach.

Fourth generation evaluation (FGE) has been criticised for representing an 'over-socialized' interpretation of programme reality, in neglecting the programme goals in favour of attention to negotiations between stakeholders and consensus building (Virtanen and Uusikylä, 2004:83). Such a claim can be denied in this research as the interviews referred back to the overall programme aims and the learning outcomes. I, as researcher and evaluator, shared constructions of other stakeholders in order to form a joint construction around which some consensus could be built. FGE has been described as a democratic methodology where as many people as possible can agree on the outcome (Heap, 1995) but this study did not fulfil such a description. Consequently, I present the findings to be judged by the reader on the holistic viewpoints as part of a pluralistic evaluation.

Whilst taking every precaution not to influence the situation I was studying, as a phenomenologist, I was cognisant of my biases starting out the research. I noted in my diary that I felt the learning outcomes might be restricting some approaches students could take in their learning approaches. I made these assumptions explicit by writing them down and revisiting them during the research process, in particular during data analysis. My learning during the ethical approval for the research was very useful. It reinforced the importance of me distancing my role as insider researcher as I had overall responsibility for academic programmes. The involvement of a gatekeeper in contacting participants and the decision to carry out the interviews with students at the end of the academic year, in a venue chosen by them was important. Conversations

with a critical friend and with colleagues were key in developing my concepts. Teasing out my direction in presenting the findings at a number of conferences and writing papers on evaluation and context issues around leadership and education further developed my thinking.

6.5 Contributions to Higher Education

The reader can be the judge of the contributions this study can make to higher education in general. However, the study has particularly highlighted the lack of research on outcomes-based curricula. This is especially important in a time when higher education institutions are pressurised to adhere to Bologna criteria which emphasises modularisation, documentation of learning outcomes for different levels of programmes and the application of credits for discreet units of learning. The argument for transferability within the EU and worldwide, progression and lifelong learning has encouraged the uptake of outcomes-based education even further. Clearly there is a need for further research on outcomes-based curricula.

Two major contributions of this study to higher education in the context of healthcare professionals are:

(1) it highlights the diversity of postgraduate students' approaches to learning at various stages in their professional careers
(2) it contextualises the importance of challenge and support from lecturers in the teaching/learning processes.

The diversity of postgraduate students' approaches to learning may be further influenced by their signature pedagogies. From a healthcare professional background, with a focus on tasks and action, there is a suggestion that the three dimensions - thinking (domain of knowing), performing (domain of acting), and acting with integrity (domain of self) do not receive equal attention across the professions. Measuring up to both profession and university, professionals must learn theory and knowledge as they must understand in order to act, and they must act in order to serve (Shulman, 2005). These connections between the

professions and the university warrant further exploration. The influence of the outsider perspectives (lecturers and external examiner) in challenging and supporting the student is offered through the principles of validating learners' ability to know, situating learning in learners' experience and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning. These supports in turn assist learners in engaging in the challenges of learning. The challenges are that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, and self is central to knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 2009). The students in this research identified the challenges they faced in coming back to study after a long period of time but with many years experience. They required different amounts of support, depending on their backgrounds. Challenges and supports could be central to the choice of teaching/learning strategies across the domains of acting, knowing and self. Further research is required to tease out these connections.

6.6 Implications for Curriculum Development

The implications of the findings of this study for curriculum development are considerable in terms of clarifying the diversity of influences on approaches to learning for postgraduate students. Relating back to Posner's (2004) framework for curriculum analysis, the identification of beliefs and ideas to which the curriculum developers are committed and which shapes the curriculum should be explicit. Clearly not all students in this research were aware of the learning outcomes for the modules. Lecturers are in danger of assuming that students understand the relevance of an outcomes-based curriculum when this may not be the case. Thus, more engagement of the student in relating to the learning outcomes is needed. The philosophy of education underpinning the curriculum needs to be communicated to the student group so that there are links between the outsider and insider perspectives which can then inform the weightings of the domains of learning. The use of a taxonomy of learning (such as Bloom's) may not be appropriate for adult learners who have a diverse range of experience and knowledge. The concept of a hierarchy of learning may not suit all groups as learners will progress at different paces. Moreover, the concept of mastery learning may reflect mastery of action, knowledge or personal and professional

skills. This focus may connect to the students' reason for continuing their studies to postgraduate level.

The implications of the research findings are the need to develop a curriculum model which best reflects the approaches to learning of postgraduate students at diverse stages in their careers. The 3P model may not visually reflect the complexities of this group. In particular, the findings from the domain of self suggest that challenge and support is core to learning. The dominant focus on the domain of acting could be balanced with an evidence-base, a need which all students alluded to, sometimes to give them confidence in their positions in healthcare, at other times to give them the language to discuss management issues. Weaving right through these needs is the importance of communicating and the support of peers. Figure 6.2 represents an alternative model for the programme evaluated and one which could be considered for similar postgraduate programmes in higher education.

6.7 A Curriculum Model for Healthcare Postgraduate Students

The model represents two dominant external influences on postgraduate programmes in higher education. Curriculum alignment in the context of an outcomes-based curriculum is the first dominant influence. Both horizontal and vertical alignments can be considered to ensure students transfer knowledge between domains of learning. Implicit in this alignment is a focus on links between learning and assessment (highlighted under process in the 3P model). The current external affiliation with the Bologna process in particular can have as much influence as the higher education institution allows. The broken arrows can be changed to continuous arrows if the influence is quite strong. As was the finding of the current study, this influence can be determined in some respects by the active involvement of the external examiner, in a quality assurance role and the involvement of the accreditation body for the programme. The influences of the postgraduate student group will always be a strong influence on the learning situation. While the diversity of the student group will change, the strength of influence will continue to be strong. Adult learners entering postgraduate education have many other commitments in their life-worlds. They will generally

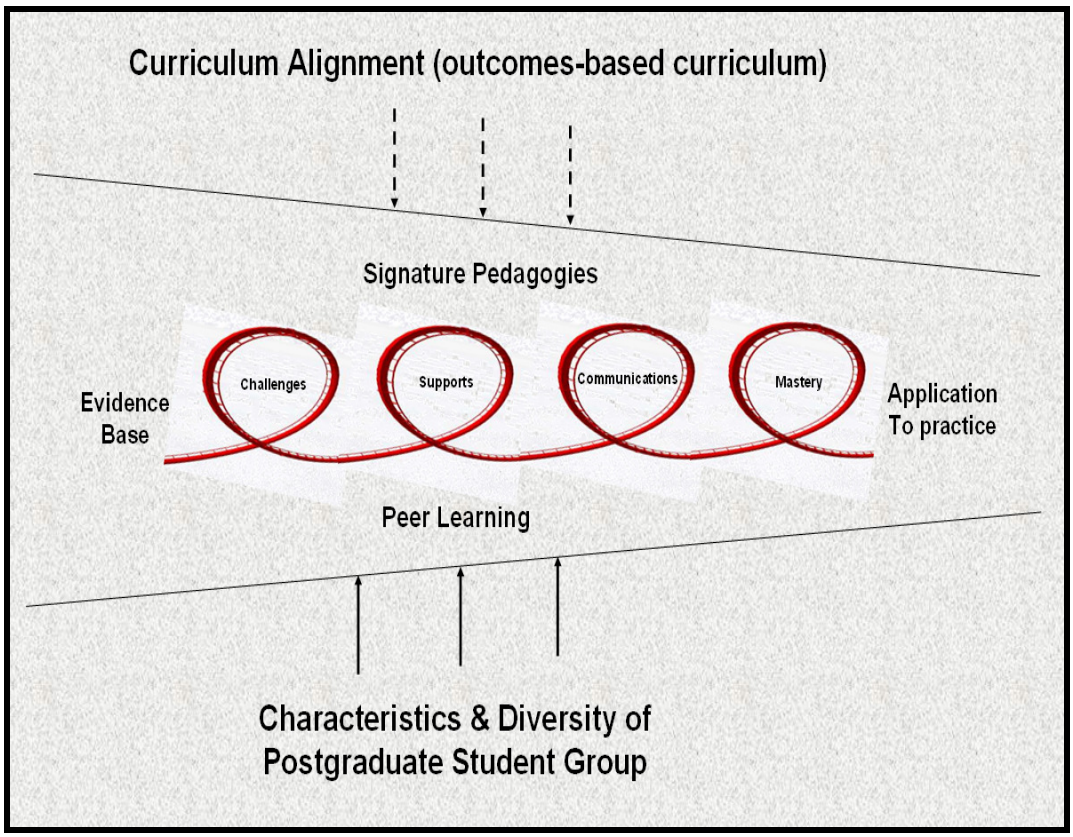
approach these programmes with a readiness to learn and apply the learning to practice.

The centre of the model represents a spiral of learning needs (which link with domains of learning) during the lifetime of the programme. Surrounding this spiral are internal influences of the student group (signature pedagogies and peer learning), discussed below. Learning needs can vary but some may remain core for postgraduate students. For example, challenges and supports (domain of self) will undoubtedly be important for adult learners undertaking further studies. While postgraduate students need to be challenged, equally, they need supports in place to counter these challenges. However, the acknowledgement of peer and lecturer supports should be central for adult learning. Within the domain of knowing needs may change depending on the student's career stage and knowledge base. The requirement for an evidence-base to support current experience in practice may be to the forefront of postgraduate students undertaking a specialist programme in a subject/topic area. Communications with lecturers and peers will be central for all students in their quest to master the topic area (mastery). The model represents the domain of knowing (evidence-base) as being a starting point for many mature students and progressing towards mastery. The emphasis on application to practice (domain of acting) will always be important for programmes at postgraduate level, as students generally take up further education to meet a need in their careers.

Internal influences are portrayed as signature pedagogies or the characteristic forms of teaching and learning which students have experienced at undergraduate level and via their professional induction. Some of these experiences can influence the way students approach learning at postgraduate level. The second internal influence is peer learning, a form of learning beyond the curriculum. This learning values corporation over competition and is generally fostered in small group teaching, which is more common at postgraduate level. The influence of peer learning can support student engagement on the programme and links closely with challenges and supports in the domain of self found in this study. Although developed from findings presented here, this model can be tested out with postgraduate students from other professional backgrounds and

will no doubt be developed further. I argue that the model makes explicit key issues for postgraduate students as they return to higher education. Unless there is a focus on influences as well as learning needs the student may not engage in the curriculum, so missing out on one or more domains. I hope the model can be viewed as being suitable for a living curriculum which is dynamic and can respond to the ever changing environmental influences between professions and universities.

Figure 6.2 Curriculum Model for Healthcare Postgraduate Students



6.7 Recommendations for Future Research

The conceptual framework and the curriculum model needs to be tested, in similar and different education settings to determine its scope, extent of transferability and how it can act as a guide for informing curriculum development. This work could be conducted within the phenomenological tradition, using the same methods and processes. Further insights and

understandings about learning approaches within the context of outcomes-based education could be gained through such inductive work. This research studied a small group of students, lecturers and external examiner at one point in time. This is a limitation which can be addressed in a longitudinal study incorporating follow-up interviews and non-participant observations. The introduction of the conceptual framework and curriculum model could form part of an action research study with the involvement of all stakeholders as co-researchers. Fourth generation evaluation could be tested further in adhering to more stakeholder involvement and negotiation as recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1989).

6.8 Conclusion

The main thrust of this research has been the influence of an outcomes-based curriculum on approaches to learning. This aim and the subsequent critique of studies in this field already carried out moved the focus of the study away from phenomenography to phenomenology, framed within fourth generation evaluation research.

In the thesis I have argued that previous research on outcomes-based curricula examined primary or secondary school level. Many papers were critiques of outcomes-based learning rather than research. Papers which focus on outcomes-based education in higher education are mainly discussion documents. Overall there was a lack of research exploring the influence of outcomes-based curricula on approaches to learning from the experiences of postgraduate students. No published research was found incorporating perspectives from students and their lecturers on this topic within the same study. Consequently, I explored approaches to learning from the insider and outside stakeholder perspectives.

The journey this far has been exciting and suggests that the research has only tapped the surface of the experiences of postgraduate students' approaches to learning in the context of the curriculum structure. It has provided some answers and raised more questions but most importantly it has reinforced my belief that experiences of students' learning cannot be understood fully without connecting to the views of other stakeholders in the relationship, namely their lecturers. The

influence of the external examiner in his feedback regarding adherence to curriculum alignment undoubtedly shapes the implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning. Using a social constructivism paradigm and fourth generation evaluation there is a realisation that realities are constructed by people, often under the influence of a variety of social and cultural factors that lead to shared constructions. However, this evaluation can raise more questions than answers and the emergent construction will only hold for a short timespan. New information and developments of the curriculum may be ongoing so that evaluations never stop; they merely pause.

7.0 References

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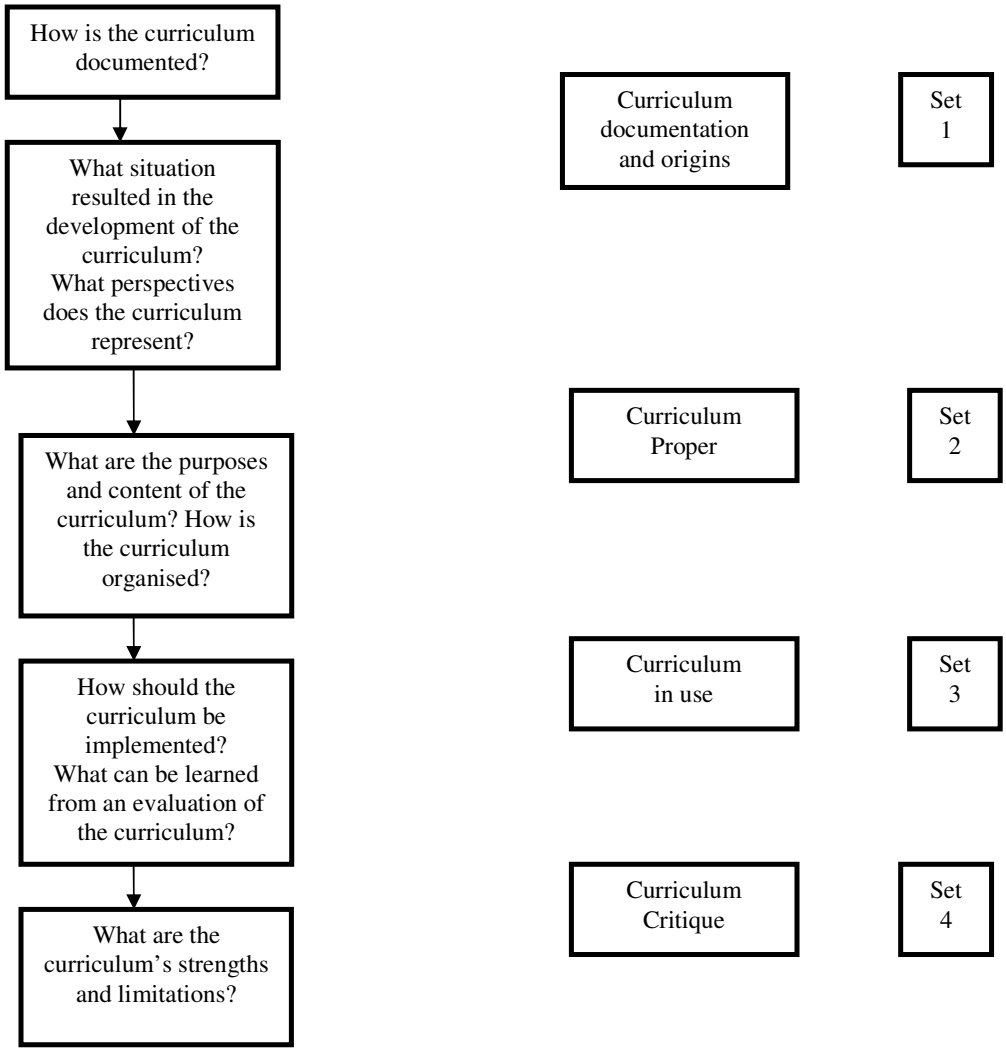
Appendix A

The Process of Curriculum Analysis (Posner, 2004)



Appendix B

Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

MSc in Quality & Safety in Healthcare

6.0 Programme Aims

The primary aims of the programme are to:

- Provide students with a sound knowledge base appropriate to master's level.
- Develop students' ability to challenge assumptions and to question values, beliefs and policies underpinning health and healthcare, at individual and organisational levels.
- Develop students as reflective practitioners with the skills, confidence and awareness necessary to identify and implement evidence based quality and safety in healthcare.
- Develop the ability to use quality improvement tools and interventions that are specific to quality and safety in healthcare.
- Provide students with the skills necessary to develop and critique appropriate research and evaluation methodologies.
- Develop students' ability to integrate skills and knowledge gained throughout the programme and to apply these to a change/organisational development project.

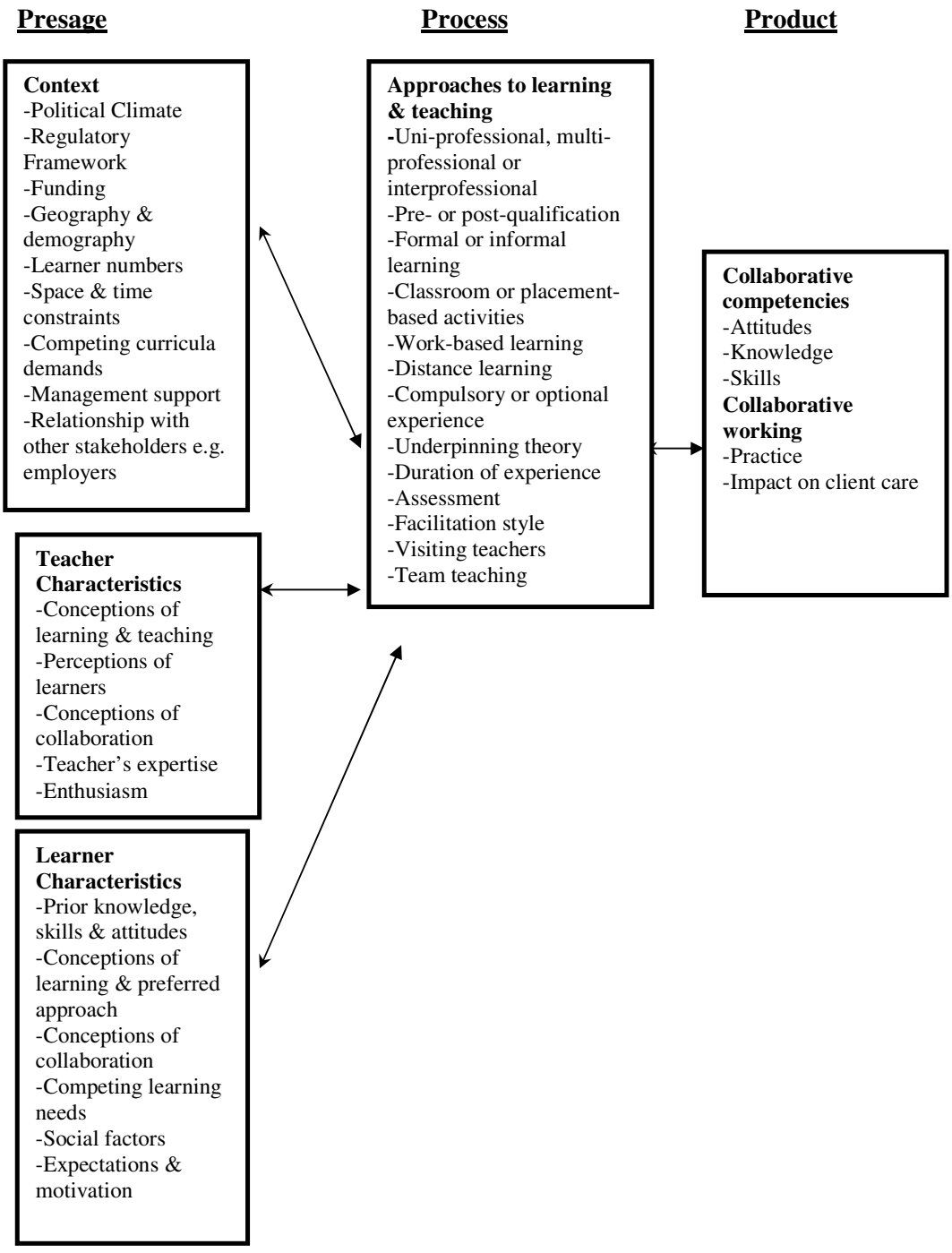
6.1 Programme Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the MSc programme participants will be able to:

- Debate internal and external catalysts for quality and understand the core concepts of quality and safety.
- Critically appraise the tools and frameworks for quality.
- Critically discuss the concepts and theories for managing quality.
- Evaluate and use measurement tools for quality and safety.
- Evaluate the concepts of governance including clinical risk management and audit.
- Critically discuss the accreditation process and the use of standards.
- Assume a strategic leadership role as an advocate for improved healthcare delivery.
- Complete a methodologically sound applied research study.

Appendix C

3P Curriculum Model (Biggs, 1993a)



Appendix D

Table 1.3 Overview of Modules

Module	Type of Module	Assessment	*Credits	Marks
Year 1 Postgraduate Diploma				
Introduction to Quality & Safety	Core	Course Work	10	100
Tools & Frameworks for Quality	Core	Course Work	10	100
Research, Measurement & Evaluation	Core	Course Work	10	100
Managing Quality	Core	Written Examination	10	100
Accreditation & Standards	Core	Course Work	10	100
Clinical Governance	Core	Course Work	10	100
Postgraduate Diploma Credits			60	
Year 2 Masters				
Research Methods	Core	Research Proposal	10	100
Leadership & Strategic Management	Core	Course Work	10	100
Dissertation	Core	Course Work	40	400
Total MSc Credits & Marks:			120	1,200

*The Credit system is based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) where 1 credit is equivalent to 25 – 30 hours of student workload (direct contact time plus independent learning time etc.)

Appendix E

Sample Module Descriptor

MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Quality & Safety

Module Title:	**Introduction to Quality & Safety (Year 1)**
Pre-requisite:	Primary degree or equivalent
Credit Rating:	10 (ECTS)
National Qualifications Framework:	Level 9
Module Co-ordinator:	Name
Module Lecturers:	Names
Module Contact Details:	Email:
	Tel:
Rationale of Module:	
It is essential that quality and safety in healthcare be based on a sound understanding of their historical development and the drivers of quality and safety within the national healthcare system.	
Module Aim:	
To introduce healthcare professionals to the historical development of quality and safety and apply this knowledge and understanding to their service area.	
Learning Outcomes:	
On successful completion of this module students will be able to: 1. Produce an overview of the national healthcare system & suggest how the regulating bodies influence quality & safety in this system. 2. Utilise the historical development of quality and safety as a basis for identifying influences in healthcare today. 3. Collaborate with inter-professional colleagues to identify key drivers of quality & safety in the context of their area of practice. 4. Demonstrate a critical awareness of clients' perceptions of service quality.	

Teaching & Learning Activities:

Activity	Hours
Lectures	30
Course work preparation	47
Independent learning time	140
Tutor-supported online learning	10
Assessment	23
Total:	**250**

Indicative Syllabus:

Introduction to Quality & Safety
The National Health System
The History of Quality & Safety
Pioneers of Quality
Drivers of Quality & Safety
The Dimensions of Quality
Patient Perceptions of Quality

Examination/ Assessment Method	Type of Assessment (Continuous/Terminal)	Weighting
Course Work	Continuous	100
Due Date:	To be determined	
Word Count:	3000	

Indicative Reading List:

Core Text Books:

Sale D (2005) Understanding clinical governance and quality assurance; making it happen, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Additional Recommended Text Books:

McSherry R & Pearce P (2006) 2nd Edition. Clinical governance: a guide to implementation for healthcare professions, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Moullin M (2002) Delivering excellence in health and social care, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

Walshe K & Boaden R (Eds) (2006) Patient safety, research into practice. Open University Press, Berkshire.

Articles:

Downey-Ennis K & Hannington D (2002) In search of excellence in Irish healthcare. International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance, 15(2); 65-73.

Macfarlane, F., Greenhalgh, T., Scofield, T. & Desombre, T. (2004), RCGP quality team development programme: an illuminative evaluation, Quality and Safety in Health Care, 13: 356-362.

Online Journals:

International Journal for Health Care Quality Assurance

Journal of Quality in Clinical Practice

Journal of Quality Management

Quality and Safety in Healthcare

Quality and Management in Healthcare

Websites:

Commission for Healthcare: http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

Department of Health & Children: http://www.dohc.ie

Department of Health UK: http://www.dh.gov.uk

Excellence Ireland Quality Association (EIQA): http://www.eiqa.com

Irish Society for Quality and Safety in Healthcare (ISQSH): http://www.isqsh.ie

Quality Healthcare: http://www.qualityhealthcare.org

Institute of Healthcare Improvement: http://www.ihi.org

Institute of Medicine (IOM): http://www.iom.edu

UAE Government Strategy: http://uaeinteract.com/government/UAEGovtStrategyEng.pdf

Assessment:

Select the drivers and barriers of quality and safety in your national healthcare system and demonstrate their relevance to your service area.

Use the learning outcomes above to focus your discussion.

Date of Last Revision: **April 2009**

Appendix F
Feedback Sheet and Marking Grid

	Student ID:	
	Student Name:	
	Programme:	MSc in Quality & Safety in Healthcare
	Academic Year:	2008 - 2009
	Module:	Introduction to Quality & Safety
	Mark:	

Learning outcomes: Your achievement of each learning outcome is graded on a scale of 1 – 5 where:	**Achievement** **5** **1**
1. Produce an overview of the national healthcare system & suggest how the regulating bodies influence quality & safety in this system.	
2. Utilise the historical development of quality & safety as a basis for identifying influences in healthcare today.	
3. Collaborate with inter-professional colleagues to identify key drivers of quality & safety in the context of their area of practice.	
4. Demonstrate a critical awareness of clients' perceptions of service quality.	

Academic writing style:	**Good** **Needs improvement**
Sentence Structure & Grammar	
Paragraphs	
Referencing	

General feedback about your work:	**Good** **Needs improvement**
A good introduction signposting your understanding of assignment topic	
Ability to link theory back to practice	
Analysis	
Written Fluently	
Use of references to support your statements	
Evidence of critical thinking	

Overall Comments:
What was good about your assignment:
Areas for improvement:

Marker:	
Date:	
Moderator:	

Assignment Marking Grid

FAILURE FOR PLAGIARISM OR NON SUBMISSION, WITH A MAXIMUM OF 50% FOR THE RESUBMISSION						
CLASS	**KNOWLEDGE**	**COMPREHENSION AND APPLICATION**	**ANALYSIS**	**SYNTHESIS**	**EVALUATION**	**LITERARY STYLE**
> 70	Exceptionally good use of knowledge from a wide range of relevant disciplines pertinent to the area of study. Use of recent (<5 years) and appropriate research. Mostly primary sources	Excellent use of explanation and summarization. Answered the question fully and completely.	Exceptionally well developed; logical presentation of argument; clear structure. Makes links between areas of work. Demonstrates clarity of thought.	Excellent level of independent imagination, creative thinking. Consistently generates new ways of looking at things.	Identifies major and minor issues and demonstrates an excellent level of critical thinking	Very well written; evidence of distinct personal style. No spelling or grammar errors; all words used correctly. Paragraphs longer than one sentence; not longer than one page. Headings if used are of the same format and appropriate level. Unnecessary abbreviations not used; necessary ones explained. Numbers are written or spelt as appropriate. Capital and small letters used appropriately. Quotations are appropriately set out and referenced. No unnecessary parentheses. Punctuation appropriate. Verbs active where appropriate and subjects are in agreement. Pronouns have clear referents. Parallel construction. Tone is not polemic. Sexist language and awkward constructions avoided. References in Departmental approved format.
65-69	Demonstrates very good use of knowledge from a wide area. Mostly with primary sources some secondary.	Very good use of explanation and summarization. Answered the question fully and completely.	Very well developed; logical presentation of argument; clear structure. Makes links between areas of work. Demonstrated clarity of thought.	Very good levels of independent imaginative creative thinking. Frequently generates new ideas of looking at things.	Very good levels of critical thinking. Identifies and evaluates major and minor issues. Balances arguments.	
60-64	Evidence of highly relevant knowledge and principles. Use of research which is relevant and up to date.	Very good use of explanation and summarization. Answered the question fully and completely.	Well developed. Logical presentation of argument; clear structure. Makes most relevant links between areas of work. Demonstrated clarity of thought.	Very good levels of independent imaginative creative thinking. Frequently generates new ways of looking at things.	Identifies major and minor issues. Identifies strengths and weaknesses of material. Balanced arguments.	Competent use of English. Fluent writing. Accurate spelling and grammar. Distinct personal flair.
50-59	Evidence of relevant knowledge and principles. Use of research which is relevant and up to date.	Fairly good use of explanation and summarization. Partially answered the question.	Clear structure; generally logical presentation of argument. Some links between areas of work. Generally demonstrates clarity of thought.	Clear evidence of independent, imaginative, creative thinking. Often generates new ways of looking at things.	Identifies major and minor issues. Evaluates major strengths and weaknesses. Balances arguments. Minimal evidence of critical thinking.	Competent use of English. Reasonably accurate spelling and grammar. Pedestrian. Lacks personal flair.
40-49 FAIL	Mainly descriptive use of knowledge. Little research used; mostly secondary sources. Inadequate reference list.	Adequate use of explanation and summarization. Some aspects of the question answered	Some structure but not entirely clear; argument sometimes but not always logical. Thinking occasionally confused. Makes few links between areas of work.	Some evidence of independent, imaginative, creative thinking. Occasionally generates new ways of looking at things.	Identifies either major strengths or weaknesses. Limited critical appraisal; polemic. Identifies major issues.	Some spelling and grammar errors. References in inaccurate format.
<40 – FAIL	Use of inadequate or outdated knowledge. Evidence of research inadequate. Unsatisfactory reference list.	Poor explanation and summarization. Has only attempted to answer question.	Weak structure, little logical argument. Links between different areas of work are missing or inaccurate. Thinking sometimes confused.	Minimal evidence of independent thinking. Rarely generates new ways of looking at things.	Does not evaluate/ appraise. Descriptive. Identifies few issues.	Difficult to understand. Poor use of English. Numerous spelling and grammar errors

Appendix G

Interview Guide (post pilot interviews)

Approaches to learning

Students

- Why did you join this programme?
- How do you usually study for the programme?
- Think of a time when you learned really well.
- What does learning mean for you?
- What do you think 'learning' is?
- How do you begin work on your assignment?
- How do you go about it?
- Are you aware of the learning outcomes for the modules?
- Do these learning outcomes influence how you do your assignment?
- Do they guide or restrict you in any way?
- Is there anything else, from your experience on the programme that you see as a positive learning experience?

Probing Strategies

- Repeating- the last sentence verbatim, in a questioning tone, followed by a silence from the interviewer.
- Request for clarification- if the repeating probe is insufficient, ask for clarification e.g. 'what do you mean by that?'
- Request for elaboration- 'can you tell me more about that?'
- Request for confirmation- summarising and returning the interviewee's answers in a questioning form.

Interview Guide (post expert advice)
Approaches to learning

Lecturers

Opening Questions

- What do you teach this group of students?
- What must these students know and understand about these topics?

Interview Questions

- What do you understand by student learning?
- How do you know if the students have learned the topics on your module?
- Do you think there is a relationship between teaching and learning?
- If yes, what is this relationship?
- Do the learning outcomes of the module influence your selection of content and learning activities?
- How do they influence you?
- To what extent do you direct students to passing the assessment for the module?
- Do you think assessment influences students' learning on the programme?
- Do you think that feedback on assessments influence student learning in any way?
- If so, in what way?
- Are you familiar with the full curriculum for this programme?
- Is there more information you would like in order to inform your teaching on the programme?

Probing Strategies

- Repeating- the last sentence verbatim, in a questioning tone, followed by a silence from the interviewer.
- Request for clarification- if the repeating probe is insufficient, ask for clarification e.g. 'what do you mean by that?'
- Request for elaboration- 'can you tell me more about that?'
- Request for confirmation- summarising and returning the interviewee's answers in a questioning form.

Appendix H

Pilot Interview Guide

Approaches to learning

Students

- Why did you join this programme?
- How do you usually study for the programme?
- Think of a time when you learned really well.
- To what do you attribute this learning?
- Are you aware of the learning outcomes for the modules?
- Do these learning outcomes help to guide you in doing your assessment?

Lecturers

- What do you understand by student learning?
- Do learning outcome statements influence your selection of content, learning activities and assessment?
- If so in what way?
- How do you think this influences students on the programme?

Probing Strategies

- Repeating- the last sentence verbatim, in a questioning tone, followed by a silence from the interviewer.
- Request for clarification- if the repeating probe is insufficient, ask for clarification e.g. 'what do you mean by that?'
- Request for elaboration- 'can you tell me more about that?'
- Request for confirmation- summarising and returning the interviewee's answers in a questioning form.

Appendix I

Consent Form

Study Title: Approaches to learning.

Please cross out Yes or No as appropriate

Complete the following:

Have you read or have read to you the Study Information Sheet? Yes / No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No

Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes / No

Have you received enough information about the study? Yes / No

To whom have you spoken? _____

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

- At any time? Yes / No
- Without having to give a reason for withdrawing? Yes / No

Please note that audio recordings of interviews will be transcribed and you will be permitted, should you wish to edit these transcripts. Once the transcripts are edited the audio tapes will be destroyed.

Do you agree to take part in this study? Yes / No

Signed: _____ Date _____

Name (in block letters) _____

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:
The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Thank you.

Researcher : Pauline Joyce
(Professional Doctorate Programme, DCU)
087 2834771
pjoyce@rcsi.ie

Supervisor: Dr Gerry McNamara
0868554001
gerry.mcnamara@dcu.ie

Appendix J

Study Information Sheet

Title of Study: Approaches to learning.

You are invited to participate in this study which will explore approaches to learning from the perspectives of healthcare professionals and their lecturers. Your involvement in the study will be to share your experience of learning via an interview.

The objectives of the study are to investigate:

- How healthcare professionals, as students, approach the experiences of learning.
- If outcome statements drive student learning.
- If outcome statements encourage or discourage direction of learning.
- If outcome statements drive teacher activity, selection of content, selection of learning activities and assessment.
- The challenges to current understandings of student teaching and learning.

You may decline to participate in the study without giving reasons. Withdrawal is permitted at any time, without having to give a reason and without any personal consequence.

Please note that audio recordings of interviews will be transcribed and you will be permitted, should you wish to edit these transcripts. All names and identification will be removed from the transcripts and codes will be used in storing the data in order to anonymise the interviews. Once the transcripts are edited the audio tapes will be destroyed.
If you require further information about the study you can contact Emma Scally (escally@rcsi.ie or 4023798) at any time.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:
The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Thank you.

Researcher : Pauline Joyce
(Professional Doctorate Programme, DCU)
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Supervisor: Dr Gerry McNamara
0868554001
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Appendix K

Table 3.1 Sample of Meaning Units and Themes

Participants	Meaning units	Themes
Majella	*I don't want to do the practical on the floor*	**Learning as 'doing'**
Cara	*They helped focus me in what was expected*	
Caroline	*they act as a guide for you*	
Sinéad	*You have to achieve the outcomes*	
Fintan	*It is more about being a reference check*	
Philip	*quite a lot of resources are utilised to achieve their assessments*	
Sinéad	*I had so much that I wanted to write*	
Sive	*all the things we were doing were so relevant for me*	
Sinéad	*a subject that's relevant to what you are doing*	
Breda	*gaining new information that's relevant to what I already know and that I can then apply*	
Majella	*My own credibility and knowledge has been greatly enhanced*	**Learning as 'knowledge'**
Kevin	*I'd prefer lecturers to treat me as stupid as possible*	
Regina	*I wanted to acquire the knowledge*	
Fintan	*I specifically encourage discussion and debate*	
Claire	*matching of learning outcomes with the academic level is vitally important*	
Cara	*tools for understanding the whole topic*	
Cara	*it forces you to open your mind and to think for yourself*	
Pat	*Some of them love the theory*	
Fintan	*learning is much wider than that*	**Learning as 'personal and professional skills'**
Marie	*It broadened our horizons.*	
Cara	*more than what you can put into practice*	
Philip	*[we] don't see where there is wider implications for approaches to teaching and learning*	
Majella	*I would prefer to do better. That's at a personal level*	
Kevin	*when people asked me about management it was an area that seemed remote*	
Cara	*opening your mind up to more than you know yourself*	

Appendix L

Ethical Approval Letter

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
The Research Ethics Committee
121 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Tel: +353 1 4028550 Fax: +353 1 4022449 Email: recadmin@rcsi.ie

Dr. David Smith, Acting Chair
Ms. Stephanie O'Connor, Convener

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Coláiste Ríoga na Máinleá in Éirinn

RCSI

12th March, 2009

Ms Pauline Joyce,
Institute of Leadership and Healthcare Management,
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland,
123 St Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2

RE: REC 427 –Approaches to Learning and Assessment.

Dear Ms Joyce,

Thank you for your Research Ethics Committee (REC) application.

We are pleased to advise that ethical approval has been granted by the committee for this study.

This letter provides approval for data collection for the time requested in your application and for an additional 6 months. This is to allow for any unexpected delays in proceeding with data collection.

Where data collection is necessary beyond this point, approval for an extension must be sought from the Research Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

PP Ms. Stephanie O'Connor (Convener)
Dr David Smith (Acting Chair)

Appendix M

Table 4.1 Meaning Units and Themes (External Examiner -Philip)

Example of Meaning Units	Theme	Sub-themes
…where the curriculum learning outcomes map with the module learning outcomes.	***Learning as 'Doing'***	Curriculum Alignment
You want something that's a living reality …so they can take that and apply it.		Application to Practice
…it compliments the teaching… the academics respond by listening, responding to emails, to give them the support in order to meet the outcomes…		Communications
…does each module build upon the next one…	***Learning as 'Knowledge'***	Mastery
…using literature in detail…		Evidence-base
…are we providing support…	***Learning as 'Personal and Professional skills'***	Supports
…are we challenging…		Challenges

Table 4.2 Meaning Units and Themes (Lecturers)

Example of Meaning Units	Theme	Sub-themes
You have to have learning outcomes. If you don't have some learning outcomes of some shape or description, you have no direction. (Denise)	***Learning as 'Doing'***	Curriculum Alignment
You've got to know who the person is, what their role is in the organisation. (Claire)		Application to Practice
Moodle is fantastic and there was a great amount of interaction from some of them as I can see all the emails. (Denise)		Communications
Student learning is building on the knowledge they have before. (Denise)	***Learning as 'Knowledge'***	Mastery
there will be an emphasis on generic competencies/skills and extreme flexibility. (Claire)		
Some of them love the theory and would spend hours going through the theory (Pat)		Evidence-base
I can bring in examples and underpin it with reading materials. (Fintan)		
I have studied myself and know the pressures they are under. I talk to them about their learning styles. (Denise)	***Learning as 'Personal and Professional skill'***	Supports
I think they feel challenged, stuff they have not been exposed to before and being mature students they have not studied for a while. (Pat)		Challenges

Appendix N

Table 5.1 Meaning Units and Themes (Students)

Example of Meaning Units	Theme	Sub-themes
In the beginning I did not pay very much attention to the learning outcomes. Then by the 2nd 3rd or 4th (module) I did pay more attention as I realized that the marking was very much so… but then I spent a lot more time, when I was doing assignments looking at the learning outcomes. (Caroline)	***Learning as 'Doing'***	Curriculum Alignment
I suppose at this stage for me its gaining new information that's relevant to what I already know and that I can then apply. I suppose learning is information and knowledge within context with an agenda. It would have to meet my agenda and my needs. (Breda)		Application to Practice
He gets his point across and makes it sensible. He brings it to our capabilities and what we are doing. He also made it fun so that we did learn. (Marie)		Communications
I would download everything and print everything, read every bit of it, pile them up, highlight what I liked in any of them and then I would take each one and as it had an influence on each section, I would use it then. (Majella)	***Learning as 'Knowledge'***	Mastery
I have more of a knowledge base now. I would question people and I can back myself up. (Sinéad)		
I suppose I am so used to evidence-based, when we are asked to give our opinion this is different. (Kevin)		Evidence-base
…getting an insight into a particular area or subject to a degree that I would feel confident to be able to speak about that subject area with knowledge. (Dympna)		
I learnt from the group work.. I like the contact here too with other students so I like coming to the classes. You have group interaction as well so that is really positive. (Fionnuala)	***Learning as 'Personal and Professional Skills'***	Supports
At the start I suppose you are getting back to going up the ladder in your approach to studying as well as working full-time. It is challenging. (Cara)		Challenges