



**ASSESSMENT CULTURES:
MAKING VISIBLE PERSPECTIVES AND
INFLUENCES IN ASSESSMENT
PRACTICE WITH LEGITIMATION
CODE THEORY (LCT)**

A thesis submitted in accordance with the regulations for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education (EdD) at Cardiff University.

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ABSTRACT

Assessment in Higher Education in the UK and globally is a complex social process. In undertaking assessment practice educators must balance an array of [often contested] demands of assessment and enact assessment practice within a myriad of [often contested] structures and systems. Varying degrees and sources of agency and influence thus moderate assessment practice.

This thesis thus investigates the underlying structuring principles of assessment practice. It considers the almost ubiquitous position of assessment theory in acting as a canon to guide practice, and calls for a conceptual, critical, contextualised, social practice approach to conversations surrounding espoused legitimacy of assessment practice.

To do this, this research study collected and analysed data from 28 academics at a UK Russell Group University from the disciplinary contexts of Accounting and Business. The sociological framework of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), specifically the dimension of Autonomy, was adopted as an explanatory framework to analyse academic perspectives of both demands of, and influences on, assessment.

In consequence, this thesis proposes a proof in concept of an Autonomy model that can be utilised as a basis for understanding both position-takings and positions in the field of assessment respectively. Key findings when using this model indicate the presence of four primary assessment cultures, those of *Cultivation*, *Cooperation*, *Contestation* and *Conditioning*.

It is proposed that by adopting such a cultural approach to understanding the legitimacy of assessment practices, the structuring principles of practice can be unearthed and deliberated. Only in appreciating the intricacies of assessment as a social practice, can the research community, institutions, educators and practitioners alike seek to further calls to ‘move’ or ‘change’ such practice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoA	Conceptions of Assessment
CR	Critical Realism
HE	Higher Education
LCT	Legitimation Code Theory
PA	Positional autonomy
PSRB	Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
RA	Relational autonomy
RGUK	Russell Group University UK (Anonymised institution)
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
RQ	Research Question
TD	Translation Device

GLOSSARY¹

Agency	<p>“[T]he projects of human agents, such as thinking, intending, and determining courses of action, that are performed differently in various situations (Archer 2003, 2), being relational in using power (Ashwin 2009, 22).” (Annala et al. 2023, p. 1313)</p>
Academic autonomy	<p>“[U]sually connected to limitations in political and interest groups’ influence over academics’ teaching and research but is broadly understood as academics’ right to autonomous behaviour (Broström, Feldmann, and Kaulio 2019).” (Annala et al. 2023, p. 1322)</p>
Assessment	<p>“[A] set of complex curriculum practices that engage and influence students and staff as well as producing information about students’ work that can be recorded and utilised.” (Boud et al. 2018b, p. 1108)</p>
Assessment as learning (AaL)	<p>“Assessment that necessarily generates learning opportunities for students through their active engagement in seeking, interrelating, and using evidence.” (Yan and Boud 2022, p. 13)</p>
Assessment Theory	<p>“Assessment theory seeks a greater theoretical understanding of assessment practices and their accompanying assessment acts by drawing upon general theories of learning and specific theories of assessment practice.” (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 190)</p>
Conceptions	<p>“Conceptions ... are defined as, “Experiential descriptions, that is, content-orientated and interpretative descriptions of qualitatively different ways people perceive and understand their reality” (Marton, 1981, p. 177)—in this study, assessment ... Conceptions have also been described as ‘ways of conceptualizing’, ‘ways of experiencing’, ‘ways of seeing’, ‘ways of apprehending’, ‘ways of understanding’ (Marton & Pong, 2005).” (Sims and Cilliers 2023, p. 2)</p>
Field	<p>“For Bourdieu, a <i>field</i> is a ‘configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions’ (1992, pp. 72-73).” (Grenfell and James 2004, pp. 509-510)</p>
Habitus	<p>“Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of actors (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a “structured and structuring structure” (ibid.: 170). It is “structured” by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is “structuring” in that one’s habitus helps to shape one’s present and future practices. It is a “structure” in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This “structure” comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Bourdieu 1990c: 53).” (Maton 2014a, p. 50)</p>
Interactionality	<p>An undefined concept influenced by ‘Intersectionality’ discourse whereby “Intersectionality argues identities such as gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference intersect and reflect large social structures of oppression and privilege, such as sexism, racism, and heteronormativity.” (Kelly et al.</p>

¹ The Glossary cites generic definitions of key terms used in the thesis to support the reader and aid conceptualisation. As terminology is often contested further conceptualisation of key terms from the authors perspective can be found in Appendix A - Conceptualisations

	2021, p. 1) In this thesis ‘interactionality’ as a term is used similarly to argue influences (micro/meso/macro) intersect and interact, to jointly contribute to the complex dynamics of assessment practice.
Learning culture	“[A]n assemblage of inter-connected elements arranged in a series of concentric circles around any given practice, but all of which are in some way intrinsic to that practice: and whilst they are all implicated in the practice, not all the elements are always immediately visible.” (James 2017, p. 112)
Neoliberalism	a theory of political economic practice that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey (2005:p 3) cited in Sauntson and Morrish (2010, p. 73))
Practice	“Practice comprises knowledge, skills, dispositions, moral values and actions, all connected within a sociocultural practice context that shapes their complex interdependencies (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001).” (Trede and Smith 2014, p. 156)
Generative mechanism	“mechanisms generate the actual occurrences and events of the world, only some of which are observed or noted empirically (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 170) ... generative mechanisms or structures may be non-material, for example social structures, organizations, ideas, motivations and so on. In fact, anything that can be thought to have causal effects in the world.” (Mingers and Standing 2017, pp. 172-176)
Qualitative research	“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.” (Denzin and Lincoln 2008:p3)
Reflexive Thematic Analysis	“[A]n easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes in a given data set.” (Byrne 2022, p. 1392)
Structure	“Structures refer to the social forms and cultural systems that enable or constrain different projects from groups of agents (Ashwin 2009)” (Annala et al. 2023, p. 1313)
Sustainable assessment	“Assessment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own [undefined] future needs.” (Boud 2000, p. 151)
Target	“[W]hat is being insulated ... what constituents and what principles of relation (e.g. purposes, aims, ways of working) are considered constitutive of this context, here, in this space and time, by these actors?” (Maton and Howard 2018, p. 10)

PREFACE

My thesis journey is circa 10 years long; whilst substantial elements of this relate to Interruption of Studies and periods of inactivity, several years were spent antagonising, exploring, drafting, and thinking. Much of the actual writing has only happened post 2021, given my earlier pre-occupations with having a baby. The precursory time on this project was spent trundling down a variety of different avenues and digging myself out of several rabbit holes. I can only thank the guidance of several esteemed individuals (e.g. Supervisors/ Professors) that persevered with advice to ‘focus’ and ‘narrow down’. Originally the thesis was aimed at investigating both staff and student perceptions of assessment, yet after initial development and student data collection, I abandoned the mutual perspectives approach as the scope was untenable for a Professional Doctorate. Likewise, several of my many doctoral study years were spent trying to master Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (although one never really masters it!); this entailed becoming a member of the LCT community, presenting variations of my thesis to various groups (see Appendix B - Credibility of Approach) and spending countless nights rearranging translating devices in my head whilst feeding my baby at 2am. The ‘just focus on one thing’ advice from Prof. Karl Maton was also invaluable here, thus another trimming down from three dimensions of LCT to what I now refer to as ‘my Autonomy EdD’.

Alas, my LCT adventures were not lost, for in conjunction with this thesis, the main outcome of my LCT investment was my first ever publication, of which I am immensely proud. Via weekly 6am Zoom calls with LCT-Q (A Queensland LCT Research Group), two Australian colleagues and I wrote and published a true multidimensional all-encompassing approach to understanding assessment practice: using not one but three dimensions of LCT. This paper was ultimately based on my original conception for this thesis and informed by my EdD data and entitled ‘A framework for understanding assessment practice in higher education’ (Forde-Leaves et al. 2023). This thesis was the point of departure for one of the dimensions we proposed in the paper: Autonomy.

I write this preface to acknowledge how the considerable time invested, and the published paper have given me confidence in finishing this thesis; with the paper acting in its own way to validate and potentially ascribe its own sense of ‘legitimacy’ to my work. That paper, and now this completed thesis, together represent the start of my ‘intellectual project’ rather than the outcome of it, and for that I am eternally thankful.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research, that being a sociocultural account of assessment cultures in a Higher Education (HE) context. The chapter sets out the rationale for the thesis, from both a problem-statement perspective and a personal-reflective perspective. The former rationale addresses what I term a ‘double undermining’ in assessment discourse, i.e., (false) dichotomies and segmental, essentialist disciplinary means of understanding assessment practice. The latter rationale draws on my anecdotal experience and personal motivations for the study. The chapter then sets the literary scene for the research, suggesting assessment discourse lacks sociocultural approaches to understanding the underlying organising structuring principles of practice. The aims of the study and research questions are then presented to address contextualised accounts of both *perspectives* of assessment and *influences* on assessment practice in a Business School context. A further research question postulates how the research field may take a *cultural* approach to understanding assessment practice. The contributions to the field are discussed both conceptually and methodologically and key findings are indicated. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the structure of the remaining thesis.

1.2 Problem statement

there is an absence of evidence about how and why practitioners make decisions about assessment

(Buckley 2023, p. 1928)

The assessment research field is virtually unanimous in its calls for a ‘movement’ or ‘shift’ (Sambell et al. 2019) in assessment practice, given the globally recognised need for assessment change. ‘Rethinking’ (Boud and Falchikov 2007); ‘re-engineering’ (Nicol and Owen 2009) and ‘revitalising’ (Norton et al. 2013) assessment practice is heralded, but do assessment researchers and practitioners alike understand the persistence of the assessment practice(s) we are being asked to move away *from*; why they exist, what legitimates such practices, and which assessment practice(s) we are being asked to move *to*, with similar concerns for legitimacy? This thesis problematises over-simplified (false) dichotomies that pervade assessment research and calls for renewed emphasis on the context of assessment practice.

1.2.1 *The (false) dichotomy problem*

Firstly, assessment discourse often clusters assessment practices into three simplified ‘paradigms’ (Chong 2018), leading to an axiological undermining; a morally-charged over-simplification of practice (Maton 2022). The ‘assessment *of* learning’ paradigm, commonly attributed to summative assessment and *measurement* (Serafini 2000) tends to be ‘demonised’ (Taras 2005); whilst ‘assessment *for* learning’ (Black et al. 2004; Wiliam 2011), and recently assessment *as* learning, are ‘valorised’ (albeit the relative critique of Torrance (2007)). This assertion is neither new nor unchallenged (Biggs 1988; Boud 2000; Lau 2016). Of concern is how this enduring dichotomy attracts symbiotic associations and over-generalisations with other concepts in educational research, other (false) dichotomies, e.g., “deep versus surface learning, teacher-centred versus student-centred, traditional versus innovative practice” (Yeo and Boman, 2019, p. 483). Judgements of assessment practice collapse into a binary ‘formative good, summative bad’ (Lau 2016) mantra; a theorised canon of assessment excellence, promulgated as assessment ‘best practice’ (Rust et al. 2005) also emerges, namely assessment *for* learning (AfL). This thesis suggests these opposing binaries represent opposing ‘poles’ of a field or different position-takings (Bourdieu 1993), ultimately the extent to which agents valorise autonomous markers of achievement (Maton, 2005, p. 697). Beliefs of assessment, struggles and strategies undertaken by actors in the field essentially represent competing claims to legitimacy. These position-takings or stances are not however always mutually exclusive or opposing; rather they are relational, emphasised at different times in different conditions or contexts and voiced by various actors occupying positions in a field. The thesis therefore seeks to disrupt such dichotomies, particularly using Bourdieusian² concepts as discussed in Chapters 2 (the Literature Review) and Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework and Research Methods)

1.2.2 *The context problem*

The second problem is that of context. Assessment practice should be understood as a complex social practice (Filer 2000). The assessment research field contributes to an over-simplification of practice with over-generalised classification systems that lead to stereotypical generalisations, or a myopic focus on micro-level enactments as opposed to holistic

² Linguistically I use the term Bourdieusian throughout this thesis (as opposed to ‘Bourdiesien’ or ‘Bourdieuian’) as per Albright et al. (2018) but see discussion by the Bourdieu Study Group for further deliberation. Available at <https://bsabourdieu.wordpress.com/2012/11/08/bourdiesien-or-bourdieuian/>

understandings. Pervading the literature is the focus on disciplinary means of analysis to differentiate between assessment practices, e.g., the use of Biglan/Becher typologies (Yeo and Boman 2019). Thus, despite advances made in the field of assessment research acknowledging more complex ‘signature’ assessment practices (Quinlan and Pitt 2021), extant literature emphasises what Maton and Howard (2018) refer to as *Segmentalism*, i.e., labelling a limited number of empirical features, or *epistemic essentialism*, as opposed to identifying a set of organising principles that underly practices. This thesis claims that there is a need to consider the full sociocultural context within which assessment is enacted when conducting and communicating assessment research. This includes macro, meso and micro level contexts, paying attention to dominant discourses in the HE landscape and their relative influences on assessment practice.

Endemic in a disciplinary approach is the potential triviality or lack of recognition attributed to individuals within disciplines as individual perspectives can become morphed into those of academic tribes (Becher and Trowler 2001). This leads to an underestimation of complexity of the social context and a misrecognition of the positions of individual actors in a field.

Akin to the dichotomy problem, swathes of assessment practices may also become valorised or vilified due to the nature of the academic discipline e.g. a predisposition of assessment *for* and *as* learning approaches in the *softer, applied* disciplines (Norton et al. 2013) and a prevalence of summative examinations in hard and/or pure disciplines. Thus, from a Biglan/Becher perspective (Biglan 1973; Becher 1994), the structuring of knowledge (hard/soft) and the nature of context (pure/applied), (or in utilising Bernstein (2000) terms, the classification and framing of singulars and regions) can leave certain disciplines viewed less favourably and targeted as sites for assessment change or reform.

1.2.3 The double undermining

In themselves, neither of these problems are new; the problem posed in this thesis is the complex intertwining of the two; the oversimplification / overgeneralisation of practices imbued with ‘moral-charging’ and judgement (Maton 2022), overlaid again by the adoption of myopic disciplinary lenses.

What follows is not only a valorisation of approaches to assessment practice that align with purported canons of assessment (AfL), but by association, a valorisation of certain disciplines (soft) leaving others (hard) viewed through a ‘deficit’ model. Individual academics enacting

assessment practice within their respective disciplines may consequently find themselves valorised or vilified in their own disciplinary or institutional field if out of kilter with disciplinary practice. In summary this thesis warns of a potential ‘assault on the professions’ (akin to Beck and Young (2005)) from the field of assessment research that requires deep engagement with the sociocultural context to ensure overgeneralised dichotomies do not ascribe false legitimacy to what may be highly personal, complex, dynamic contextualised accounts of assessment practice³. Complex approaches to understanding assessment as a social practice emerging from interactions between individual actors within a field are called for, acknowledging how approaches that acknowledge structural and power issues and individuals history and experiences (James 2014) remain scarce in the literature.

1.3 Personal motivation for the study

The motivation for writing this thesis is a plea for a more holistic context of assessment practice to be considered, and attention afforded as to how such contexts mediate the actions of individual academics at the coalface – to acknowledge legitimacy in practice and depart from decontextualised judgements of ‘best practice’. It is born out of my experiences as a Senior Lecturer in Accounting & Finance and Director of Assessment and Feedback at a leading Russell Group university, where I sought a means of understanding and managing the complexities of assessment practice.

Having entered academia as a Chartered Accountant, and subsequently curating assessment at both a teaching-intensive post-1992 institution and a research-intensive Russell Group university, I was exposed to the troubled waters of HE, navigating feelings of isolation and risk at undertaking assessment change. I felt the personal aftermath of the double undermining whereby the ‘traditional’ summative unseen exam, a rite of passage to the (hard-applied) Accounting profession, was vilified by the wider assessment community (e.g., see Winstone and Boud (2020)) yet was a staple in my ‘Accounting profession’ armoury. My neighbouring Business Management colleagues (Marketing, Human Resources, Management and Leadership etc.) evidenced formative reflective logs and authentic business simulations, often being construed as ‘innovative’ and thus their practices valorised in comparison. After several

³ Negative moral axiological charging due to what may be classed as disciplinary assessment practice is not unique to hard disciplines, for example, calls for soft disciplines to abandon traditional (critical) methods such as the essay and become more focused on authentic ‘real world’ tasks fall into this act of judgment.

years of attendance at the esteemed International Assessment in Higher Education conference I felt pressure, inadequacy, and shame towards such personal and disciplinary ‘examination’ practices but found myself questioning if the promulgators of assessment ‘best practice’ understand what I was up against, in *my* context? Admittedly there is a wealth of research critiquing the ‘examination’ however a more nuanced perspective is needed.

Institutionally, in my leadership capacity at a Business School I flew the Assessment *for* learning flag; yet acutely aware of the influence of ‘corridor whispers’ or what Jameson (2018) refers to as ‘corridor talk’ - anecdotal evidence of colleagues’ perspectives of assessment. Perspectives from both colleagues and students diametrically opposed not just each other, but those of emancipation and human flourishing that I had so naively and optimistically envisaged for an institutional culture of assessment. This is not to over-generalise as world-leading assessment practices existed and thrived, yet these were voiced alongside anecdotal claims that ‘students don’t need feedback they only want the grade’ and ‘they are only here for the degree certificate’ and ‘just want to be spoon fed and know what’s on the exam’. Terms such as ‘commodification’ and ‘marketisation’ consumed academic dialogues and acted as a significant influence for writing this thesis. I wondered if other academics in the UK felt this way?

My primary rationale for conducting this research was thus recognition that context was paramount; and given my experiences at a Russell Group Business School where it may be claimed “teaching remains the poorer relation vis-à-vis research” (Marinetto 2013, p. 618) I was conscious not to valorise or vilify. At my time of leadership, colleagues were overworked and in crisis, pedagogic frailty (Kinchin et al. 2016) was immeasurable, the Business School experienced cases of suicide of both a student and staff member at the premises; the latter in light of “excessive workloads, often in relation to inflexible targets around marking and assessment” (Wightwick 2018). Thus, even I, as an assessment champion, found myself questioning the burgeoning need to rethink (Boud and Falchikov 2007) assessment towards approaches that almost felt foreign in my former disciplinary life.

Presently, my current position as Head of Assessment and Curriculum at a teaching-intensive institution also informs the final stages of this thesis. I occupy a unique position, having been both the academic and the developer, the enactor and the hypothesiser; balancing the constraints of what is feasible and what is ideal for individual academics thus sits at the heart of this thesis’ project alongside what is optimal and socially-just for student success.

Given this context and embedded contestations, much of the driving force for writing this thesis was to tackle what I refer to as the ‘dark underbelly’ of assessment, to bring the corridor whispers about assessment out into the open and to problematise *how*, *why*, *where* and *when* contestations impact assessment practice. I wanted to tackle the anecdotal and render this empirical, to unearth the corridor whispers and understand more deeply the beliefs, motives and influences on assessment practice as experienced by academics as “anecdotes are representative” (Maskell and Robinson 2012, p. vii).

It was also important that this research did not become a swathe of unconnected quotes from individuals with little ‘big picture’ emerging. Utility and applicability across disciplines and contexts was important, particularly given my previous exposure to different assessment cultures both across, and within, teaching and research-intensive institutions. I wanted to ‘see’ these cultures and understand what they meant for assessment practice.

1.4 Setting the scene

Fundamentally this thesis acknowledges how assessment practices in UK Higher Education, both across and within institutions, disciplines, and departments, are varied, complex and socially situated. It sets out to establish a means of understanding the structuring principles of practice, a way of seeing and understanding legitimacy in assessment practice that does not valorise or vilify but is empathetic in its understanding of various assessment cultures at play.

1.4.1 Scope of assessment practice

Assessment practice⁴ refers to the many activities, strategies, interactions, and methods employed in undertaking student assessment. Much of what may be conceptualised as ‘assessment practice’ is constituted by what is ‘done’, as Boud et al. (2018b) suggest (adopting a practice theory (Hager et al. 2012) perspective), what is done *in-situ*; “marking a shift from a focus on the way assessment should be to a focus on the ways it is” (Boud et al. 2018b). This conceptualisation resonates somewhat with this thesis as I interpret assessment practice in terms of the particular approaches to assessment as designed or enacted (e.g., inclusive or authentic approaches taken in designing assessment tasks); the assessment functions/processes adopted (formative and summative); the underlying assessment functions of tasks

⁴ Further conceptualisation of the terms used is provided in Appendix A.

(certification, evaluation, skill enhancement etc.) and the specific assessment methods used (exams, essays etc.).

1.4.2 *A canon of theory?*

Given this sheer complexity and diversity of assessment practice ‘in situ’ in HE, assessment practice may seem impalpable or too nebulous a concept to hypothesise upon. Nevertheless, the field of assessment research is intent on exploring ways and means of theorising about assessment practice, its various means of enactment and postulated changes to such practices to enhance learning. I suggest there is a guiding body of assessment knowledge and assessment ‘theory’ that acts as a canon to guide practice, or what literature might suggest being ‘more desirable features of assessment’ (Boud et al. 2018b; Norton et al. 2019). This canon, or body of knowledge promulgating ‘assessment best-practice’ (Jackel et al. 2017) is evidenced in the form of guides for ‘effective’ assessment (Bloxham and Boyd 2007), calls for ‘sustainable’ assessment (Boud and Soler 2016), or ‘learning-orientated’ assessment approaches (Carless 2015b), with an emphasis on assessment *as* learning (Yan and Boud 2022), calls to scale-up assessment *for* learning (Carless 2017) to develop more ‘confident’ assessment (Forsyth 2022). Foregrounded in much of what constitutes effective assessment practice are themes that ultimately advocate a student-centred social constructivist approach (Rust et al. 2005), inculcated through enhancement of student agency and co-creation (Doyle et al. 2019), self-regulated learning (Evans 2016), evaluative judgement (Boud et al. 2018a), inclusive assessment (Nieminen 2022a), and authentic assessment (Villarroel et al. 2018) amongst a plethora of discourses.

This canon has been claimed to represent a paradigm shift in assessment (Sambell et al. 2019), one moving beyond a testing culture to an assessment culture (Birenbaum 2016). This shift is supported by numerous toolkits and ‘principles of assessment’ to guide best practice (e.g. see Evans (2016); JISC (2020); Knight (2022)). Authoritative bodies of assessment theory are also encapsulated by guides and frameworks issued by regulators and advisory bodies, e.g., the UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Assessment (QAA 2018) and the Framework for Transforming Assessment in Higher Education (AdvanceHE 2024)

Validation for the shift is evidenced in literature that opens with idealised positionings of assessment, being central to student learning,⁵ at the heart of the student experience and defining the actual curriculum and what students regard as important (Rust 2007; Boud and Soler 2016; Carless 2017). All too commonly authors immediately caveat their openings with ‘but ...’, citing assessment practices ‘in disarray’, being the ‘Achilles’ heel of quality (Knight 2002a,b) ‘seriously deficient’ or ‘broken’ (Race 2003, p.5 cited in Rust et al. (2005). Immensurable references to dissatisfaction with both assessment and feedback are clearly evidence-based and well understood and a common citing in the literature (Sutherland et al. 2018).

1.4.3 *A universal need for change?*

However, rather than an exploration into the underlying structuring principles of assessment practice to establish what is being practiced and legitimated in a given field, research tends to be undertaken with an underlying, almost tacit, element of judgement, predicated on the (often unchallenged) assumption of the need to ‘change’. Thus, assessment research rests upon attempts to answer research questions predicated on diagnosing problematic assessment practice (Evans 2016; Jessop 2019), or problematising assessment change (Deneen and Boud 2014), with attempts to understand barriers to changing assessment practice (Medland 2016) and seeking understandings of why assessment practice may be subject to slow incremental change (Boud and Falchikov 2007) and lag behind theoretical advances. Inertia to change, practical impediments along with a plethora of highly warranted ‘barriers to change’ (Deneen and Boud 2014) represent a misalignment, or gap between what theory may suggest as *desired practice* (Norton et al. 2019) and the actual enacted on-the-ground practice; or conceived of as a gap between rhetoric and reality. Little is afforded to understand the legitimacy of such ‘desired practice’ across contexts and roll-out of the canon is assumed ubiquitous.

Despite nods to disciplinary approaches to assessment there seems to be unanimous consensus that assessment practices ‘should’ change. Often these may be interpreted to be proclaimed at universal (context devoid) levels. What then ensues are speculations as *how* to change or ‘fix’ assessment practice with predominantly small-scale pockets of initiatives cited without enough

⁵ This thesis uses ‘Assessment’ as incorporating assessment design and assessment tasks, however much of the extant pedagogic literature will combine ‘Assessment & Feedback’ under the umbrella term ‘Assessment’. Carless and Boud (2018) recently re-asserted how “the most powerful single influence on achievement is feedback”, and a limitation of this thesis may be the deliberate exclusion of a focus on feedback discourse.

attention paid to *why* and *whether* change is imminent and readily accepted in various complex fields of education.

It needs to be emphasised that despite the focus on practice, this thesis does not take issue with a quest for assessment enhancement through development of an assessment canon or a generalised theoretical understanding of what *may* be deemed as ‘best practice’. Nor does it disregard the evidence-based approaches or principles of effective practice per se. There are countless research papers evidencing learning gains via assessment enhancements; indeed, this thesis pays tribute to the leaders in the field of assessment research for developing such canons. This thesis does however take issue with the essentialism of such a canon without due consideration of context; struggling with a quest for an idealised best practice leaving extant practice left wanting or perceived from a deficit perspective. Recognition of what Davari-Torshizi (2020, p. 556) suggest as “expecting an ideal and full-potential AfL context would be a mythical prospect” is needed to avoid the valorisation of generic approaches to assessment and the consequential vilification of approaches that fail to conform to promulgated ideals.

1.5 Gaps addressed by this thesis

1.5.1 Gap 1: Conceptual

Whilst assessment literature may address context by adopting case study approaches or specific disciplinary settings, a nuanced understanding of what binds or bounds these contexts or disciplines across the literature is largely absent or debased into a narrow discussion of disciplines (albeit they have been recent advances from a signature perspective (Pitt and Quinlan (2021))). There is a perceived gap in the literature, being a lack of deep engagement with the sociocultural context in which the research is enacted, or the contexts within which the research may be applied or subsequently generalised. By contexts here I conceptualise the term as encompassing factors that shape the *field* (Bourdieu 1993) of assessment practice in HE. This context should be one that considers the macro, meso and micro level environments as relational, and acknowledge, what I term as ‘interactionality’ and interconnectivities of these multi-level influences. This argument surpasses traditional recognition of ‘research participants’, ‘discipline’, or ‘institution’ as ‘context’ (often a euphemism for ‘setting’ in published research from a methodological perspective); but is more a theoretical conceptual concern that should frame the research and be concerned with issues of cultural norms, beliefs, power dynamics, social structures and broader socio-economic forces.

Ashwin (2008) suggests contexts within which educational explanations should be situated ask:

How much are individuals free to decide on their own actions and how much are they constrained by the social settings in which they operate? Are explanations of educational phenomena to be found at the micro level of the individual or at the macro societal level?

(Ashwin 2008, p. 152)

These questions can, and should, be applied in conversations about assessment. A discrete number of contributions to assessment discourse do this (e.g., see James (2014) amongst others) yet in the main a gap exists as a failing to address the interplays between structure and agency and power relationships that mediate and form assessment practice. There is both a lack of a person-centred approach to assessment, acknowledging the primacy of the academic along with a broader cultural approach to understanding assessment⁶. Deep, meaningful engagement with the constructs of context is largely absent from the assessment literature; by this I refer to the cultural practices, both shaped by, and that shape, this ‘context’ or the *field* of assessment practice.

This thesis addresses this gap by proposing a contextualised sociocultural approach to research assessment practice; one that seeks to understand what is deemed effective or legitimate assessment practice in a field, or context, and an understanding of the various generative mechanisms and structures that underpin such practice. This approach acknowledges assessment as a social practice or a socially situated act (Shay 2005,2008b).

1.5.2 Gap 2: Theoretical/Methodological

A second gap is emerging in the literature; being the (under) use of theoretical frameworks in assessment research. The notable absence of critical theories and an underutilisation or instrumental use of theory in quantitative studies has been subject to empirical debate (Nieminen et al. 2023). Consequently, authors have issued calls for reflexivity in assessment research through deep and interdisciplinary engagement with theories “to avoid further siloing

⁶ Examples of these approaches are discussed in Chapter 3 but James (2014) learning cultures is proposed as an exemplar from which concepts of assessment culture are derived in this thesis.

of the field” (p.77). Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) also emphasise a lack of conceptual underpinning:

Few, [articles in the field of assessment research] if any, reflect on the philosophical meaning of the entire practice and on its possible implications at the individual and systemic levels.

(Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023)

This thesis therefore infuses the empirical with a deep engagement with theory. In taking a critical realist stance (Bhaskar 2008) it acknowledges the multiple domains in which assessment is enacted; being the ‘real’ the ‘actual’ and the ‘empirical’ domains (ibid) . It also draws on the ‘thinking tools’ of Bourdieu (1984,1988,1993) particularly field theory, and nods to code theory of Bernstein (2000) to allow for theoretically-informed understandings of context. Bourdieu and Bernstein are considered in recognition of their influence on Legitimation Code Theory (LCT); the primary analytical framework utilised in the thesis. LCT enables development of a rich theoretically informed model for analysing and understanding assessment practice.

1.6 Aims and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to better understand assessment practice through a contextualised sociocultural approach. This is achieved by understanding not only the enactment of practice (e.g., the methods used/approaches taken) but ‘how’ academics see assessment, i.e., their perceptions of assessment or to use a Bourdieusian (1993) term their ‘*position takings*’. To provide a holistic contextualised sociocultural account, the research queries the *influences* on such assessment practice and perceptions, and the extent to which academics have autonomy in assessment practice. The disciplinary context within which this research is conducted is that of a Russell Group Business School in the UK with a focus on assessment practice at the undergraduate level. The research questions are:

1. What are the *perceptions* of academics in relation to assessment practice, their *position takings*. How do academics perceive assessment practice in terms of what it should be and what it is?
2. What *influences* academic’s assessment practice, their *positions*? How do academics perceive their autonomy in assessment practice?

3. How can we best understand the interactions between these *perceptions* on assessment and *influences* on assessment in a theoretically informed way?⁷

The research questions will in turn address the research problems, i.e., Research Question 1 addresses (false) dichotomies in assessment, while Research Question 2 addresses context and overcoming narrow disciplinary perspectives in assessment. Taken together, and thus Research Question 3, the thesis addresses the gaps in the literature by: 1) proposing a contextualised sociocultural approach via ‘assessment cultures’; and 2) grounding the research in Legitimation Code Theory. The thesis provides a proof in concept model to enable both person-centred and cultural means of understanding assessment practice through the development of an LCT translation device⁸ and the LCT Assessment Tool⁹.

The thesis adopts a reflexive thematic approach (RTA) to addressing the research questions, one that enables theoretical flexibility and places overt emphasis on the role played by the researcher (Landrum and Davis 2023); this is especially pertinent given the ‘insider’ status of the researcher as a member of the ‘academic’ collegiate.

LCT enables Bourdieusian concepts of *positions* and *position takings* to be managed simultaneously, constructing a framework for understanding assessment practice in a given field. It is envisaged future research can apply this LCT ‘analytical framework’ by utilising the initial ‘coding mechanism’ i.e., the translation device developed in this research. The LCT Assessment Tool developed thus presents a common vocabulary or means of ‘seeing’ assessment practice across contexts.

1.7 Contribution to the field

This thesis makes two central contributions: one conceptual and one methodological.

1.7.1 Contribution 1: Conceptual - a contextualised cultural approach

A person-centred and cultural approach to understanding assessment practice will ensure the legitimacy of assessment in itself as both *practice*; and as *theory*, or assessment as *theorised*,

⁷ When referring to research question terminology the use of italics will be retained throughout the thesis for these terms: *perspectives* and *positions* and *influences* and *position takings*

⁸ A translation device is a technical term for the construction of an ‘external language of description’ (Bernstein 2000) or a ‘model’ in LCT that permits empirical data to be analysed (see Chapter 3)

⁹ The LCT Assessment Tool is a mapping tool comprising the aforementioned translation device and a cartesian plane in an Excel environment.

but not being beholden to it or judged by it. A sociocultural approach is taken that considers macro, meso and micro level context and influences and boasts a critical engagement with the work of Bourdieu to understand structures, agency, power imbalances and broader social systems that influence practice. This allows for not only understanding assessment practice on-the-ground, or what academics *do* in assessment but acknowledging the person-centeredness of *why* they do it and *how* they perceive it and how this may relate or misalign to purported assessment theory.

1.7.2 Contribution 2: Methodological – an LCT informed theoretical framework

This thesis addresses “limitations in the ways in which research on assessment is conceived and framed” (Boud et al. 2018b, p. 1108). It straddles a number of theoretical worldviews (Nieminen et al. 2023) being both practical and interpretivist to emphasise the importance of socially situated assessment practices but also by building critical insights into generative mechanisms and structures (Bhaskar 2008) that act to legitimate such practice. It makes a methodological contribution to assessment discourse by building on Forde-Leaves et al. (2023) promotion of the use of LCT as a valuable theoretical framework to understand assessment practice. Specifically, providing a ‘proof in concept’ of the LCT Assessment Tool or a framework that assessment scholars may utilise as a means of evaluating assessment change. Through mapping extant practice and understanding assessment cultures, change agents in the field of assessment can design strategies for assessment change or reform from an evidence-based perspective. Through understanding assessment cultures from an LCT perspective, ‘legitimation codes’, being conceptualisations of organizing principles of practices, dispositions and contexts, and subsequent concepts of ‘code-clashes’ and ‘code-matches’ (Maton 2016a) can be more clearly understood and managed. Assessment strategies can then be enhanced via more culturally-informed and context-relevant strategies.

1.8 Methodology

This thesis adopts the sociological analytical and explanatory framework of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to uncover the organising principles of practice. LCT draws from critical realism’s ontological realism and epistemological relativism underpinnings (Bhaskar 2008), both of which align with my own philosophical positioning. LCT is “a sociological framework for researching and informing practice” (Maton, 2014, p. 182), one that explores different aspects of legitimacy in social practice. It is a “multidimensional conceptual toolkit for

analysing actors' dispositions, practices and contexts, within a variegated range of fields" (Maton 2014c, p. 17). This thesis uses one specific dimension of LCT entitled 'Autonomy'. LCT Autonomy specifically extends and develops the work of Bourdieu and Bernstein. Elements of both field theory and code theory are built into LCT with respect to Bourdieu's (1996) 'autonomous' and 'heteronomous' principles of hierarchisation and thus positions and *position takings* in assessment; and Bernstein's (1990) 'external classification' and 'external framing'. LCT Autonomy efficiently and effectively brings together these complex concepts through both 'positional' and 'relational' autonomy (as elaborated in Chapter 3.). The latter concept of relational autonomy addresses Research Question 1, enabling an understanding of the various *perceptions* or *perspectives*¹⁰ or *position takings* of assessment practice. The former, positional autonomy is used to enable analysis of the various *influences* or *positions* in the field of assessment practice. Taken together the dimension is used specifically to address Research Question 3 and provides a proof in concept of a framework to understand insulation and boundaries around and within the field of assessment practice and how competing claims regarding assessment are legitimated within social contexts.

Empirical data collected to inform the study and inform development of the LCT translation device (Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen 2016) comprised semi-structured interviews with 28 academics undertaken at a UK Russell Group Business School (elite/research intensive) throughout August-September 2021.

The methodological adoption of LCT enabled development of the LCT Assessment Tool, or a framework for understanding assessment practice, akin to that in Forde-Leaves et al. (2023). Staged analysis as recommended by Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen (2016) was achieved via initial reflexive thematic analysis, arrangement into descriptive accounts and subsequent analysis using LCT concepts. It is this staged approach that acts as the bedrock for this thesis' convergence of both Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) and subsequent use of an external language of description, or Translation Device (TD) (Maton 2016a) by which LCT analysis is conducted.

RTA was well suited to my research design as it boasted 'theoretical flexibility', thus could be used with a range of "philosophical meta-theoretical, methodological, explanatory and

¹⁰ Whilst the appendix conceptualises the term 'perceptions', the term perceptions and perspectives are used interchangeably in this thesis from this point forward.

political/ideological frameworks” (Braun and Clarke 2022). The reflective element was vital given my personal motivations for the study and status as a fellow academic engaged in assessment practice at the onset of this EdD journey.

1.8.1 Bringing it all together

Given the above, Table 1-1 summarises the ‘project’ of the thesis providing an overview as to how each of the thesis aspects will be met:

Aspect of the thesis	What does this entail?	How has the thesis addressed this?
<i>Research problems:</i>		
The dichotomy problem	Three paradigms of assessment are treated as dichotomous, disparate or continuums: thus, valorisation or demonisation of summative, AoL practices.	By seeing assessment practices (AoL/AfL/AaL) as <i>position takings</i> cast on a relational autonomy continuum that offers multiparadimicity.
The context problem	Practice is commonly seen at the level of the task, academic sample, discipline or institution; thus, narrowly focussed that fails to acknowledge interdependences	By seeing assessment context as comprising micro, meso and macro levels of influence, as <i>positions</i> cast on a positional autonomy continuum that offers interactionality and interconnectivity insights.
<i>Gaps in the literature:</i>		
Gap 1: Conceptual - Sociocultural approaches	Lack of acknowledgement of the myriad of social and cultural factors that influence assessment; thus, agency and structure overlooked	By utilising Bourdieusian informed understanding of the field and derivation of assessment cultures from established learning cultures (James 2014).
Gap 2: Methodological - Sociological/ theoretical frameworks	Lack of sociologically informed theoretical framework to use to analyse assessment practice and lack of theory informed research generally; thus, siloed as practice-based field of research	By utilising LCT as a theoretical framework.
<i>Research questions (RQ):</i>		
RQ1: <i>Perceptions of practice</i>	What are the <i>perceptions</i> of academics in relation to assessment practice, their <i>position takings</i> . That is, how do academics perceive assessment practice in terms of what it should be and what it is?	RTA discussion and relational autonomy (RA) mapping
RQ2: <i>Influences on practice</i>	What <i>influences</i> academic's assessment practice, their <i>positions</i> ? That is, how do academics perceive their autonomy in assessment practice?	RTA and positional autonomy (PA) mapping
RQ3: A means of seeing practice	How can we best understand the interactions between these <i>perspectives</i> on assessment and <i>influences</i> on assessment?	The cartesian plane afforded by development of the LCT Assessment Tool allows infinite spacial possibilities to be mapped and intersections established to link both outcome and causality. Assessment cultures and sub-cultures are proposed as a means of understanding the structuring principles of practice.

Table 1-1: An overview of the research problem, gaps and research questions for this thesis.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 presented the research problem, providing background and context for the research, outlining the research questions, gaps in the literature and contributions to the field. LCT as the theoretical framework was introduced.

Chapter 2 reviews extant literature pertaining to the research problem and research questions organised in four consecutive parts: Part One addresses the three assessment paradigms arguing dichotomisation is unhelpful. Part Two reviews extant academic *perceptions* of assessment and how these are methodologically presented and understood in the field of assessment research, informing Research Question 1 (RQ1). Part Three investigates generative mechanisms and events that may *influence* assessment practice. It considers micro, meso and macro contexts in which assessment is enacted, addressing the conceptual gap (#1) in assessment research and Research Question 2 (RQ2). Part Four addresses the theoretical gap (#2) in assessment research, reviewing two theoretical approaches employed in the assessment literature (Bourdieu and Bernstein). It then adapts the concept of learning cultures (James 2014) to purpose assessment cultures as a sociological approach.

Chapter 3 presents critical realism as the meta-theory for the thesis and the ‘underlabourer’ (Vincent and O’Mahoney 2018) for the explanatory framework of Legitimation Code Theory. The LCT dimension of Autonomy and concepts of ‘positional’ and ‘relational’ autonomy are proposed to answer Research Question 3 (RQ3). The chapter identifies semi-structured interviews as the research method, explaining how Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) bolsters the ‘staged approach’ given my insider status as an academic in a previous Business School. Initial data is utilised to construct a ‘translation device’ informing development of the LCT Assessment Tool.

Chapters 4 and 5 are integrated findings and discussion chapters. They use RTA and LCT respectively to amalgamate both *perceptions* or *positions* in the field with respective *influences* or *position takings*. Chapter 4 presents descriptive data of the research context and explores six qualitative themes emerging from the RTA that legitimate assessment practices. Chapter 5 applies the LCT Assessment Tool by plotting empirical data onto cartesian planes at the person-centred level, then extrapolates this to form ‘assessment cultures’ and ‘assessment sub-cultures’; enabling the underlying structuring principles of assessment practice to be ‘seen’.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of findings, implications, contributions to the field and limitations of the research. It concludes with recommendations as to how this research and the developed LCT Assessment Tool can enlighten assessment practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 introduced the research problems; being (false) dichotomies and (lack of) context. This chapter engages with extant assessment literature to address these research problems. Part One problematises dichotomies, reviewing three assessment paradigms; Part Two explores literature concerning academics' *perceptions* of assessment; Part Three addresses context to understand micro, meso and macro level *influences* on assessment practice. Part Four concludes by considering extant theoretical frameworks to inform development of a sociological tool to understand assessment practice.

2.1 Part One: Dichotomies and three perspectives of assessment

Generally, AoL is about grading and reporting, AfL effective teaching, and AaL metacognition.

(Lam 2021, p. 106)

Three “specific theories of assessment practice” (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 190) or ‘paradigms’ (Chong 2018)¹¹ permeate assessment literature: assessment *of* learning (AoL) (Earl 2003); assessment *for* learning (AfL) (Sambell et al. 2012); and assessment *as* learning (AaL) (Yan and Boud 2022). Whilst alternative means of understanding assessment abound, e.g. ‘learning-oriented assessment’ (Carless 2007), ‘sustainable assessment’ (Boud and Soler 2016), and assessment to ‘assure’, to ‘enable’ and to ‘build’ (Boud, 2023 personal communication unpublished), the three conceptions are commonplace. In this thesis they represent clusters of *perspectives* of assessment, defined as:

a set of interrelated concepts which provide the framework within which we see a particular problem or activity.

(Gipps 1994)

The triumvirate attract critique for lacking philosophical and epistemological underpinnings (Chong 2018) addressed by the author with a theoretical ‘undergirding’ via application of Serafini and Habermas. Yet these three ‘notions’ (Schellekens et al. 2021) remain unclear constructs to comprehend, being inconsistent in definitions and practice (ibid). and are often

¹¹ Researchers including David Boud may critique the use of the term ‘paradigms’ as anecdotally evidenced via personal conversations.

“treated as separate *purposes* of assessment” [emphasis added] (Yan and Boud 2022, p. 14) or groupings of purposes that reinforce (false) dichotomies. These ‘purposes’ of assessment can proliferate to include selection and standards; quality control and assurance; motivation, student and staff feedback; preparation for life/lifelong learning; licensing, ranking; student learning; review, transfer and certification accountability to the public (Boud 2000; Bloxham and Boyd 2007; Zou 2008; Falchikov 2013). In his meta-analysis Newton (2007) poses 18 different ‘purposes’ of assessment. To organise, QAA (2011) utilise a stakeholder approach citing student-oriented (motivation and feedback), lecturer-oriented (diagnostic and evaluative), institution-oriented (standards and quality assurance) and wider stakeholder-oriented purposes respectively (professional accreditation). Stakeholders are obvious influences in assessment practice yet ‘Purpose-Stakeholder’ dichotomies form, as AoL generalises to, or assimilates to, external stakeholders, AfL to internal staff / student relationships, and AaL to individual students. This symbolises a conflation of ‘process’ and ‘function’, as summative and formative assessments get distinguished in terms of ‘functions’ or purposes (certification and learning) as opposed to ‘processes’ (judgement and feedback) (Taras 2005; Taras and Davies 2017) and generalised to AoL, and AfL respectively (Yang and Xin 2022).

2.1.1 *The (false) dichotomy*

In the ‘process’ / ‘function’ conflation the two paradigms play out a “false dichotomy” (Houston and Thompson 2017) posited as mutually exclusive (opposing) ends of a continuum which is “self-destructive and self-defeating” (Taras 2005, p. 476); and rarely seen as processes. The creation of ‘either or’ choices between two poles, or ‘constellations’,¹² entails an axiological ‘moral charging’ (Maton 2022); summative assessment becomes ‘demonised’ (Taras 2009)¹³ and a “formative good summative bad” (Lau 2016) positioning ensues. Binaries with implied value judgements¹⁴ plague the literature:

¹² Constellations refer to “groupings (of any socio-cultural practice) that appear to have coherence from a particular point in space and time to actors adopting a particular cosmology or worldview” (Maton et al. 2016, p. 237)

¹³ Taras (2009) cites Broadfoot and Black (2004) in alluding to the demonisation of SA, also Broadfoot (2002) in citing SA as the ‘Frankenstein monster’

¹⁴ As per Yeo and Boman (2019) they quote “the second item in each binary being viewed as desirable”

[surface versus deep]¹⁵ learning ..., teacher-centred versus student-centred ... traditional versus innovative practice ... reproductive or transformational conceptions of assessment ... assessment-of-learning versus assessment-for-learning ...

(Yeo and Boman 2019, p. 483 [amendment added])

Binary distinctions limit Bourdieu's concept of the 'space of possibles'; they restrict "what can be constellated together, how they are legitimately chosen [and] how we value such constellations" (Maton 2022 02:29). "[I]mplied value judgements" (Yeo and Boman 2019) mean notions of 'academic or everyday, abstract or concrete, quantitative or qualitative, instruction or learning, science or humanities' all constellate to create 'big dichotomies' (Maton 2022). Big dichotomies "pose a major menace to research ... insinuate false allegiances to whole constellations of stances ... limit what we can see ... limit what we can do" (Maton 2022 46:31). In the context of assessment, and as evidenced in the Yeo and Boman (2019) quote, AoL becomes constellated with the first terms in the quoted dichotomies, i.e. constellated with surface learning, teacher-centred, traditional practice and reproductive conceptions of assessment. We have also seen post-covid axiological judgements made regarding 'traditional' assessment methods e.g., examinations are *bad* (see Winstone and Boud (2020)) or essays are *bad* (Rudolph et al. 2023), amplified by the rise of artificial intelligence. Ultimately big dichotomies engender stigmatisation via these constellations. Few calls in the literature acknowledge the centrality of summative assessment and AoL as core to the business of degree-awarding powers; without AoL there would be no HE. AfL is positioned as the 'default approach' and 'standard practice' (Chong 2018), reinforcing its valorisation. AfL thus represents a generic canon in assessment theory and practice.

This 'Great Dichotomy' is long contested (Elwood and Murphy 2015; Lau 2016; Taras and Davies 2017) despite Boud (2000) calls to acknowledge the 'double duty'; warning "to overlook these multiple competing/self-complimenting purposes would, be commensurate to inadvertently sabotaging one or more of them" (ibid). An overview of the triumvirate follows:

¹⁵ Original quote read "deep versus surface learning" but assumingly is a typographical error given the point made in the paper that the "second item" is the most desirable, thus amended in reproduced quote here.

2.1.2 *Assessment of learning (AoL)*

AoL is characterised by summative assessment, ‘assessment as measurement’, and a ‘positivist’ perspective of knowledge (Serafini 2000). It serves to measure or certify learning at the end of an assessment event (McLean 2018), characterised by “end-point testing, psychometric measurement, certification and accountability” (Sadler and Reimann 2018, p. 132), and commonly seen as ‘separate’ to teaching and learning. The AoL ‘conventional model’ casts students as ‘passive recipients of knowledge’ and assessment as a ‘unilateral act’ done ‘to’ students (Boud et al. 2018b) whom are “empty vessel[s] or ‘blank slate’[s] ready to be filled up with knowledge” (Serafini 2000, p. 385).¹⁶

In this paradigm, norm-referenced standardised testing methods accentuate objectivity, standardisation and reliability (Watty et al. 2010) thus the need to make assessments fair, objective and consistent has resulted in ‘assessment as a science’ (Trede and Smith 2014) and widespread adoption of ‘traditional’ tried and tested modes of assessment accentuating reliability over validity, e.g. examinations (Price et al. (2011).

In applying Habermas’ three human interests (technical, practical/communicative, emancipatory)¹⁷ to AoL, Chong (2018) provides a philosophical underpinning, categorising AoL as ‘technical interest’; capitalising prediction, effectiveness, and control. This positivist view is preoccupied with defining and controlling student learning, realising outcomes through standardised testing and foregrounding the construction of learning experiences by those in power (Chong 2018). Boud (2010) contends that AoL is typically used in professional courses to validate practitioners’ capabilities as opposed to preparing students for continuing development. This arouses credentialist concerns as a practice of ‘warranting’ achievement (Knight 2007) attracting calls to move beyond AoL as a ‘necessary artefact’ of HE but to contribute to lifelong learning (Boud 2010).

2.1.3 *Assessment for learning (AfL)*

Assessment should be an integral component of instruction, located within collaborative learning environments that engage students as active participants in the assessment and feedback process, foster meaningful,

¹⁶ This empty vessel imagery is analogous to the critical pedagogy work of Freire (1968) and his ‘banking’ metaphor of ‘depositing’ information into students.

¹⁷ A full description is not warranted here – see Chong (2018)

authentic engagement with the discipline, and support students in the development of evaluative expertise.

(Sadler and Reimann 2018, p. 132)

This quote encapsulates a constructivist conceptualisation of assessment practice, anecdotally recognised as AfL (ibid), conceived of as ‘desirable practice’ (Norton et al. 2019). This rich constellation has led to AfL representing “accepted orthodoxy” (Taras 2009, p. 57), with calls for scaling up assessment *for learning* on a global scale (Carless 2017) resulting in the AfL movement¹⁸ being increasingly embraced globally (Jackel et al. 2017) and idiosyncratically adopted in HE (McLean 2018); essentially representing an ‘ideology’ of assessment practice.

The term Assessment for Learning¹⁹ originated from work on formative assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998; Black et al. 2004). Yan and Boud (2022) emphasise “where its power often comes from, is the feedback incorporated into a task”. Empirical evidence corroborates learning gains via formative assessment and feedback (Gibbs 2006; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006) achieved through integrated, student centred, facilitative and interactive assessment embracing notions of student autonomy and self-regulatory behaviours (Dixon et al. 2011) and engendering evaluative knowledge and expertise (Sadler 1998).

Chong (2018) attributed Habermas’ ‘practical interest’ to AfL, denoted by the ‘use’ of information for feedback and formative assessment. Academic engagement with students to clarify expectations akin to Carless’s (2006) process as “assessment dialogue” also informed the Habermasian theoretical underpinning. AfL embraces participative approaches including peer (students), collaborative (students and academics), and wider consultative approaches (employers) (Reynolds and Trehan (2000). Co-creation of assessment criteria (Doyle et al. 2019) and engaging students as partners in assessment (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017) is an increasingly powerful, emerging area of assessment research and practice, striving to enhance student agency in assessment (Nieminen and Tuohilampi 2020).

¹⁸ Sambell et al. (2019) accredit the term ‘AfL movement’ to Boud and Falchikov (2007)

¹⁹ As Murphy (2006) remarks “‘Assessment for learning’ is a neat catchphrase that needs defining (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Sutton, 1995)” but can be summarised by using Black and Wiliam’s (1998) (as cited in Tolgfors 2018, p. 2) five key strategies of: “(a) clarifying and sharing learning intentions with the students; (b) engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning; (c) providing feedback that moves the learner forward; (d) activating students as learning resources for one another; and (e) activating students as owners of their own learning”.

Given that assessment conventionally ‘belonged to’, or was within the domain of, the teacher (Deeley and Bovill 2017) this change in power dynamics for a democratic pedagogical relationship can be ‘uncomfortable’ for academics and represent a threat to privilege and power, yet it can enhance outcomes (Bovill et al. 2011). Reynolds and Trehan (2000) warn that changing assessment processes without changes in the institutional context can however result in underlying power relationships being unchanged, this potentially exasperating cases of [unsuccessful] adoption of AfL practices as ‘lip service’ (Marshall and Jane Drummond 2006). James (2014) ‘technicist’ assessment orientation may also apply here whereby AfL is implemented mechanically.

AfL also has a time *invariant* focus on learning, accentuating both current and sustainable ‘future learning’ (Boud and Soler 2016) thus aligned with conceptions of ‘sustainable assessment’ (ibid). In addition, subsumed within AfL is authentic assessment (Boud and Falchikov 2007; Sambell et al. 2019) whereby students engage in meaningful assessed tasks for the longer term (Boud et al. 2018a). Authentic assessment is characterised by “its fidelity to the real world ways in which knowledge is used in the discipline” (MacLellan 2004, p. 21), Wald and Harland (2017) contest the term as vague and uncritical, acknowledging that authenticity is complex. They elucidate authenticity as ‘real world’, ‘existential self and being’, and ‘embedded meaning’. Correlating these concepts to assessment tasks may entail: 1) an orientation to fields outside of HE; 2) building self-regulation skills, confidence, responsibility; and 3) contributing to a community of practice. Villarroel et al. (2018) extends these ideas in their conceptualisation of three elements of authentic assessment, being realism, cognitive and challenge.

Despite Villarroel et al. (2018) exemplification that authentic assessment is not confined to the ‘workplace’, it is often associated with problem-based, case-based and project-based pedagogies, offering students real-life examples of working practices (Maton 2009), thus enhancing ‘employability’ (Villarroel et al. 2019). This can engender a deep pedagogical contestation of employability in the curriculum and assessment of generic graduate attributes (Sin et al. 2019), as Speight et al. (2013) term as separate conceptions of ‘learning for employability’ and ‘academic learning’. A second dichotomy exists in HE where “the employability debate still polarizes opinion amongst academics and other stakeholder groups” (ibid, p115). Claims of neoliberalism in UK HE exasperate such a critique, as Grant-Smith and Osborne (2017, p. 60) contend that “[e]ducation for its own sake... becomes untenable”.

Raaper (2016) suggests assessment is seen as a ‘technology’ serving the graduate labour market, conversely Knight and Yorke (2003) argue employability and free critical liberal thought ought not be dichotomous, as employability necessarily entails complex learning. Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre (2018, p. 821) agree; assessment for employability entailing solving complex problems, working effectively with others, communication skills and work-related knowledge and skills is “more important than ever”.

2.1.4 *Assessment as learning (AaL)*

The final paradigm is assessment as learning (AaL). Previously perceived as a subset of AfL (Earl 2003; Dann 2014), notably critiqued by Torrance (2007); and recently expanded by Yan and Boud (2022) it remains an emerging paradigm constrained by implementation (Yang and Xin 2022).²⁰ Definitions of AaL encompass an emphasis on self-regulated learning (Dann 2014) or “the active participation of students in their own assessment ... [and] assessment as a process of metacognition” (Zeng et al. 2018, p. 221). Chong (2018) refers to ‘assessment as inquiry’ viewing knowledge construction as a social, highly contextualised activity, here assessments enable a “deeper understanding of individual learners in their specific learning contexts” (Serafini 2000, p. 387). He correspondingly categorises AoL with the ‘emancipatory interest’ of Habermas, emphasising self-reflection and metacognition.

AaL tends to be integral to learning, and engages with explicit criteria, self-assessment and resulting feedback to the student (Mentkowski, 2006, p. 48). Yan and Boud (2022, p. 13) suggest contemporary understandings fail to “speak to what happens to assessment per se”, and “Assessment-as-learning is not the same as self-regulated learning”; it requires the generation of new knowledge through task engagement. Yan and Boud (2022) utilise the concept of timing to distinguish AaL, suggesting:

assessment-as-learning plays as an “assessment while learning” pattern, while assessment-for-learning can be seen as an “assessment then learning” pattern, and assessment-of-learning as an “assessment after learning”

(Yan and Boud 2022, p. 14)

²⁰ Similarly from a practical perspective both AaL and AfL have been criticised for slow implementation (Sambell 2016) and “risk being drowned by the power of SA [summative assessment]” (Zeng et al. 2018). HE assessment systems also ‘lag behind’ pedagogic advances (James 2006; Yeo and Boman 2019), and institutional approaches ‘lag behind the curve’ as assessment seems ‘resistant to change’ (Boud et al. 2018a).

However Berry (2008) contends control and power relations differentiate AaL from AfL, with AaL inculcating student agency and control. Yan and Boud (2022) argue against this as a differentiating factor as student's active engagement underpins both AfL and AaL, Yang and Xin (2022, p. 55) emphasise that for AaL, "learners should have greater autonomy in learning and actively self-regulate their learning through self-assessment and self-reflection". Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) adopt a critical realist approach and emphasise self-regulation, contending that AaL relies upon a different generative mechanism and structure from AfL, claiming "self-reflexiveness is the leitmotif of assessment as learning" (p.168).

In critique, Torrance (2007) claimed the overtly explicit clarity in assessment, focus on coaching and formative feedback, encourages instrumentalism and results in a 'displacement of learning' by procedural compliance, or 'achievement without understanding'. He claimed:

the practice of assessment has moved from assessment-of-learning, through assessment-for-learning, to assessment-as-learning, with assessment procedures and practices coming completely to dominate the learning experience and 'criteria compliance' replacing 'learning'

(Torrance 2007, p. 281)

In response Yan and Boud (2022) re-directed Torrance (2007) concerns to AfL. Yet overreliance on criterion-based assessment (Torrence, 2007, 2017) and 'cue seeking' behaviours (Boud 2000) shadow both AfL and AaL agendas.

2.1.5 Interlinkages and differentiations:

Claims of deficient theoretical underpinnings belie the three paradigms. Academics have "lamented the deficit in theory" inhibiting innovation (Taras 2010, p. 3021). Taras (2010) proposed a cogent theoretical framework to interlink AoL and AfL to address earlier dichotomies; suggesting all assessment is judgement and all assessment is process (opposed to function). This theoretical framework has gained little traction in mainstream assessment discourse. However, advances in integration initiatives for the three paradigms (Schellekens et al. 2021, p. 2) is apparent as Zeng et al. (2018, p. 221) contends:

There is an urgent need to revise and redesign pedagogy to reconcile the tensions among assessment as, for, and of learning and to glean the benefit of each to enhance learning and teaching.

Models such as Carless (2015b) Learning Oriented Assessment framework are posed as a feasible solution for these interactions. Schellekens et al. (2021) also advance a theoretically informed integrated understanding in their scoping review of 131 global articles on assessment. They formulate a synthesis utilising the concept of ‘Educational Assessment’ as shown in Box 1:

Educational assessment refers to:

- 1) *Student-teacher roles and relationships within assessment, wherein*
 - a) Students are involved in assessing their own learning and activated as owners to take responsibility in directing their own learning.
 - b) Students and teachers have a collaborative relationship, wherein they share roles and responsibilities.
 - c) Students and teachers are continuously collecting and reflecting on various sources information to monitor progress and use this information to act on.
 - d) Students and teachers are literate in talking about assessment and understand what quality looks like.
 - e) Teachers are adapting to students’ individual needs and preferences.
- 2) *An assessment learning environment, wherein*
 - a) Students feel safe to take risks and are encouraged to engage with the assessment and learning process.
 - b) The design and implementation of assessment and learning activities are aligned both within and between the classroom and the programme levels.
- 3) *Educational outcomes of assessment, that comprise*
 - a) A focus on the teaching and learning process in order to enhance learning for all students.
 - b) The measurement and judgement of assessment and learning activities to determine the status of achievement in order to make informed decisions.

Box 1: Synthesis of characteristics of AoL, AfL and AaL (Schellekens et al. 2021, p. 8)

This provides stakeholders with an integrative relational view of assessment and learning, being “a prerequisite to improve the assessment culture”²¹ (ibid, p.9). They evidence holistic ways of thinking about assessment that need not be married to certain paradigms.

²¹ Here the term assessment culture is used without explanation nor clarity as to its sociocultural underpinnings and is assumed to represent a singular assessment culture with a focus on learning in its most generic sense.

2.1.6 *One size fits all*

Whilst attempts to assimilate the various paradigms of assessment into cogent frameworks is to be applauded, AfL tends to dominate as an informal ‘canon’ of assessment. This canon and ‘decontextualised remedies’ (James 2014) may pose concerns for sociocultural perspectives of assessment, as Pienaar (2022) expressed in her South African study:

Using the existing body of knowledge about assessment from the global North, without re-contextualising it for a South African context, has led to decontextualised practices that treat assessment as a one-size-fits-all phenomenon

(Pienaar 2022, p. iii)

This is not an all-encompassing statement acting to refute AfL but here generic conceptions of assessment that are valorised (almost) ubiquitously are eschewed in favour of contextualised sociocultural approaches. As Manathunga (2006, p. 23) cited in Clarence (2016) purports, one cannot come into HE communities “with a ‘generic canon about student learning’, and expect academics to apply this canon to their context”. Thus, more contextualised understandings and theorisations of assessment are required.

2.2 *Part Two: Evidence of academic perceptions*

How academics ‘see’ or understand assessment, be it perceptions, conceptions, or orientations is under-researched (Offerdahl and Tomanek 2011; Postareff et al. 2012; Norton et al. 2019; Yeo and Boman 2019). Similarly, in educational practice, education/academic development is critiqued for ‘ignoring’ how academics conceive of assessment (Watkins et al. 2005, p. 306).

A body of research in the assessment field comprises quantitative approaches focussing on ‘conceptions’; employing surveys, recognised scales and covariance structures for analysis (Brown and Remesal 2012; Fletcher et al. 2012; DiLoreto 2013; Hodgson and Garvey 2019). Methodological critique here rests with quantitative methodologies that narrowly explore pre-defined options, failing to capture the complexity of assessment as a social process or rich engagements with holistic individual conceptions.

Qualitative methodologies are sparse (Dixon et al. 2011; Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022; Sims and Cilliers 2023), but momentum is gathering. Evidence of both conceptions and perceptions explored through case studies and interviews thus informs this section (James 2014; Raaper

2016; Bearman et al. 2017; Adachi et al. 2018; Boud et al. 2018b; Sadler and Reimann 2018; Myyry et al. 2020; Fernandes and Flores 2022; Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022; Sims and Cilliers 2023).²² Here socio-cultural context is acknowledged to an extent via engagements with academic lived experiences through vignettes and interviews to understand “the qualitatively different ways of understanding a phenomenon” (Sims and Cilliers 2023, p. 1). Understanding how perceptions materialise in enacted practice is also ‘rare’ (Reimann and Sadler 2017) however this is not explicitly the foci of the thesis.²³

2.2.1 Other distinctions of Assessment that are considered in the literature:

Despite their (almost) universal persistence, the three paradigms are claimed to represent just one of “many ways in which the topic is defined and approached, each of which comes with ontological and epistemological positioning” (James 2014, p. 156). In his ‘learning cultures’ study, James (2014) proposes three (non-distinct, non-mutually-exclusive) perspectives of assessment, being ‘technical’, ‘humanist’ and ‘interactionist’. The technical representational of “institutionally-based policy discussion, diagnosis, remedy and documentation” (ibid, p156) often resulting in mechanical overreliance on ‘devices’ and ‘de-contextualised remedies’, and generic notions of ‘good practice’ (James 2014, p. 157). The second humanistic student-centred perspective, emphasising human flourishing (ibid), instils ‘deep’ learning and holistic development of not only the individual as critical, reflexive and self-directed but also development for the betterment of community and society (Nguyen and Walker 2015). Finally James (2014) third perspective is the ‘rare’ interactionist perspective that promotes collective thinking and decision making between lecturers and students, creating opportunities for dialogue to enhance the learning experience (Scholtz 2016). This perspective re-conceptualises power relations and staff-student agency, aligning with the dialogic ethos of AaL. It enables professional identity discourses that may shape and inform habitual assessment practices to be voiced in the assessment arena.

To conclude Part One, the valorisation of AfL exasperates the double duty (Boud 2000) conflict, indeed a ‘triple duty’ conflict posed by the contested paradigms of AoL, AfL and AaL.

²² Albeit some of these works are particularly focused on specific constructs e.g., emotions in assessment or self and peer assessment

²³ The thesis addresses academic perceptions of assessment and influences on assessment practice but does not rigorously examine assessment practices as enacted on-the-ground.

These conflicts are played out on the front-line as HE professionals, namely academics²⁴, find themselves “pulled in different directions by assessment purposes other than facilitating student learning” (James 2014, p. 158). There is a fundamental challenge for teacher management of assessment in serving varied, potentially, competing functions (Carless 2015b), hence understanding assessment cultures and practices that belie the three assessment paradigms (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023) may provide academics with an intellectual armoury to minimise these front line assessment conflicts.

2.2.2 *Quantitative conceptions of assessment*

Research utilising quantitative scales to ascertain ‘conceptions of assessment’ includes New Zealand studies (Davidson et al. 2009; Meyer et al. 2010; Fletcher et al. 2012) utilising Brown’s (2006) ‘Conceptions of Assessment’ (CoA) questionnaire to measure attitudes towards, and uses of, assessment. However much conceptions literature yields undertones of US evaluation and accountability and was originally formulated for pre-HE contexts. Thus, this research is deemed to be outside the scope of this thesis.²⁵ Lin Norton and colleagues (Norton et al. 2012; Norton et al. 2013; Norton et al. 2019) adopt survey techniques (not CoA), investigating lecturers’ ‘views’ on assessment, finding participants were engaging in ‘pedagogically sound’ ‘professional assessment’ practices, e.g. “self-regulated learning, assessment for learning, authentic assessment, student involvement and practice” (Norton et al. 2019, p. 7) labelling such as ‘desirable practice’ aligning with ‘generic’ valorised AfL practice as characterised by Sadler and Reimann (2018). The authors acknowledge the value-laden labelling of practice. The studies also found lecturers failed to enact student choice in assessment, raising implications for inclusive assessment discourse (Tai et al. 2021; Nieminen 2022a,b). Participants also focussed on assessment to develop oral and written skills, to undertake group work, and to lessen cheating. The authors cite:

preventing students from plagiarising is not a pedagogical rationale but is commonly cited for using specific methods of assessment such as portfolios ... and exams

²⁴ Carless (2015) utilises the term ‘teachers’ whilst James (2014) utilises the term ‘those teaching in HE’

²⁵ However Brown (2022) aimed to establish the generalisability of the CoA across HE contexts and advocated for use with both staff and students and across global contexts as per extant studies (Fletcher et al. 2012; DiLoreto 2013; Deneen et al. 2018; Hodgson and Garvey 2019; Brown 2022).

(Norton et al. 2012)

The plagiarism focus runs counter to AfL promulgations of trust (Carless 2009) and enhancement of student agency (Sadler and Reimann 2018); this 2012 finding was corroborated in the two subsequent large-scale studies with 75% (2019) of participants agreeing that assessment focus rested on ‘lessening student cheating’, aligning with prioritising reliability over validity, often reflected in the adoption of ‘safe’ assessments (Price et al. 2011).

2.2.3 *Qualitative studies*

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002), Watkins et al. (2005), Postareff et al. (2012) and Day et al. (2019)²⁶ utilised qualitative interview-based approaches to propose ‘conceptions’ and ‘orientations’, resting on ‘continuums’ of knowledge practices. These continuums reinforce dichotomies via ‘either/or’ positioning and fail to emphasise ‘multiparadimicity’²⁷ of complex practices. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) related six assessment ‘orientations’ to six ‘belief dimensions’ and seven teaching or ‘knowledge orientations’.²⁸ Assessment orientations ranged from “reproduction of important bits of knowledge, procedure and skill to transforming conceptions of the discipline and/or world” (p194) and correlate with teaching orientations. The focus on knowledge however is too narrow for this thesis, thus fails to fully inform the research questions. Similarly Watkins et al. (2005) investigated academic’s conceptions of assessment (n=46) from a cross disciplinary perspective. Conceptions found included: 1) assessment as ‘result’; 2) the ‘process’ of learning; and 3) ‘deeper strategies’ with assessment as integral component. Whilst not alluded to, these may mimic the AoL, AfL and AaL paradigms respectively.

Postareff et al. (2012) investigated assessment purpose(s), practices, and the relationship between ‘conceptions’ and practices from a pharmacy context; a hard applied discipline (Biglan 1973; Simpson 2017) characterised by a dominance of traditional modes (Neumann et al. 2002). ‘Reproductive’ and ‘transformational’ conceptions of assessment emerged, as per Samuelowicz and Bain (2002). Postareff et al. (2012) triangulated ‘conceptions’ with

²⁶ These studies include perceptions from Australia, Hong Kong and Sweden, Finland and the UK respectively.

²⁷ Multiparadimicity is a term used in this thesis to denote how multiple assessment paradigms can coexist and interconnect within a particular context or domain. Rather than treating paradigms as binary choices multiparadimicity recognizes that assessment paradigms are all part of an assessment system, complementing each other in dynamic and complex ways.

²⁸ Interactions between these are best viewed in the paper via the numerous tables provided. Visuals or tables will not be replicated here.

assessment practice, categorising two tranches: ‘traditional’ assessments (examination, little assessment criteria, focus on summative assessment); or ‘alternative’ assessments (diverse practices, transparent criteria, formative assessment), approximating to AoL and AfL respectively. ‘Reproductive’ knowledge conceptions aligned with ‘traditional’ assessment and ‘transformational’ knowledge conceptions aligned with ‘alternative’ practices, denoting an element of congruence of espoused theory and theory in use (Argyris 1979,2004). Three quarters of participants used assessment for “measuring reproduction of knowledge”, evidencing AoL over AfL and reproductive assessment conceptions. Conversely, Day et al. (2019) found most academics (n=17) across three disciplines in one institution boasted ‘transformational’ conceptions however in translating thinking into practice, external constraints inhibited subsequent transformational assessment practice, as opposed to academic conceptions.

A swathe of literature (Pereira 2016; Reimann and Sadler 2017; McLean 2018) moves beyond ‘knowledge’ to more general assessment conceptions and perceptions. Pereira (2016) interviewed 57 educators across three Portuguese universities and 10 disciplines reporting conceptions against a standard entitled: “better assessment for students to learn” constituting continuous assessment, formative assessment and active participatory assessment aligning to AfL as orthodoxy (Taras 2009). Self and peer assessment raised concerns over “unfairness, subjectivity and favouring of marking” (Pereira 2016, p. 151) aligning to work of several authors citing challenges in relinquishing control in self and peer assessment (Maclellan 2004; Kearney 2013; Adachi et al. 2018); thus challenging the AaL paradigm. There was no real categorisation of such conceptions in the paper.

From a UK perspective, Reimann and Sadler (2017) and Sadler and Reimann (2018) utilised interviews and concept mapping to investigate development of academic perspectives longitudinally, finding competing perspectives and multiparadimicity,²⁹ yet an foregrounding of AfL and an AfL trajectory of enhancement over time, moving from a ‘teacher focus’ to a ‘learning focus’. They found academics already boasting an AfL-focused conception of assessment further developed their assessment practice in significant ways thus the authors called for “research needs to go beyond categorisations such as student- versus teacher focused

²⁹ As insinuated, this is a term coined in this thesis to represent the coterminous integrated perceptions of assessment that span across all three main assessment paradigms, i.e., AoL and AfL co-existing and with no individual participant adhering exclusively to one specific model of assessment.

(Trigwell & Prosser, 1996) or reproductive versus transformational (Postareff et al., 2013) and instead recognise, make explicit and investigate the finer grained complexities of assessment thinking and practices and their development over time” (ibid, p142).

2.2.4 *Conceptions as profiles*

From a methodological perspective, the ‘concept maps’ of Sadler and Reimann (2018) proved innovative. Other research utilises conceptions and patterns for profiling academics into clusters/groups: for example, classic, competence and cohesive profiles (Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022) and passive operators, awakening enquirers, active owners and scholarly assessors (Sims and Cilliers 2023). These typologies represent a valuable contribution to the field and inform this thesis in ascertaining ‘sayings and doings’ (Boud et al. 2018b) and shared expectations, also nodding to the concept of cultures (James 2014). Profiling as a methodological approach is claimed to “extend previously described conceptions across different educational levels, disciplines and contexts” (Sims and Cilliers 2023, p. 1) thus enhancing applicability.

Assessment design observations arising from 17 simulation tasks and interviews from four HEIs across three disciplines in Spain, were used as the basis for profiles by Fernández Ruiz et al. (2022). Three profiles being ‘classic’, ‘competence’ and ‘cohesive’ emerged. These profiles aligned to minimalist, convenient assessment practices predicated on feasibility of assessment task and an inertia to innovate and reliance on tradition; assessment design predicated on alignment with learning outcomes and preparing their students for their professional future; and assessment alignment with context and teaching methods respectively. These patterns were mutually exclusive in the study, with participants designing in only one of the three types.

Sims and Cilliers (2023) clinical study in three South African and Mexican medical education settings evidenced a phenomenological approach to develop four hierarchal conceptions of assessment. These:

*exist along a porous continuum from less to more complex ... [being] ...
passive operator, awakening enquirer, active owner and scholarly assessor*

(ibid, p.1),

These four profiles were elucidated by six dimensions: purpose of assessment; temporal perspective; role and responsibility; accountability; reflexivity and emotional valence

Additionally, three characteristics were identified: professional identity; assessment literacy; and self-efficacy. The authors aligned their developed ‘conceptions’ with findings from other studies (Halinen et al. 2013; Norton, et al. 2019; Postareff et al. 2012; Watkins et al. 2005; Brown 2004). Assessment conceptions avoided traditional summative/formative dichotomisation with both summative and formative ‘use’ separately recognised across all four conceptions, acknowledging the double duty (Boud 2000) and process function debates (Taras 2005). This enables a visual map demonstrating the interlinkages between variables and their alignment to profiles³⁰. There is a sense of progression noted, with “assessment practice tracking with successive conceptions” (Sims and Cilliers 2023, p. 20), hence scholarly assessor is denoted as ‘best practice’ on the assumption that the former less sophisticated roles of assessment are met. The utility of this approach is cited as targeting these profiles/conceptions for ‘faculty development’ providing a “productive avenue to explore professionalisation of assessment practice” (ibid, p22). No critique is published against the approach however explicating the conception profiles from a person-centred approach may be useful. The authors suggest the conceptions “do not singularly represent an individual’s conceptions, but rather are collective profiles of conceptions (Dortins, 2002)” (ibid, p8) thus to avoid unhelpful stereotypes or labelling of individuals as one of four over-simplified ‘profile types’ one may need to understand how individuals, course teams, departments, or institutions may occupy spaces across the continuum.

2.2.5 *Thinking and practice links*

Assessment *perceptions* may not always align with practice. Sadler and Reimann (2018) found that rationale for change was not based on assessment ‘thinking’ but upon technical/processual reasons e.g., marking volume along with influence from peers and the community of practice. Offerdahl and Tomanek (2011) found evidence that shifts in assessment thinking were not followed by a change in assessment practice and Sadler and Reimann (2018) noted ‘friction’ or ‘disturbance of beliefs’ from an ‘incongruence’ between thinking and practice, also exhibited by AoL thinking and AfL practice.

³⁰ Readers are guided to Table 4, pages 11-12 in the Sims and Cilliers (2023) article for a visual account of the profiles.

Conversely, Postareff et al. (2012) evidenced alignment between assessment thinking and practice.³¹ In their earlier UK study of nine academics, Reimann and Sadler (2017) reported congruence whereby “the relationship between thinking and practicing appears to be two-directional”, which was corroborated by Boud et al. (2018b) findings that assessment practice was also informing assessment thinking and theory, rather than the common ‘flipped’ understanding. Much of the thinking practice nexus is due to assessment change and thwart with barriers and resistance (Deneen 2012; Deneen and Boud 2014; Medland 2016). As Heeneman et al. (2015, p. 495) suggest, “It is not uncommon for the translation of theoretical concepts into practice not to go as planned”.

Regarding practice, several studies convey the assessment landscape. In UK, Portuguese, and Spanish studies in single and cross-disciplinary contexts, traditional methods (written tests and examinations) tend to dominate (Pereira 2016; Harrison et al. 2017; Panadero et al. 2019). Peer and self-assessment practices are rare (Panadero et al. 2019) as is formative assessment (Wu and Jessop 2018).

In Joughin (2010) review of assessment literature he claimed much research had neglected the influence of sociocultural context; an omission strongly criticised as it can lead to unjustified generalisations of findings. Similarly here, cited literature has afforded insight into local contexts but failed to fully engage with or explicate the influence of social systems. Investigating the myriad of *influences* on the ways of thinking and practicing assessment, as discussed in Part Three of this chapter, is vital for any means of understanding assessment practice.

2.3 Part Three: Influences on assessment practice

There is scarce literature revealing reasons for educators’ assessment choices (Bearman et al. 2016) and little evidence about how or why assessment decisions are made (Buckley 2023). This obfuscation in understanding assessment practice may be attributed to the complexity of assessment as a social practice (Filer 2000; Shay 2008c), an endless spectrum of possibilities and interactionality of influences, what this thesis conceptualises as ‘generative mechanisms

³¹ As discussed above, Postareff et al (2012) found that ‘reproductive’ conceptions align with more ‘traditional’ assessment practices and ‘transformational’ conceptions align with more ‘alternative’ practices.

and structures' (Bhaskar 2008). Nevertheless, this thesis argues for fundamental recognition of the holistic *context* of assessment in HE (Boud and Falchikov 2007; Lundie 2017).

What is known is that influence on assessment practice emanates from “local instructional context, institutional mandates about teaching and assessment, educational policies and sociocultural values regarding language teaching and learning” (Yan et al. 2018, p. 159). The structuring or classifications of these influences has included categories of professional and environmental (Bearman et al. 2017); as socio-cultural milieu at the micro, meso and global macro level (Lundie 2017); and levels of the module, course, department, institution and external environment (Macdonald and Joughin 2009). Boud (2008) suggests assessment modalities are most significantly influenced by factors internal to the institution as opposed to influences external to the university. Raaper (2019) acknowledges how the imposition of external market principles underpins HE assessment policy and there are increasing tensions between contextual and personal factors that influence assessment design (Fernández-Ruiz et al. 2021) thus structure-agency interconnectivities (Ashwin 2008) and the need for assessment practice to be “discussed within a much wider historical and social context” (Fulcher 2012, p. 125), cannot be overlooked.

Fanghanel (2007,2009a) provides a useful model informing for this thesis, categorising teaching influences at three levels of academic practice: the micro level (internal factors affecting the individual lecturer); the meso level (the department and the subject discipline); and the macro level (institutional and external factors such as the research–teaching nexus).

2.3.1 *MICRO influences*

Assessment is invariably created, enacted, and evaluated by human beings. Individuals are messy, creative, and complex beings and cannot be disentangled from their practice. Identity is complex; it spans individual, disciplinary professional, institutional, and national boundaries (Välilmaa 1998). Bearman et al. (2017, p. 55) suggest “educators themselves naturally were the most significant factor in how the assessments developed”, they “bring themselves into the act of assessment” . (Orr 2011, p. 37), as assessment is “deeply invested with the self” (Shay 2005, p. 675). Whilst there is a wealth of literature investigating academic identity in HE generally (Trautwein 2018; McCune 2019; Drennan et al. 2020), tensions in academic identity (Winter 2009; Billot 2010) and how identity influences teaching practice (Kane et al. 2002), there is scant literature delving into academic identity as a direct influence on assessment practice.

Components of identity (past experiences, beliefs, professional identity, characteristics, circumstances and prior professional learning) have been categorised as ‘professional’³² influences on assessment design (Bearman et al. 2017). Norton et al. (2013) also reported statistically significant ‘individual’ variables of gender, length of teaching experience and qualification status as influences on new lecturers’ views of assessment design. Collectively these represent the micro context of individual academic identity, themes of personal identity, pedagogic identity, professional identity, collegial identity, and academic agency are utilised to categorise the plethora of personal influences.

2.3.2 *Personal Identity*

Academics’ experiences as both assessor and assessed inform assessment practice. Academic-as-assessor influences by virtue of prior observations of backwash effects (Watkins et al. 2005) whilst academic-as-assessed impart their own personal beliefs e.g., dislike for multiple choice, dislike for continuous assessment (Bearman et al. 2017) and previous experiences in high-stakes assessment (DiLoreto 2013). Harrison et al. (2017) concurs with medical educators’ inherited reliance on numbers and grades as “a form of perceived objectivity or rigour” (ibid, p. 10) leading to assessment discussions “dominated by the need to get through assessment hurdles, rather than becoming a good doctor” (ibid, p. 10). Strongly held inherent summative beliefs of medical educators “prevented radical redesign solutions from being accepted by group members” (ibid, p. 1).

Assessment practice is born from lived experiences of individuals and collectives engendering legitimacy to past experience as influenced by folk pedagogies (Olson and Bruner 1998), i.e., “those that are gained through personal experience as both a learner and teacher, and through cultural norms about teaching (e.g. from a disciplinary teaching culture)” (Drumm 2019, p. 4). Boud (2010) critiques in how “knowledge of assessment is passed on as a folk practice, and is essentially unexamined and taken for granted”, as Elton (2010) suggests, the traditional view of assessment enhancement was that:

*one improved through imitation of role models – one assessed one’s students,
as one had been assessed as a student by academics who assessed, as they*

³² In Bearman et al. (2017) both professional and environmental factors were found to influence assessment. These are conceptualised as micro and meso/macro factors respectively in this thesis.

had been assessed, ..., an apostolic succession, going back to the Middle Ages.

(Elton 2010, p. 645)

Holroyd (2000) similarly argued that assessment was key to academic professionalism, arguing for assessment scholarship to incorporate both assessment craft knowledge and research-informed assessment scholarship. He joins the plethora of scholars promoting professionalism of academic work (Elton 2006; Kolsaker 2008; Evetts 2014) more specifically establishing a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (Boyer 1990; Boshier and Huang 2008; Tierney 2020; Trigwell 2021) and prompting the need for scholarship of assessment and professionalisation of assessment practice (Wright 2002; Price 2005; Rust 2007).

Evidence suggests that SoTL, the accumulation of educational capital, directly influences assessment practice (Bearman et al. 2017). Yet, assessment scholarship, conceptualised by Carless (2015a) as “building cumulatively on strands of relevant theory and practice so as to address key issues” (ibid, p. 5) is scarce (Price 2005). Thus “universities need to become more professional in their use of assessment techniques” (Murphy 2006, p. 42). Norton et al. (2019) corroborate, recognising a lack of discourse or literacy in the field conceptualising what ‘professionalism in assessment’ or ‘assessment scholarship’ mean or how such concepts are enhanced. Rust (2007) contends that a scholarship of assessment needs recognition alongside SoTL, residing within the ‘teaching’ element of Boyer’s (1990) four scholarship functions of an academic.

In practice, a deficiency of assessment scholarship is evident as academics do “not refer to the literature at all” (Bearman et al. 2017, p. 56), yield limited theoretical knowledge about assessment (Asghar 2012), lack knowledge regarding pedagogically sound assessment practices (Davidson et al. 2009), and have had “little formal exposure to ideas about assessment” (Boud 2010, p. 255). Despite this overwhelming evidence Norton et al. (2019) found 68% of academics agreeing that ‘I underpin my assessment practice through reading the literature on learning and teaching’ suggestive of “strong evidence of assessment design professionalism” or potentially a methodological issue of significant self-reporting bias. Critically the lack of engagement with assessment research laments the gap between assessment research and assessment practice, a gap Buckley (2023) contends is ‘particularly

wide’ with deleterious consequences, in that a lack of pedagogical assessment knowledge prompts retention of ‘traditional’ inherited assessment methods.

The discourse of ‘scholarship of assessment’ has also become embedded within that of ‘assessment literacy’ (Medland 2015; Norton et al. 2019) an under-conceptualised term (Medland 2019, p. 568) traditionally focussed on ‘terminology around assessment’ (O’Neill et al. 2023), however now extending to holistic knowledge of the assessment process (Zhu and Evans 2022). Varying levels of assessment literacy significantly influence assessment practice:

poor assessment literacy was associated with simplistic and negative conceptions of the purpose of assessment; whereas more advanced assessment literacy appeared to be associated with a more sophisticated conception of the purposes and temporal range of assessment

(Sims and Cilliers 2023, p. 21)

Academic development is proposed to ‘remedy’ the lack of assessment professionalisation (O’Neill et al. 2023) given how a third of staff at ‘very famous’ HE providers are not qualified³³ to teach (Kernohan 2022). Norton et al. (2013) found exposure to training changed 75% of lecturers’ views on assessment practice, however citing contradictory earlier work³⁴ suggesting that despite PGCert participants accumulating knowledge, assessment practice was not significantly influenced due to an inability of participants to implement change.

2.3.3 Pedagogic/Research identity,

Training and scholarship sit hand in hand with research–teaching nexus arguments (Marsh and Hattie 2002; McLean and Barker 2004; Jenkins and Healey 2005; Robertson 2007; Trowler and Wareham 2008) and fracturing of the academic role and deprofessionalisation (Clark 2005; Macfarlane 2011; de Saxe et al. 2018), as well as conceptions of academic-as-researcher or academic-as-teacher. Disparities fuelled by the regrettable (long standing) situation whereby research is considered “significantly more prestigious than teaching” (Elton 2010, p. 643) position academics into camps of ‘teaching specialists’ and ‘researchers who teach’ (Skelton 2012). Norton et al. (2013) cite institutional differences as influencing the expansion of effort

³³ This is a contentious aspect as to what imbues someone with appropriate qualifications; here it refers to formalised qualifications.

³⁴ (Fanghanel 2004; Norton et al. 2010; Smith 2011).

academics devote to assessment practice and Neumann (2001, p. 144) claims teaching-research identities impact practice when teaching becomes ‘generic’ and devoid of context, “something you lay on top of your real work, unconnected with the disciplinary community at the heart of being an academic” (Neumann 2001, p. 144).

2.3.4 *Professional Identity*

professional identity is central to the quality of educational provision

(James 2017, p. 107)

Bearman et al. (2017) corroborated how professional identity and disciplinary allegiances influence assessment design. In Harrison et al. (2017), medical educators may re-produce their summative professional experiences to maintain their professional integrity, to uphold the ‘gatekeeping’ function of assessment (Raaper 2019), personally acting as ‘gatekeepers’ to a profession (Yorke 2011). Professional identity also engenders authentic assessment approaches acting as a ‘substantial element’ in shaping academics’ attitudes of online multiple-choice assessment (Johannesen and Habib 2010). Jawitz (2009) corroborated professional practitioners as being central in sustaining authentic assessment practice (p. 216), often cast as “experienced professionals yet HE novices” (Beaton 2022, p. 234).

Professional identities are not homogeneous across individuals within a discipline, for identity is complex. Orr (2011) conceived five identities in the field of fine art assessment: 1). Assessor as ex art student; 2). Assessor as artist; 3). Assessor as artist practitioner; 4). Assessor in the arts arena; and 5). Assessor’s location within HE sector. The first three are explained in terms of prior experience and nuanced sub-disciplinary identities informed by epistemological standpoints in the discipline (Shay, 2005). The latter two Orr (2011) discussed in terms of “positionalism” or positionality in assessment, what they deem to be legitimate for the field. Whilst Orr doesn’t link explicitly to Bourdieu the reference to ‘position’ within an arena to shape assessment practice alludes to the sociocultural approach taken in this thesis.

Also opposed to generic disciplinary or professional identity, Clegg (2008) emphasises the ‘local’ context, or a ‘person’s project’ acknowledging that an academic’s identity is formed within a multiply-constituted space and exists alongside other aspects. Such individualised aspects of identity can take precedence over the disciplinary influences (Clegg 2008). Academics thus emphasise their own project, and those of their professions and disciplines. In

conjunction, academics operate as a collegiate, academic identity is thus shaped by being an academic; in Simper et al. (2022) ‘collaboration with peers’ was found the most oft-cited factor regarding enablers for assessment change.

2.3.5 Collegial identity

Collegiality is at the heart of the academy’s collective endeavour. It is central to how we think about academic governance structures, academic cultures and values, as well as the norms guiding academic work

(Kligyte 2019, p. iii)

Gavin et al. (2023) proposes the concept of ‘collective collegiality’ as sitting alongside institutionalised notions of collegiality, representing a ‘counter space’ to performative notions of collegiality. Simper et al. (2022) found assessment cultures related to both institutional structures and collegial relationships. The study found peer support for assessment change more evident with an “institutional collegial climate” (ibid, p. 1026) and claimed all academics evidenced a form of being ‘inducted’ into their collegiates to “maintain the existing assessment practices ... perpetuating current practices through socialisation” (Simper et al. 2022, p. 1022). Assumably, in situations of AoL focus or traditional methods, this can detrimentally reinforce the assessment status quo; however a collegiate approach to assessment may entail holistic programme-level assessment (Jessop 2019) rather than siloed individual modules (and individual academics) (Boud and Falchikov 2007).

Yet, reinforcing the teaching-research nexus, Sadler (2011) contends that research involves “high-level interactions with scholarly peers”, i.e., collegiality, but “[w]hen it comes to standards and comparability in grading, collegiality is typically less” (ibid p. 92). He calls for academics to re-conceptualise their academic professional identity with respect to assessment: specifically marking and standards. As opposed to ‘individual experts’ with the ‘sovereign right’ to decide student grades he suggests an emphasis on collegiality, on the community of academics acting collectively as a profession rather than an array of individual experts (Sadler 2011). This community often mobilises via “‘corridor talk’, team teaching and networking at conferences” (Bearman et al. 2017, p. 56). ‘Communities of assessment practice’ (COPs) and ‘communities of likeminded practitioners’ are cited as key actors in developing assessment scholarship (Reimann and Wilson 2012; Sadler and Reimann 2018).

2.3.6 Academic agency

As academic professionals, academics are bestowed academic agency over assessment. They are “relatively free and flexible process in their practice” (Raaper 2016, p. 185) citing accounts such as:

I actually feel I have quite a lot of flexibility’ ... ‘I don’t feel huge pressures in institutional terms of what we can and can’t do in assessment’

(Raaper 2016, p. 185)

Forsyth et al. (2015, p. 34) argues that academics have a “wide range of discretion in the planning and delivery of assessment” and are “free to set the assessment agenda”. Likewise Australian university educators have considerable flexibility in their design decisions (Bearman et al. 2017) and Sosibo (2019) reinforces that “assessments are still under the tight grip of the most-knowledgeable teacher”, albeit materialising in poor appropriation of self-assessment impeding student development. Strong lecturer control could be discordant to the goals of enhancing student agency (Nieminen and Tuohilampi 2020; Inouye et al. 2022). Agency residing wholly with the academic signifies how “assessment processes are underpinned by a fundamental element of domination between assessor and assessed” (Raaper and Olssen 2015, p. 178).

James (2008, p. 10) however suggests “contrary to popular belief and to appearances, people do not learn, teach or assess exactly as they please” for example McKnight et al. (2020) locate academic freedom in assessment as a “site of discursive struggle” (p. 1200) claiming the “capacity for critical creativity in assessment design is also fundamental to academic freedom (UNESCO 2018)”. In this particular case, the authors oppose enforcement of institutional-level assessment rubrics, casting them as antithetical to aspirations of valuing an ‘expanding repertoire’ of assessment approaches, fostering assessment innovation and employing differentiated assessment tools for inclusivity. Pienaar (2022) cites Orr’s 2007 position that “the positivist paradigm of assessment possibly contributed to backgrounding lecturer agency”.

From a managerialist perspective, centrally set institutional strategies are increasingly regulating assessment (Clegg and Smith 2010); standardisation regimes of institutional prescriptive criteria, rubrics and enhanced transparency over marking process mean disciplinary power is eroded (Raaper 2016). Academics become ‘marking machines’ or assessment tasks are displaced.

Academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie 2001), disaggregating, or ‘unbundling’ of the traditional academic role also causes fragmentation of what it now means to teach and ‘assess’. The ‘all round’ academic is no more, usurped by ‘para-academics’ (Macfarlane 2011), whereby ‘assessment’ (specifically marking and feedback), are often demeaned, banded as ‘time consuming’ and positioned as ‘feasible’ for para-academics. Outsourcing can even be undertaken, often by diverse markers, (e.g., casual academic staff) (Raaper 2016). Assessment in this highly regulated environment is seen as part of the “technologies that increasingly govern academics and their work” (Raaper 2016, p. 1) threatening both academic freedom and ‘academic judgement’ (Sadler 2011).

Much literature amalgamates these issues of academic ‘freedom to act’ with ‘constraints’ (Norton et al. 2019) or barriers (Medland 2016). These include historical resistance, university systems, and logistical constraints; resources, hours devoted to a course or new recruitment, retention, achievement and/or progression targets (Deneen and Boud 2014; Medland 2016; Carless 2017; Norton et al. 2019; Fernandes and Flores 2022; Simper et al. 2022). Ultimately in line with James (2008) there is general (pragmatic) recognition that:

at some point in the design, teachers encounter certain challenges that they are not capable of facing, and that prevent them from carrying out assessment practices as they would like

(Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022, p. 608)

The levels of such challenges were also quantified and empirically investigated by Norton et al. (2013) and Norton et al. (2019). In order of quantitative priority they include: time, workload and cost; students’ ability to succeed without learning; little incentive to innovate; students’ focus on grades; students’ responses to innovations; and Quality Assurance Agency requirements. Many of these extend to meso and macro levels.

2.3.7 MESO influences

ants create colonies, urbanites create neighbourhoods and – arguably academics create disciplinary departments

(Elton 2010, p. 638)

Discipline informs academic identity (Becher and Trowler 2001) and is claimed to be one of the most significant influences on assessment practice (Neumann 2001).

2.3.8 *Disciplines*

Pedagogical beliefs are inscribed in “epistemic cultures within communities of practice” (Johannesen and Habib 2010) deeply rooted in established disciplinary epistemologies and often implicit and unexpressed (Moore 2000). Studies empirically evidence the prevalence of discipline in influencing assessment practice (Neumann 2001; Mathieson 2012; Jessop and Maleckar 2016; Simpson 2016; Bearman et al. 2017; Ylonen et al. 2018; Yeo and Boman 2019; Fernández-Ruiz et al. 2021; Pitt and Quinlan 2021). Recently, disciplinary assessment discourse has been reconfigured and construed as ‘signature assessment and feedback practices’ (Carless et al. 2020; Pitt and Quinlan 2021; Quinlan and Pitt 2021; Pitt and Carless 2022) drawing on the seminal work of Shulman (2005). This moves away from Biglan-Becher typologies (Biglan 1973; Becher 1994), and segmented understandings of disciplines towards more conceptualised theoretically informed understandings.

Biglan (1973) and Becher (1994) typologies premise ‘knowledge’ and the epistemological lens³⁵ as their basis. Biglan’s (1973) three-dimension model utilising concepts of hard versus soft; pure versus applied, and life versus nonlife systems is utilised in research to investigate disciplinary assessment. Hard disciplines have well developed theories whilst soft have unclear boundaries and relatively unspecified theoretical structure (Trowler and Wareham 2008) whilst Pure/applied differentiations consider emphasis of practical application (Nesi and Gardner 2006). Biglan (1973) provides examples:

‘hard pure’ disciplines: e.g. maths, physics, astronomy;

‘hard applied’ disciplines: e.g. engineering, economics, computer science;

‘soft pure’ disciplines: e.g. literature, history, philosophy;

and ‘soft applied’: e.g. education, social care, foreign languages.

(Fanghanel 2009b, p. 566)

In a large scale study of 4000 academics investigating ‘goals of undergraduate education’, disciplines were postulated as explicating relationships with knowledge, Smart and Ethington (1995) found: 1) soft and applied disciplines emphasised ‘knowledge acquisition’ (the acquisition of multidisciplinary general knowledge); 2) hard disciplines emphasised ‘knowledge application’ (the in-depth knowledge of a specific subject that prepares the student

³⁵ As discussed there are challenges to this (see Trowler (2014b) and critiques that this approach fails to acknowledge ‘agentic interpretations’, something that Fanghanel (2007) acknowledges particularly.

for a career); and 3) applied disciplines emphasised ‘knowledge integration’ (the use of knowledge to think creatively) (Nesi and Gardner 2006). These knowledge ‘types’ align with the continuums of knowledge ‘reproduction’ to knowledge ‘transformation’ as per orientations and conceptions of assessment (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Van de Watering et al. 2008; Dixon et al. 2011; Postareff et al. 2012), potentially contributing to disciplinary assessment differences. However the Smart and Ethington (1995) study may represent an over-simplification and over-generalisation of disciplines and knowledge perceptions.

A plethora of studies empirically evidence that variations in modes of assessment are explained by discipline some are presented Table 2-1. Whilst several authors claim a dominance of ‘traditional’ assessment characterised by essays and examinations (Harrison et al. 2017; Panadero et al. 2019), what is considered ‘traditional’ in a discipline may differ e.g., hard disciplines aligned to examinations versus soft disciplines aligned to the essay.

Interpretation of Table 2-1 suggests a clear demarcation between assessment methods across the disciplines. Hard-pure fields adopt specific, closely focused examination questions in contrast to the soft pure, which favour broad essay type questions. In terms of soft applied fields, essay and project-based assessments predominate, and peer and self-assessment tasks are common.

Specifically Neumann et al. (2002) was seminal in this space. They applied the Biglan/Becher typology to postulate an organising framework. They see hard disciplines characterised by a quantitative nature, with objectively assessable outcomes of assessment, assessed via teacher-led procedural model answers that are largely examination based. Soft disciplines are more qualitative, boast outcomes of assessment that require judgement, assessed by tutor/self peers and are essay based. Whilst a seminal paper, Neumann et al. (2002) has attracted criticism for being based on only a limited number of empirical studies (Simpson 2016)

Study/Author	Hard Pure e.g. Natural Sciences Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics Biology, Environmental Science	Hard Applied e.g. Pharmacy, Engineering, Architecture, Medicine-Related Disciplines, Computer Science	Soft Pure e.g. Humanities Arts and Social Sciences Philosophy, English, History Political science, French, Psychology, Religion	Soft applied e.g. Counselling, journalism Law, Social Work and Teaching, Communications, Sport, Social Policy, Transportation, Allied Health, Family Studies, Art, Nursing, Social Work, Management, Theatre, Music, Marketing, Education, Health Science & Practice
General description:	<i>quantifiable, impersonal knowledge forms, containing universally accepted 'truths'.</i>	<i>application of sciences to pragmatic and functional ends</i>	<i>characterised by complexity, by being personal, value-laden and open to interpretation,</i>	<i>using soft knowledge for functional purposes</i>
Neumann et al. (2002)	quantitative numerical calculation experimental skills 'objective' tests, testing is frequent, comprehensive and unequivocal. no double marking, little guidelines for marking or grading. less safeguards norm-referencing	examinations—multiple choice—factual knowledge solving of problems; assessment of practice-related skills judged in terms of their readiness to embark on a professional career	essays, short answer papers and project reports intention to test sophistication and understanding of a complex qualitative domain; and to elicit their own judgements on debatable issues continuous assessment, preferable to examinations. project work, tutorial participation, allowing for wide range of readings and perspectives Oral presentations oral examinations, interaction between assessor and candidate, Formative assessment, Guides to assessment criteria	essay and project-based peer and self-assessment tasks, self-reflection and practical skills. guidelines for marking and grading are ambiguous as practical skills are inexplicit and difficult to specify constructive, informative feedback on assessment tasks. judged in terms of their readiness to embark on a professional career
Various cited in Jessop and Maleckar (2016)	knowledge-driven, content-focused, cumulative, quantitative and 'teacher-centred' (Lattuca and Stark 1994; Neumann, Parry, and Becher 2002; Lindblom-Ylanne et al. 2006),		soft pure domains are rich in language, and tend to adopt more interpretive, critical, divergent and 'student-centred' approaches.	
Jessop and Maleckar (2016)	Sciences Turnaround times: Min 10 days average 20 Total assessments 74 No of summative 43 Formative 31 Variety 15 Proportion exam 31% Oral feedback 4hrs 56		Humanities Turnaround times Average 23 max 35 Total assessments 54 No of summative 42 Formative 12 Variety 11 Proportion exam 14% Oral feedback 3hrs 17	Professionals Turnaround times Average 23 Total assessments 42 No of summative 32 Formative 10 Variety 14 Proportion exam 15% Oral feedback 10hrs 33

	Written feedback 3615		Written feedback 7382	Written feedback 7040
Becher (1994) cited in Yeo and Boman (2019)	<p>Knowledge structures: tree/crystal. Knowledge is cumulative, atomistic, concerned with universals, quantities, simplification; resulting in discovery/explanation</p> <p>Academics perceive themselves as standing on the shoulders of researchers who have come before. Disciplinary culture is described as ‘competitive, gregarious, politically well-organised, [with] a high publication rate, task-oriented’</p>	<p>academics take heuristic and trial and error approaches, not always cumulative or always quantitative. Directed towards practical ends and judged by the effectiveness with which they work. Knowledge is ‘purposive, pragmatic (know-how via hard knowledge), concerned with mastery of physical environment, resulting in products or techniques. Disciplinary culture is ‘entrepreneurial, cosmopolitan, dominated by professional values, patents substitutable for publications, role oriented’</p>	<p>Knowledge structures: organism, river. Knowledge is ‘reiterative, holistic, concerned with particulars, qualities, complication, resulting in understanding /interpretation. Complexity is valued and considered a legitimate aspect of knowledge. All knowledge is ‘value laden’. Disciplinary culture: ‘individualistic, pluralistic, loosely structured, low publication rate, person-oriented’</p>	<p>‘draw on soft pure knowledge as a means of understanding and coming to terms with the complexity of human situations, but with a view to enhancing the quality of personal and social life’. ‘functional, utilitarian (know-how via soft knowledge), concerned with enhancement of professional practice, resulting in protocols and procedures’</p>
Yeo and Boman (2019)	<p><i>“objective and quantitative measures”</i></p> <p>All utilised exams and labs. Other assessments may include research presentations, posters and research critiques, but these tend to be graded with highly structured rubrics. Concerns: fairness, impacting groupwork. relatively intensive testing procedures</p> <p>highest users of multiple-choice testing concern for standardisation, consistency and fairness.</p> <p>qualitative components and formative pieces were against a backdrop of quantitative examining.</p>	<p><i>“solve problems”</i></p> <p>practical, problem-solving orientation towards assessment, <i>doing</i> problems, <i>solving</i> problems, applying knowledge, and making things work, tension between what is expected by accrediting bodies and what engineers ‘actually do in real life’, Multiple-choice testing is not emphasised, value is on students’ ability to apply their knowledge in various contexts – knowledge alone is not enough</p>	<p><i>“think and write”</i></p> <p>wide variety of writing tasks; for example, reader responses, reflections, papers and written projects where students are explicitly expected to be creative in their presentation. narrative assessment. Idiosyncratic assessment practices, congruent with the individualistic values of this disciplinary group, e.g. academic writing freedom to experiment with assessments not common in their discipline; however, the core value of thinking and communicating clearly, either through writing or an alternative means such as video, was very evident</p>	<p><i>“theory to practice”</i> Application of knowledge in practical situations is assessed, programmes are structured with clinical and practicum placements. assessments include story writing , case studies, lesson planning Journals, reflections and on-line discussion boards.</p> <p>an ‘action’ orientation, ‘evidence-based’, focus is on formative assessment, consistent with cultural norms of soft applied disciplines (e.g. editor is to review the stories of the reporters and to give feedback) ‘you should never use or rely on a single method of assessment’.</p>
Warren Piper, Nulty, and O’Grady (1996) cited in Jessop and Maleckar (2016)	<p>Memorisation; application of course content; fact retention and solving logical problems</p> <p>Examinations; practical work; laboratory reports; numeric calculations and Multiple Choice</p>	<p>Practical competence; application of theory to practice and factual understanding</p> <p>Multiple Choice Quiz; examinations; simulations and case studies</p>	<p>Analysis and synthesis of course content and continuous assessment</p> <p>Essays; oral presentations; short answer papers and project reports</p>	<p>Emphasis on personal growth and intellectual breadth and application of theory to practice</p> <p>Simulation and case studies</p>

	Quiz		
Neumann et al. (2002) adapted in Trowler and Wareham (2008)	Outcomes of assessment Objectively assessable Objective tests and examinations often used Assessment by teacher using model answers and guides		Outcomes of assessment require judgement Essays, short answers, continuous Assessment often used Assessment by peers and self sometimes used. Assessment intuitive
Lueddeke (2003) Lindblom-Ylänne et al. (2006)	hard/pure or applied subjects are more likely to bring an ITTF orientation to their teaching i.e. Information Transfer/Teaching Focus teacher-centred approach		soft/pure or applied subjects generally take a more developmental (constructivist) approach in classroom situations (i.e. CCSF). Conceptual Change/Student Focus student-centred approach
Braxton (1995) cited in Nesi and Gardner (2006)	characterised by greater concern for career development and cognitive goals (such as the learning of facts and concepts)		characterised by greater concern for general education development, character development, critical thinking and 'scholarly' activities (such as the reading of research articles).
White and Liccardi (2006)	favouring assessment methods that reflected their view of the quantitative nature of knowledge, such as exam-based assessment with specific and focused exam questions, and objective tests	preferred exam questions about problem solving	favoured essay questions, short answer questions, oral presentations and continuous assessment. favoured essays, but in addition preferred project-based assignments and tended to encourage peer- and self assessments

Table 2-1: Author compiled table of disciplinary differences in assessment.

Given the differences in assessment practice, assessment methods utilised more commonly in soft/soft applied fields may align more readily with AfL, e.g., groupwork (Greenbank 2003), self-assessment, peer-assessment (Adachi et al. 2018), portfolio-based assessment (Trotter 2006), and assessment practice focussed on concepts of evaluative judgement (Boud et al. 2018a) and employability skills (Grant-Smith and Osborne 2017; Tholen and Brown 2017).

Norton et al. (2013) corroborate, finding a continuum of hard-pure at one end being ‘less likely’ to agree with ‘desirable practice’, and soft-applied at the opposite. The discipline of Mathematics has also explicitly been cited as founded on AoL concepts “namely testing – rather than AfL” (Nieminen and Atjonen 2023, p. 243). AfL as ‘desirable practice’ can be heralded as symbiotic with assessment approaches of the soft disciplines (Sadler and Reimann 2018; Norton et al. 2019); in soft applied fields it is characterised by the aims of enhancing professional practice embracing self and peer assessment to enhance self-reflection and practical skills (Neumann et al. 2002), commensurate with authentic assessment.

Disciplinary differences account for assessment methods but also extend to student outcomes, marking and feedback practices. Ylonen et al. (2018) reference how the distribution of marks in their five-year UK study reflected different disciplinary assessment cultures, with hard disciplines (sciences) reporting lower learning gains than soft disciplines (arts humanities and social sciences).

However Nesi and Gardner (2006) however emphasise that there are shared commonalities across disciplines for example in published assessment criteria Elander et al. (2006: 72) evidenced how ‘critical thinking, use of language, structuring and argument’ were core criteria across different disciplines. This resonates with the arguments of Shay (2008b) calling for HE to move ‘Beyond social constructivist perspectives on assessment’ in that “our assessment criteria discourse have no anchoring in the disciplinary forms of knowledge which constitute higher education curricula” (ibid, p603) and contributes to the wider argument of ‘knowledge blindness’ in HE more generally (Maton 2014c,b).

2.3.9 Authenticity and employability

Of note, specifically for applied disciplines, is the discourse of authentic assessment (Koh 2017; Villarroel et al. 2018; Ajjawi et al. 2020; Sokhanvar et al. 2021). Given the ‘realism’ factor of authentic assessment (Villarroel et al. 2018) and proximity or fidelity of assessment to the workplace (Ashford-Rowe et al. 2014), authentic assessment may be more aligned to applied disciplines:

there is less authentic assessment in the humanities ... given the theoretical and abstract nature of humanities’ subjects may not lend itself easily to the authentic types of assessment.

(Jessop and Maleckar 2016, p. 706)

From a conceptual perspective, disciplinary understandings of assessment are entangled in (often contested) discourses of educational ideologies (Fanghanel 2009b) Thus, educational ideologies that favour employability may be pre-disposed to adopt more authentic assessments. Speight et al. (2013) found discipline, cultural and geographic contexts, and stakeholder category to nuance a tendency for academics to perceive “learning for employability as a threat to disciplinary learning” (ibid, p112) e.g. Arts tutors whilst Engineering academics were more open to employability agenda. Sin et al. (2019) corroborated, finding Management and Computer Engineering academics aligning with discourses of ‘learning for employability’, yet academics in classical subjects, (the Arts), “with blurred labour market destinations” favouring ‘academic learning’.

Fanghanel (2009b) expresses concerns with the over-application of disciplinary stereotypes in that “[i]deological orientations affect the way teachers view their disciplines”:

Such a structural analytical lens [disciplinary classification systems] disregards the ‘purpose’ of HE, its ‘necessarily’ ideological dimension ... cognitive structures are not abstract and neutral, and ‘reflect the interest of both the academic community itself and the wider society’ (Barnett 1990, 85).

(Fanghanel 2009b)

Fanghanel critiques Neumann et al. (2002), given the pre-occupation with “epistemological properties and disciplinary communities [meaning] the ideological stance of the lecturer

teaching that discipline was absent” (p.571). This represents a fundamental challenge for this thesis and provides opportunity to develop more sociocultural approaches to understanding assessment practice; ones that incorporate macro-level educational ideologies. Essentially to utilise discipline as the fundamental means of understanding assessment practice is to run afoul of both essentialism and segmentalism (Maton and Howard 2018). The former represents an over-generalisation of what we understand to be represented by any given discipline, whilst the latter segmentalism trap represents the overuse of extant typologies (e.g., Biglan-Becher models) that fail to adequately provide a means of analysing the structuring principle of practice.

2.3.10 Critique of disciplinary approaches

In critique, disciplines are complex and not for over-generalising. They are “sites of ontological, epistemological, and methodological tensions” (Yeo and Boman 2019, p. 484) thus “one size (such as assessment for learning) does not necessarily fit all” (Norton et al. 2012, p. 4). Disciplinary analysis also obfuscates the individual, undermining how individualised aspects of identity take precedence over the disciplinary influences (Clegg 2008). Jawitz (2009) warns of over-generalising to simplistic notions of homogeneity in disciplinary practice:

Multiple identity trajectories were evident, indicating the role of individual agency, despite the dominance of a professional community of practice within the department

(Jawitz 2009, p. 241)

Jawitz (2009) reported divergent assessment practice within a discipline by virtue of differing professional identities. Ylonen et al. (2018, p. 1015) corroborates how “the nature of the assessment design varies from course to course, even within the same discipline”. This supports Macdonald and Joughin (2009) citing the programme level -opposed to discipline - as fundamental for understanding and changing assessment practice, hence discipline is one amongst multiple interconnected sociocultural factors.

From a methodological perspective, the Biglan-Becher classification system has been critiqued extensively, as Norton et al. (2019), argued due to its “focus exclusively on cognitive aspects and because of the growth of interdisciplinarity (Kreber, 2009)” (p. 4). Recent attempts to move beyond Biglan-Becher typologies recognise “signature tasks, performances, and feedback

practices that are particular to a given discipline or profession”(Quinlan and Pitt 2021, p. 204). Drawing on Shulman (2005), the authors identify a taxonomy of elements to be used cross-discipline: conceptual; epistemological; social; material; and moral. This addresses the critique applied to Neumann et al. (2002) separation of the knowledge-related and social-related aspects of the framework.

2.3.11 Accreditation

Compounding the ‘applied’ nature of disciplines and associated employability debate is the external influence from Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Accreditation influences both teaching and assessment (Fanghanel 2007; Bearman et al. 2017). Charlton and Newsham-West (2022) found accreditation ‘beneficial’ to programme planning, providing rigour to programme quality, ensuring requisite skills and knowledge are taught and assessed. Counter to this, Swarat et al. (2017, p. 1) contends that “accreditation remains the primary driver of assessment” leading to assessment “as a means to fulfil compliance requirements and not a genuine means to examine and improve student learning”. Further critical perspectives suggest accreditation process are:

not benign or apolitical but represent a power struggle that impinges on academic freedom, while imposing an extensive bureaucratic burden in some cases. Accreditation can also act as a restraint on innovation and run counter to pedagogic improvement processes

(Harvey 2004, p. 207)

Assessment of learning outcomes orchestrated by accreditation bodies thus has significant implications for academic freedom; PSRB involvement also varies significantly by discipline, favouring the applied. In conjunction, discipline and institution type have been reported as having a “large and roughly equal” impact on assessment types (Simpson 2016).

2.3.12 Institution, Managerialism and Resource

The institution is cited as a key determinant of assessment policy and practice (Norton et al. 2013). Institutional status (research or teaching intensive); purported educational ideologies; internal regulatory environment, management and situational factors (resources) influence assessment practice (Bearman et al. 2017; Wu and Jessop 2018; Simper et al. 2022); however

literature considering assessment practice and institution type remains scarce (Tomas and Jessop 2019).

Bearman et al. (2017) categorised institutional influences as ‘organisational requirements’ and ‘organisational culture’; the former, handbooks, policies, mapping of assessment to standards or frameworks and approval processes; the latter encompassed division of work and teaching roles, and the implicit ‘ways of doing things’. Macdonald and Joughin (2009) used the terminology ‘institutional resources’ and ‘institutional recognition’.

Tomas and Jessop (2019) found teaching-intensive institutions evidencing lower summative assessment load than research-intensive counterparts: a significantly lower proportion of examinations and significantly higher variety of assessments (Tomas and Jessop 2019). A lower summative regime was not supported by a greater emphasis on formative assessment; formative assessment was “the weakest aspect of the assessment environment”. Three distinct assessment environments, differentiated by institution type (Oxbridge, Pre-1992 and Post-1992) were also found by Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet (2007) summarised below:

- *Oxbridge, ‘traditional’*: infrequent summative assessment, narrow range, frequent formative-only oral assessment, weak specification of criteria;
- *Pre-1992, ‘modern’/research-oriented*: modest levels of both summative and formative assessment, and modest levels of specification of criteria e.g. pre-1992 institution.
- *Post-1992 ‘modern’/teaching-oriented*: frequent summative assessment, wide variety of forms, low levels of formative-only and oral assessment, clear specification of criteria,

Box 2: Summary of institutional types (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet 2007)

Counter to intuition, the study found post-1992 assessment environments (anecdotally assumed to align to more progressive teaching and assessment environments given their ‘teaching intensive’ focus) yielded negative learning responses when compared to their research-intensive counterparts.

Teaching-intensive institutions tend to be more innovative in assessment; using project or portfolio-based applied, creative, ‘real-world’(authentic) assessment tasks whilst research-intensive institutions boast traditional forms (essays and examinations) (Tomas and Jessop 2019), with a dominance of examinations (Simpson 2016). Norton et al. (2010) evidenced

lecturers in post-1992 (teaching) universities self-reporting as more likely to adopt ‘desirable’ assessment practices but were more constrained; thus, AfL thinking not enabling AfL practice.

Assessment practice, policy and process is influenced via centrally set institutional strategies (Clegg and Smith 2010). The institutional assessment environment is often justified as enhancing professionalisation of assessment (Murphy 2006) yet is driven by “worries about standards, reliability and plagiarism” (ibid, pi) thus prioritising the ‘technical’ over the ‘humanistic’ (James 2014), boasting sinister neoliberal undertones of standardisation and performativity (Raaper 2019). Assessment ‘innovations’ were similarly found to be driven by assurance concerns, technology, capabilities and a need to counteract plagiarism (Norton et al. 2019).

University systems and logistical constraints have been cited as significant barriers to assessment change (Simper et al. 2022); organisational requirements (systems, policies and procedures) maintain the status quo and inhibit change (Bearman et al. 2017) and assessment regulations stifle creativity (Simpson 2016) and constrain assessment options (Simpson 2018; Bryan and Clegg 2019). Assessment regulations have been conceived of as prescriptive ‘complicated’, ‘complex’ and a ‘necessary evil’ (Raaper 2016). Furthermore, administrative assessment processes perceived as ‘scrutiny’ contribute to bureaucratic auditing monitoring mechanisms. Academics were reported as feeling “pressurised, disengaged with policy developments and oppositional to management” (Raaper 2016, p. 188) circumventing bureaucracy to alleviate the managerialist administrative burden (ibid, p. 15). To the contrary, Carless (2015b) found no evidence to corroborate university assessment regulations limited academic freedom to create assessments, contradicting the earlier findings of Anderson and Hounsell (2007); however this remains a highly contested issue.

2.3.13 Managerialism:

Old collegiality is a problem, but the new managerialism is not the answer

(Dearlove 1998, p. 75)

Claims of a loss of academic freedom (Olssen and Peters 2005) and marginalisation of academic autonomy and control (Jabbar et al. 2018) feature at the heart of the managerialism

debate and that of assessment. Knoetze (2023, p. 1678) identified managerialism³⁶ as a significant factor “causing misalignments between the underpinning values of the curriculum, and the pedagogy and assessment practices that were employed”. A managerialist approach of “trying to squeeze as much output from staff members as possible” (ibid, p1686) resulted in academics unable to implement formative assessment and feedback to standards to large cohorts.

‘Departmental leadership’, specifically the Head of Department, was a source of power in Bearman et al. (2017) determining the significance and merit of assessment innovation via: control of resources; ‘status’ afforded to teaching and assessment; and their own personal beliefs as to what constituted good assessment. Participants grew to evaluate what was mutable or negotiable within their contexts (Bearman et al. 2017). The paper did not exemplify the extent to which department leadership was valued or resented yet managerialist control over resources is recognised persistently. James (2017) argues the onset of ‘powerful structural elements’ (resource, workload, targets) constrains innovation. Norton et al. (2019) also found that 67% of academics cited time, workload, and cost as inhibiting innovation, unsurprising given academics in HE are working more than two unpaid days per week (50.4 FTE hours) (Shorter 2022).

Time and resource can inhibit adoption of certain assessment practices e.g. variety and diversity of assessment is significantly greater with lower student numbers on modules (Rawlusk 2016) and the ‘time consuming’ nature of self and peer assessment proves untenable (Adachi et al. 2018). However innovation can materialise from resource constraints as opposed to pedagogical drivers (Bevitt 2015). Sadler and Reimann (2018) reported the introduction of formative peer review as a direct consequence of both resource and colleague influence; volume of marking and issues of multiple markers were drivers. However generally, marking volumes and high student numbers spark resource concerns thus are commonly detrimental to both assessment and academic wellbeing. Guy (2016) notes the rising expectation of staff being ‘available’ to students prompting academics to work ‘unsafe’ hours.

³⁶ Perceived of as a situation whereby universities are occupied by management, a regime obsessed with ‘accountability’ through measurement, increased competition, efficiency, ‘excellence’, and misconceived economic salvation (Halffman and Radder 2015, p. 165)

Discourses of dialogic interactions with students and engaging with students as partners (Carless 2009; Matthews et al. 2021) may exasperate such expectations of being 'available' to students, further fracturing the academic role as to where time is allocated and prioritised. Issues of pedagogic frailty (Kinchin et al. 2016), wellbeing and stress are serious; at the extreme, assessment and workloads have been linked to suicides in HE. Explicit statements of large student numbers (>600), 'workload', 'marking' and 'setting exam papers' have been made in direct recognition of academic suicide (BBC 2019). The academic development community recognise the need for pastoral care of academics-as-students, fuelling the paradox of promoting 'desirable' assessment practice on the one hand and unsustainable workloads on the other, as an academic developer discusses:

I recognise pressures they [the academics] face trying [to] mark over 300 essays ... We can pretend and give them advice about how to adapt and try different things to make learning an individual experience. But with those numbers it would be difficult to get to know even 20 students well.

(Kinchin et al. 2023, p. 312)

For research-intensive universities, Kinchin et al. (2016, p. 4) expresses how pedagogic frailty arises from the research-teaching nexus, leaving institutions "having a limited repertoire of responses to demands of the teaching and learning environment".

2.3.14 *Students as influencers?*

As mentioned student co-creation, partnership and influence in assessment is an emerging phenomenon yet Panadero et al. (2019, p. 395) found "barely any student involvement in assessment". Similarly enhancing student agency through assessment design has yet to gain momentum, as Norton et al. (2019) reports only 32% of respondents agreed they had implemented student choice in assessment, supporting Raaper (2016) positionality of students in assessment is one of subordination, opposed to students as partners (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017; Boyle et al. 2024).

2.3.15 *MACRO influences*

a discussion of the role of judgement in assessment practices needs, arguably, some consideration of the probable tensions between core ideas in notions of: professionalism (judgement, autonomy, public service etc.);

consumerism (a known product, choice, value-for-money, customer satisfaction etc.); and managerialism (that all important aspects of the task can be defined, measured and controlled).

(James 2014, p. 165)

Professionalism, consumerism and managerialism form a complex web of micro, macro and meso level influences respectively that coalesce to collectively influence assessment practice, recognising agency in structure and structure in agency (James 2017). It reinforces Gipps (1999, p. 355) claim that “we can understand [assessment] only by taking account of the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which it operates”. Presently it is argued the HE context is one characterised by neoliberalism, credentialism and consumerism. These discourses arise from contentions of educational ideologies (Fanghanel 2009b) of what it means to be assessed and “what it means to be educated” (Shay 2016, p. 767). The educational ideologies Fanghanel (2009b) refers to are:

A ‘traditionalist’ or ‘liberal’ view of education as ‘learning for its own sake’

... A ‘vocationalist’ view embracing human capital theory.

... A ‘progressive’ or ‘emancipatory’ position which focuses on personal choice, and personal growth

...A ‘social constructionist’ or ‘critical’ position, HE for transforming society.

[summarised from Fanghanel (2009b, p. 571)]

Little is explicitly known about academics’ conceptions of such ideologies in the context of their (in)direct influence on assessment practice. ‘Traditionalist’ and ‘progressive’ orientations may conjure assessment in its Latin origins, as ‘assidere’ meaning ‘to sit beside’ (Swaffield 2011) resemblant of ‘Humboldtian’ ideals as integral to learning, research and the disinterested search for truth (Anderson 2010). ‘Emancipatory’ forms of ‘assessment for social justice’ (McArthur 2016; Tai et al. 2022) may similarly be idealised with assessment being undertaken ‘with’ students as ‘critical citizens’ (Giroux 2010, p. 716) in a democratic community and not something done ‘to’ students (Bovill et al. 2011). More vocationalist ideologies may be challenged (Sin et al. 2019) given the onset of neoliberalism and a period of unprecedented complexity, referred as ‘supercomplexity’ (Barnett 1998).

2.3.16 Neoliberalism and assessment

Neoliberalism ... an ideology that reduces our conception of human interactions to economic relations

(Knoetze 2023, p. 1677)

The dominant discourse of neoliberalism subjectifies academics as researchers rather than teachers; organisation of work is centred on performativity, imposed targets, and metrics that re-shape what constitutes being a ‘successful academic’ (Raaper 2016); these orientations can devalue investment in pedagogy and assessment. Raaper (2016) work on assessment regulations has been discussed in the meso section of this thesis, however is situated in the context of neoliberalism, where assessment regulations in neoliberal universities apply discourse that “silences educational processes of teaching and learning (Evans, 2011)” (Raaper 2016, p. 181) and changes focus from pedagogical processes of assessment to the complex ‘technologies of government’³⁷; assessment is conceptualised in terms of “quality assurance, managerialism, accountability and performativity” (ibid, p188).

Commercialisation of educational activities under a neoliberal regime to cater and “capitalise on the market for (international) education” (p. 1) lead respondents in the Dhanani and Baylis (2023) study unable to implement assessment and feedback practices to ‘nurture student learning’ due to large student numbers and depleting resource base. They cite how:

assessment practices, small group sessions, dissertations and pastoral care have been redesigned / morphed to accommodate large student numbers

(Dhanani and Baylis 2023, p. 10)

Increasing student numbers are symptomatic of neoliberalised recruitment strategies, and the ‘squeeze’ (Knoetze 2023) on both academics and the pedagogical relationship. This squeeze often met by a rise in academic casualisation, e.g. Knoetze (2023) reporting how 64% of staff were on temporary contracts. Outsourcing of assessment and external markers paid on a per-script-marked basis, poses difficulties for shared assessment standards and understanding,

³⁷ Raaper’s (2016) work is guided by Foucault’s (1978,1982) theorisations of governmentality and subjectification. The article utilises Foucault’s theory of Governmentality and approaches neoliberalism as “a historically specific mode of government that is rooted in economic discourses of competition” (Raaper, 2016, p.175).

leaving academics in the role of ‘moderators’ or “part of that factory line commoditisation” (Raaper 2016, p. 181).

2.3.17 Credentialism and assessment

Under neoliberalism, HE is focused on the manufacture of human capital (Holborow 2012). Students are perceived as ‘commodities’ that universities ‘sell’ to business and industry (Levin, 2005) as standardised ‘products’ (Rhoades and Slaughter 1997). To achieve standardisation, assessment itself becomes standardised and debased to a quality assurance metric to ‘certify’ such products. Students are thus transformed into qualified employees to meet the needs of society (Emery et al. 2001); potentially at odds with emancipatory ideologies (Fanghanel 2009b).

Assessment primarily serving certification purposes is inherent within credentialism discourse (Dore 1976; Collins 1979; Brown 2001); here “summative assessment leads to ‘credentialism’ where students put in the least effort for the most gain, namely a degree certificate” (Wu and Jessop 2018). The unbridled pursuit of the ‘qualification’ erodes the pedagogic relationship as it “fundamentally change[s] the nature of education itself, alienate[s] learners and commodify[ies] the University process” (Tannock 2008, p. 443).

From a credentialist perspective, students are positioned as instrumental; as ‘marks-driven’ and ‘wanting a number’ as opposed to feedback, thus downplaying the AfL and AaL purposes (Leedham 2009). They disengage with formative tasks, seeing assessment as exclusively credentialist “with very little inherent learning benefit. ... assessment is viewed as a necessary evil or a chore to be endured” (Sambell et al. 2019, p. 52). Disengaged students hinder and legitimise reduced or absent academic investment in formative assessment (Asghar 2012).

Grade inflation (Richmond 2018) is incumbent to credentialism, consumerism and wider marketisation discourses as HEI’s compete for students, (revenues), on the basis of attainment and progression metrics. The phenomenon has become synonymous with the ‘dumbing down’ of academic standards as claims “there will be no prizes for the “hard marker” at the various university examination boards”, are made in efforts to curtail failure rates on courses (Thomas 2006, p. 159); neoliberal performativity pressures may bolster ‘criteria compliance’ (Torrance 2007) approaches and even engender educational malpractices such as ‘spoon-feeding’ (Emery et al. 2001) and exasperate responsibility issues (Singh 2002a; Torrance 2017) where

academics are under pressure to change assessment to achieve the highest scores and lowest failure rates (Lakeman et al. 2023, p. 749). As such:

Students and teachers have been ‘responsibilised’ for the quality and outcomes of education, with assessment and examinations providing the quintessential vehicle for individualising and responsabilising success and failure in relation to achievement and social mobility.

(Torrance 2017, p. 83)

Torrance (2017) calls for recognition of collective responsibility to perceive educational encounters as a collaborative endeavour, producing outcomes that benefit communities as well as individuals (Torrance 2017, p. 94). This chimes with calls for collegiality in curriculum development and assessment (Pountney 2020) and more dialogic, partnership interactions and relationships (Deeley and Bovill 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017; Boyle et al. 2024). Yet grade focus (Bunce et al. 2017) and perceptions of grades as “a key construct of ‘value for money’ for students” (Howson and Buckley 2020, p. 7) endure. The ‘purchase’ of a degree/credential becomes a transaction between consumer and ‘provider’ (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014, p. 18); education itself seen as a commodity (Williams, 2012) and HE as a market where students are consumers (Molesworth et al. 2010; Bunce et al. 2017; Jayadeva et al. 2022):

2.3.18 Consumerism and assessment

the students ascribed economic value to assessment as an institutional technology of selection and reward: a way to promote one’s competitiveness

(Raaper 2019, p. 12)

In a neoliberalised context, students are seen as consumers and universities as service providers (Raaper 2019). ‘Student satisfaction’ and ‘value for money’ are posited as two ‘reasons’ to transform assessment in HE in the ‘Transforming Assessment Framework’ (HEA, 2016), proceeded only by ‘improved potential for student learning’. These artefacts convey consumerist messages underpinning assessment ‘best practice’. However, whilst much literature is orientated to a student-as-consumer discourse (SAC) (Ashwin et al. 2023; Bunce

et al. 2023) and work undertaken to dispel such ‘myths’³⁸ (Macfarlane 2020), there is little research investigating the interlinkages between marketisation and assessment practice from academic perspectives. Jabbar et al. (2018) did however investigate academic views on consumerism in education more generally, finding higher fees, greater stress and debatable outcomes with respondents seeing education as transactional.

Bevitt (2015) student-focussed study on assessment design raised concerns regarding assessment innovation and consumerism, claiming calls for innovative assessment reject concerns for student experience and student satisfaction. She found “negative emotional reactions to novel assessments appeared to taint the overall student experience” (p. 114). Inherent within this is the expectation that assessment design duly considers student satisfaction, and that “[s]tudent learning and satisfaction are not incompatible” (ibid, p. 112) however she cites Furedi (2011, p. 4) in that:

an emphasis on student satisfaction may erode the quality of education, because students need to be placed under ‘intellectual pressure’ and ‘such an engagement does not always promote customer satisfaction’.

(Bevitt 2015, p. 113)

Singh (2002a) suggests that “[p]leasing the customer has dire consequence in terms of assessment procedures”, resulting in pressures to increase pass rates, increase ‘satisfaction’ scores yet maintain academic standards. Thus a marketised focus on ‘satisfaction scores’ may yield assessment practices that erode the pedagogic relationship as opposed to enhance it. Lakeman et al. (2023) reported how academics believed Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) contributes to both an erosion of standards and inflation of grades; similar to concerns of Thomas (2006).

2.3.19 *Interplays*

The micro/meso/macro structure of the literature review enabled a segregated analysis of different influences, however agency and structure are intertwined (Ashwin 2008). Generative mechanisms and structures coalesce to present a complex sociological system within which assessment is conceived, designed, enacted and practiced. The interplay of these factors affords

³⁸ Macfarlane (2020) eschews the ‘folklore’ nature of the consumerist debate for the underpinning lack of empirical evidence, claiming a series of ‘myths’ have dominated educational discourse. Consumerism being one.

the ‘seeing’ of patterns, clusters, or cultures of assessment practice. This sociocultural relational perspective is representative of the “constant reciprocity or dialectic between agency and structure” (James 2014, pp. 166-167).

Few authors tackle influences from a critical realist stance to understand generative mechanisms, however in South Africa Pienaar (2022) investigated influences on lecturers’ assessment practices within an undergraduate medical programme specifically seeking to “illuminate the structural and cultural mechanisms that enabled or constrained medical lecturers’ assessment practice” (ibid, piii). The author explored academics’ agential powers at the levels of the personal, the micro (classroom) and the macro (institution and national level of the medical curriculum). She found that lecturers were imbued with agency yet their practices remained conventional evidence-based teacher-led. Cited influences on such practices included academics own experiences, formal education programmes, colleagues, timetabling, limited integration, disciplinary power, insufficient human, and financial resources extending to structural and cultural mechanisms in the form of government legislation. Consequently assessment design choices were “ill aligned to inclusive assessment practices” (ibid piii). Ultimately she reported that “influences on assessment practices are multifactorial, emanating from the structural and cultural domains”; this assertion corroborates the critical realist approach taken in this thesis and the need to ensure influences on assessment are considered in terms of the interactionality between micro, meso and macro level influences. This approach would account for global differences regarding factors influencing assessment as Sims (2023, p. 133) highlights significant variations between South Africa and Mexico reflecting diversities and unique influences not seen in the global North.

Whilst a critical realist understanding of generative mechanisms is helpful, there are multiple means by which we may also conceive of this ‘mutual construction’ and ‘interlinked’ nature. Both Bourdieu (1993) perspectives of a field of assessment practice and Bernstein (2000) perspectives of a field of recontextualisation or an ‘arena of struggle’ (Shay 2015) can illuminate the complexities of social structures and the way they mediate assessment as a social practice. The following section thus reviews theoretical frameworks proposed in the literature as a means of evaluating and analysing assessment practice, directly contributing to informing Research Question 3.

2.4 Part Four: Models and Frameworks used to understand assessment practice (RQ3)

This section evaluates how we can ‘see’ or understand assessment practice (RQ3) using a sociocultural lens. It begins by considering theoretical positionings and frameworks by which the insights afforded are obtained.

2.4.1 Theory in assessment research

There is a gap in the field as “[t]heory has been cast as an important but absent aspect of higher education research” (Nieminen et al. 2023, p. 77). Nieminen et al. (2023) seminal critical review found a minority of research engaging with educational theory (37.5%); when utilised this was ‘explanatory’. They reported a notable absence of critical theories and an underutilisation, or instrumental, use of theory in quantitative studies; acknowledging however examples of reflexive practice whereby absence of theory may be legitimated. A lack of theoretical philosophers in the field of assessment research is also posed by Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) suggesting an over-emphasis of practice at the expense of theoretically-informed research.

A bifurcation of theory-informed work was also evident in the literature review: on the one hand capturing views ‘on the ground’ through qualitative measures (Deneen and Boud 2014; Bearman et al. 2017; Sadler and Reimann 2018; Fernández-Ruiz et al. 2021; Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022) or quantitative measures (Norton et al. 2013; Jessop 2019; Norton et al. 2019; Tomas and Jessop 2019), yet a notable lack of engagement with theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, literature approaches assessment through a structured theoretical lens: conducting a theoretically-informed analysis of practice utilising empirical data (James 2014; Raaper 2016; Shay 2016; Boud et al. 2018b) and some conceptual or literature-informed studies (Torrance 2007; Macfarlane 2020; Quinlan and Pitt 2021; Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023).³⁹

In this thesis Practice Theory (Schatzki 1997; Hager et al. 2012) employed in the field of assessment (Boud et al. 2018b) and Foucauldian theorisation (Foucault 1978,1982,1988) applied to assessment (Raaper 2016,2019) provide valuable insight and relevance, in their

³⁹ A full meta-analysis or systematic literature review would be a useful means to categorise such demarcation in the assessment literature but is beyond this thesis.

proximity to practice and neoliberalism respectively. However the significant influences of Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023), James (2014) and Shay (2016) and their concepts of assessment capital, learning cultures and power and control respectively, renders a sociocultural approach the most suitable and applicable for the research problems due to the need to ‘see’ interconnectivities of influential factors. These authors utilise Bourdieu’s field theory and Bernstein’s code theory, which both significantly influenced the choice of theoretical framework of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). LCT thus offers significant explanatory power given its conceptual roots, and is further discussed in Chapter 3.

2.4.2 Bourdieusian approaches:

Under Bourdieusian logic, sociological systems drive the assessment practices of teachers and students through specific generative mechanisms and structures

(Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 155)

Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) utilise critical realism as a meta-theory alongside the sociocultural theory of Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984,1993) to enable the field of assessment practice to be ‘seen’ through concepts of capital habitus and field, or Bourdieu’s thinking tools:

(habitus)(capital) + field = practice ... relations between one’s dispositions (habitus) and one’s position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)

(Maton 2014a, p. 51)

Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023, p. 168) apply these terms to assessment noting how “assessment of, for and as learning ... [each have their own] assessment capitals and habituses”. Here Bourdieu’s concept of capital represents “what is at stake in social spaces” (James 2011), this tends to be symbolic capital, knowledge (Grenfell and James 2004) in the field of educational research, signifying status and resources; considered as “both the process in, and product of a field” (Thomson 2014). Ultimately configurations of capital in a field shape social practice (Grenfell and James 2004). For Bourdieu (1988) in the field of French HE, dominant forms of capital were:

‘scholastic capital’ (scientific prestige and intellectual renown) and ‘academic capital’ (institutional control over appointments, funding, etc.)

(Maton 2005, p. 690)

Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) extend this concept of capital in proposing ‘Assessment Capital’, encapsulating the concepts of assessment professionalisation, or assessment literacies. For assessment, one might thus adapt Grenfell and James (2004) earlier rendition to argue that configurations of ‘assessment capital’ in a field shape the social practice of ‘assessment’.

Simper et al. (2022) utilise Bourdieu as a socio-cultural framework to analyse assessment practice - to a limited extent. They acknowledge how agents holding cultural or social capital are in a position to influence others e.g. those holding informal ‘key decision maker’ status, or being an ‘innovator’. Academics with more social capital were “more readily able to make [assessment] changes” (ibid, 1026) (citing the example of changing from OSCE to DOPS). New academics lacked capital for assessment change whilst respected and trusted individuals with ‘time served’ possessed capital for assessment change.

Maton (2005) also signals how struggles in the field are not purely accumulation strategies but act to legitimate as to ‘which form of capital should be the Gold Standard’ (ibid, p. 690). Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) differentiate assessment capital posing the three paradigms of assessment as forms of capital.⁴⁰ The extent that academics internalise assessment professionalism as a legitimate ‘element’ of academic identity is however dubious given a “blindness to the need for professionalism in teaching” (Elton 2006) and the recognition of a lack of assessment professionalism (Rust 2007).

Capital is important as agents are defined by their relational *position* within the field’s distribution of capital (Maton 2005); thus agents vie in competition over the dominant capital within the field through strategies termed *position takings*. *Positions* and *position takings* are fundamental to this thesis being orientated to *influences* on assessment (RQ2) and *perceptions* of assessment (RQ1) respectively.

⁴⁰ In the book they define the three capitals as: “Assessment of learning constitutes a form of assessment capital in the sense of reaching agreement between teacher and student about what knowledge and skills a student possesses in a summative sense at any point in time along a continuum, and their accompanying evaluative knowledge of this.

Assessment for learning is the understanding that assessment capital is transformable and based upon feedback and subsequent adoption or modification to change the level of knowledge and skills possessed over time.

Assessment as learning as assessment capital, on the other hand, is the view that a student or teacher possesses skills in evaluating their own and others’ knowledge and skills at any point in time.” (p. 156)

Positions represent the occupation of roles or locations within social systems and structures within a field, resultant of the distributions of capital and power dynamics. For assessment these positions can be stakeholder based, whereby different agents occupying varying positions of power and influence in assessment (academics, staff, management, PSRBs), and positioning can differ within these stakeholder groups e.g., academics or students evidencing different forms of capital (cultural capital etc.).

To assert or maintain these positions the thesis then looks to *position takings*. *Position takings* are influenced by both capital and habitus, dispositions, and ways of perceiving the social world. Specifically, which strategies are adopted in the field of assessment practice can be likened to the three paradigms (AoL, AfL and AaL); ways of navigating assessment structures in the field to reinforce or challenge the existing distribution of positions within the field (Maton 2005; Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023).

Regarding Bourdieu's concept of habitus applied to assessment:

assessment is embodied in the habitus of individuals and institutions. It is carried in our bones so to speak and as such is not always easily verbalised

(Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 7)

Habitus includes deeply ingrained dispositions, preferences, it is symbolic of past experiences, attitudes and beliefs, ways of “acting, feeling, thinking and being” (Maton 2014a, p. 50). *Position takings* are informed by an individual's habitus as it shapes their understanding of the field and their ability to navigate it effectively. Academics can occupy *positions*, yet their strategies vary significantly considering educational ideologies that may be shaped via prior experiences, background, cultures. Thus, a complex web of beliefs and dispositions can inform academic perceptions/conceptions of assessment (Bearman et al. 2017; Harrison et al. 2017; Norton et al. 2019).

Habitus extends beyond the individual. Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023, p. xxxi) propose the term “institutional habitus with the collective dispositions of the institution understood as norms, rules and values connected with learning and assessment practices” whilst Simper et al. (2022, p. 1025) suggest “a collective habitus” yet not extensively elaborated. Habitus is “the embodiment of systems of structures (traditions over time) and behaviours conditioned by unwritten rules, doxa (Bourdieu 1977)” (Simper et al. 2022, p. 1018)

Holistically Bourdieu's 'rules of the game' signify what may be legitimate assessment practice. They provide the framework for occupying *positions* and enacting *position-takings*. For academics, capital in assessment, and *positions* can stem from Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) knowledge interpretation akin to assessment literacy, or from occupying dominant positions of power in the field due to status prestige e.g., academic-as-manager positions. *Positions* in the field of assessment practice may be inhabited by actors and agents internal and external to the institution (e.g., PSRBs, AdvanceHE, NSS).⁴¹ Habitus can influence assessment strategies (*position takings*) as academics conform to or circumvent the norms in disciplinary/institutional assessment practice. The field is thus an arena of struggle for academics vying for positions, through enactments of what is deemed as legitimate assessment practice (Maton 2005).

These thinking tools enable a sociocultural approach to be undertaken. James (2014) suggests a cultural approach to understanding assessment would enable recognition, seeing practices as:

instances of the intersection of relationships and relative positions ... the mutual interdependence of social constraint and individual action, of 'structure' and 'agency'

(James 2014, p. 159)

In his social view of assessment practice he claims "people are 'representing' (as well as 're-presenting') something they embody and enact the structures around them (ibid, p159) thus both habitus and capital shape and are shaped by the field.

The field of assessment in HE is the cornerstone of this thesis, and for a field "the notion of 'autonomy' is its keystone" (Maton 2005, p. 687). The field's own autonomy (generating its own values and markers of achievement) (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005) and the relative nature of this autonomy (given competing influences from economic and political powers/influences for example) enables understandings of the rules of the game, what is valued in the field. The refraction coefficient of the field can determine the extent of this relative autonomy (Maton

⁴¹ As fields are autonomous there is a refraction coefficient that determines the extent to which the field is susceptible to 'external' influence. In this study PSRBs, external pedagogic organisations (e.g., AdvanceHE) and more macro level actors (e.g., National Student Survey (NSS)) are determined to exert influence on the field of assessment in HE. The former PSRB and AdvanceHE type organisations may be akin to those occupying the Pedagogic Recontextualisation Field (PRF) whilst government initiatives and pressures stem from the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF) from a Bernsteinian perspective.

2005).⁴² Maton (2005) provides an example of field structure and autonomy in the context of HE:

The two main forms of capital circulating in a field represent competing principles of hierarchization: an autonomous principle looking inwards to the ostensibly disinterested activities of the field (such as ‘knowledge for its own sake’) and a heteronomous principle looking beyond the field’s specific activities and towards economic and political success (such as generating research income or wielding administrative power).

(Maton 2005, p. 690)

These poles may translate as a liberal educational ideology versus a neoliberal ideology and the principles of hierarchisation form the basis of struggles between agents. They inform this thesis by signifying a shift away from Bourdieu’s concepts in isolation to recognition of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as a means to analyse such poles (as discussed in Chapter 3).

2.4.3 Bernstein

In addition to the work of Bourdieu, Shay (2016) also influences this thesis, and significantly influenced Forde-Leaves et al. (2023); not for proximity to the assessment literature but for offering a conceptual point of departure, that of Bernstein’s concepts of classification (power) and framing (control), and ultimately the initial introduction to the author of LCT. Shay (2016, p. 767) concern was the “outward pull ... contestation over curriculum ... the ‘false choices’ about the purpose of higher education, [and] what it means to be educated”. This sparked the research problem of the thesis; contestation over assessment, the ‘false choices’ about the purpose of assessment, and what it means to be assessed.

Wider Bernsteinian educational research (Wheelahan 2005; Hordern 2017; Pereira and Sithole 2020; Chiang et al. 2022) has implications for assessment, as do several doctoral studies interweaving Bernsteinian analysis of curriculum and assessment with LCT (Pountney 2014; Kirk 2018; Herrett 2020). Yet Bernsteinian assessment research per se remains a poor cousin to curriculum; few studies (Willis et al. 2013; Young et al. 2021) explicitly problematise assessment utilising Bernstein’s code theory and the pedagogic device. However Bernsteinian concepts of classification and framing inform this theses, notably via their association to

⁴² However a full applications of Bourdieu’s theories are beyond the scope of this thesis

authentic assessment and ‘looking outward’ (classification) (Shay 2016) and control within the pedagogic assessment relationship (framing).

Classification

For context, *classification* refers to the relations and nature of differentiation *between categories or contexts* (Bernstein 1971) i.e., the degree of insulation between one category/context and another (Shay 2016). Wheelahan (2005) explains that classification “expresses power because it defines ‘what matters’ ... who has access to it”. Power is pertinent for assessment given the multiple actors and agencies involved in assessment practice and how power relations are legitimated, contested and negotiated (Singh 2002, p. 578). Classification categorises the distinctiveness of a discourse, specialism and uniqueness representing strong classification (C+) less specialisation weaker classification (C-). For assessment, economic assessment practices whose organisation and specialised language differs to assessment practices in visual arts suggests stronger classification (Willis et al, 2013).

Young et al. (2021) interpreted classification as the strength of the silence between “what is, what could be and what isn’t assessed” finding AfL practice, more fluid interactional weakly insulated concepts of assessment correlated with weaker classification. Classification weakens as disciplines look beyond HE to the workplace and authentic assessment (Villarroel et al. 2018); likewise programmatic assessment working across silo modules (Torre et al. 2022) and interdisciplinary assessment for graduate attributes (Ya-hui and Li-yia 2008) signify weakening classification.

Framing

Framing refers to the strength of control *within* categories/contexts, the locus of control over selection, sequence, pacing and evaluation (assessment), or “who controls what” (Bernstein 1996, p. 27). For assessment, strong framing suggests control over assessment resides with the ‘expert’ typically the academic (Willis et al. 2013); weaker is suggestive of control residing elsewhere (agency shifting to the student in strategies aligned to AfL e.g., self and peer assessment (Nieminen and Tuohilampi (2020)). Framing also applies to transparency in assessment; stronger when evaluation criteria are explicit, weaker when evaluation criteria are implicit (Morais and Neves 2004) thus given Torrance (2007) critique one may steer to weaker framing. Young et al. (2021) however correlate weaker framing with the AfL agenda given

calls for student co-creation of assessment criteria. Willis et al. (2013) however assert that even in strongly framed practice the AfL agenda can be supported.

In consequence of classification and framing, modalities emerge as collection codes (+C,+F) and integration codes (-C,-F) (Bernstein 1973; Bernstein 2000); the latter integration codes entail less insulation between curriculum contents and a relaxed framing of the pedagogical relationship, enhancing student autonomy and discretion (Bhattacharya 2022, para.6). Taken collectively the assessment environment associated with integration codes assimilate to AfL ideologies of assessment best practice. Maton (2014c) however correlates weak classification and weak framing to ‘invisible pedagogy’; a situation tantamount to progressivist, constructivist approaches to teaching where the ‘rules of the game’ are obfuscated.

In addition to code theory, Ashwin et al. (2012) contend that Bernstein (2000) pedagogic device offers an alternative to Biglan-Becher disciplinary classification systems, in that “the pedagogic device suggests that [disciplines] are just one set of the many factors that shape the students’ experiences of studying at university” (p.1). The pedagogic device could offer a more nuanced perspective of assessment context than epistemologically narrow conventions of discipline, but the focus on ‘knowledge transmission’ and the pedagogic device in isolation would narrow this thesis’ focus.

2.4.4 Cultures

Another defining influence on this thesis was how Bourdieu’s work was utilised as ‘theory-as-method’ in James (2014), enabling a relational and sociological approach; a learning culture approach challenges the idea that assessment is an isolated practice, that it is a ‘fundamentally individual’, activity located in an a specific context (James 2017, p. 112); rather “[c]ultures, then, are both structured and structuring” (Hodkinson et al. 2007, p. 419). They entail “practices that both reproduce and instigate a set of beliefs and a way of doing things” (James 2014, p. 160) or defined more fully: learning cultures are:

an assemblage of inter-connected elements arranged in a series of concentric circles around any given practice, but all of which are in some way intrinsic to that practice: and whilst they are all implicated in the practice, not all the elements are always immediately visible

(James 2017, p. 112)

Elements comprise the positions, dispositions and actions of students and tutors: disciplinary identity; institutional management and organisation; resourcing; policies; funding; quality; and wider social and economic contexts (ibid). If applied to assessment, these are depicted visually below to reiterate how an assessment culture is required to be seen as a ‘whole’:

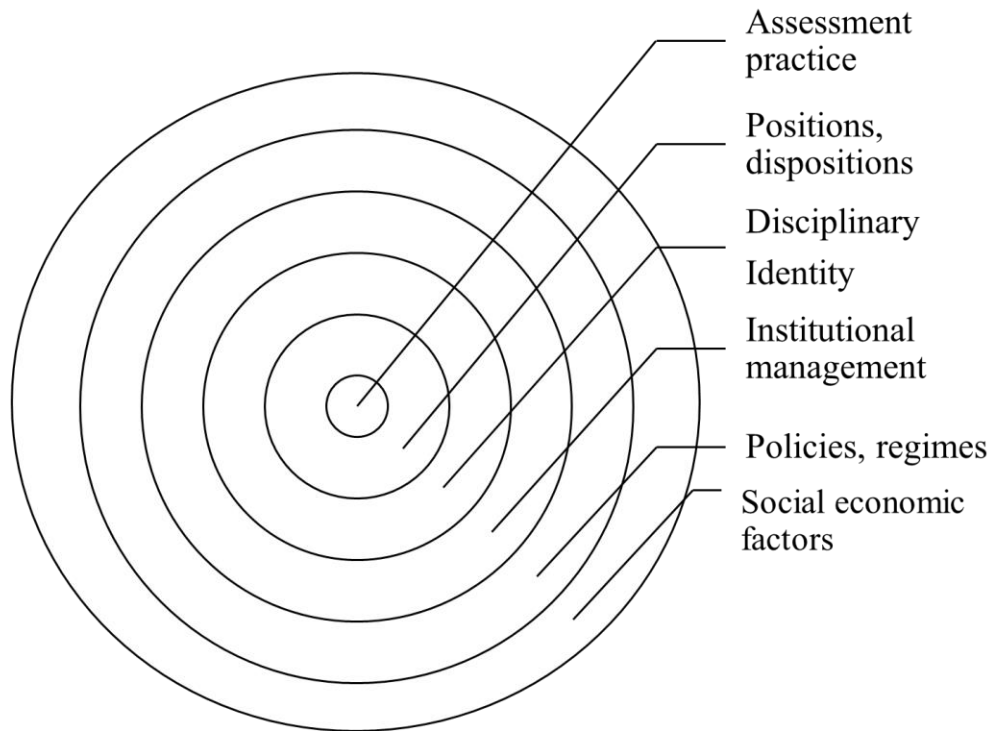


Figure 2.1: Suggested visual interpretation of assessment culture as interpreted from James (2017)

The term assessment culture is conceptualised here as a specific concept derived from the learning cultures work of David James and colleagues, and as informed by Bourdieu. It is a novel contribution to literature acknowledging in that its conceptualisation in the field is varied and there is “limited empirical research on the impact of assessment culture on assessment practices” (Simper et al. 2022, p. 2022).

Extant literature utilises the term ‘assessment culture’ as indicative of either a singular assessment culture (Birenbaum 2016; Harrison et al. 2017), as a multitude of cultures of assessment (Baas et al. 2016; Fuller et al. 2016; Skidmore et al. 2018) or as assessment cultures (Ylonen et al. 2018; Simper et al. 2022; Nieminen and Atjonen 2023). However, none of these works specifically derive the meaning of the term from James (2014), despite seminal literature

acknowledging the “theoretical sociocultural Bourdieusian analysis of assessment practice” as presented through a “learning cultures approach” (Bearman et al. 2017; Boud et al. 2018b).

Nieminen and Atjonen (2023)⁴³ conceptualises assessment cultures as

subsets of educational cultures defined by the values, beliefs and assumptions concerning assessment held by teachers, principals and students (Banta, 2002).

(Nieminen and Atjonen 2023, p. 244)

Underpinning this definition is the utilisation of an earlier body of work from a US ‘quality’ interpretation of the term (e.g. Banta, 2002) being institutional ‘use’ of assessment results for accountability as opposed to learning opportunities, deriving from the work of several US researchers (Fuller et al. 2016; Skidmore et al. 2018). In this work a culture of assessment was conceptualised as the “institutional contexts that support or hinder the integration and use of assessment data to inform decisions that lead to changes in teaching, institutional effectiveness and learning.” (Fuller et al. 2015, p. 333); thus a US utility-based quality assurance/evaluation driven term⁴⁴ as distinct from the approach taken in this thesis and the work of James (2014).

Simper et al. (2022) investigated assessment cultures ‘through a socio-cultural lens’ with consideration of Bourdieusian concepts, however their definition of assessment culture is likewise derived from the US context and the work of Fuller et al. (2015); Fuller et al. (2016); Skidmore et al. (2018) without appropriate critique of the US versus UK conceptualisations of the term ‘assessment’. Nevertheless, the authors explore assessment culture and change “through a socio-cultural framework (Bourdieu 1993).

Via in-depth interviews with academics five themes of Tribes, Habitus, Motivations, Barriers and Enablers emerged corresponding respectively to findings of embedded disciplinary practice, peer induction, policy and agency, readiness systems and logistics, and capital academic community and peer support. The authors found how:

⁴³ Empirically this study is pre-HE, set in the schooling sector of Finland thus ordinarily would be out of scope for the thesis, however, conceptually, due to the scarcity of ‘assessment cultures’ work and the contribution it makes to clarifying the UK/US interpretations of ‘cultures of assessment’, alongside the eminence of the researcher within the field of HE assessment research it is included in this literature review.

⁴⁴ These US depictions fail to resonate with the ethos of assessment as conceptualised in this thesis, they include *Culture of Student Learning*; *Culture of Compliance*; and *Culture of Fear* (Skidmore et al. 2018) as determined statistically via the “Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture” tool.

disciplinary assessment norms and attitudes transcended institutional boundaries ...[and] support the assertion of assessment microcultures. Academics being inducted into the systems of assessment appeared to create stability in the form of socialisation into a collective habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

(Simper et al. 2022, pp. 1024-1025)

Thus they suggested “contextual specificities of the discipline are suggestive of assessment subcultures”⁴⁵ (ibid, p1018); and utilise the term ‘assessment microcultures to represent “distinct characteristics discernible within disciplines” (ibid, p1025). The authors do not comment on what this might mean for disciplinary or signature assessment discourse (Quinlan and Pitt 2021) but significantly they found assessment norms and practices “consistent in disciplines across settings” supporting the disciplinary discourse narrative of Ylonen et al. (2018) thus assessment microcultures in this regard are taken to emulate disciplinary assessment practices. The term ‘collective habitus’ was suggested in this regard but not expanded; Jawitz (2009) however suggests “within the collective habitus resides the ‘shared repertoire of ... ways of doing things’ (Wenger 1998)” (p.604) which would align with disciplinary practices.

Given a lack of conceptualisation of the term ‘assessment culture’ from a sociocultural perspective, this thesis re-purposes and extends James’ (2017) work to propose assessment cultures are adapted to represent, from an academic’s perspective, “the social practices through which people assess” (adapted from James and Biesta, 2007: 23 cited in James (2017)); seeing assessment culture as:

a complex socio-cultural configuration comprising interconnected elements that govern and mediate the practices and perceptions of assessment within higher educational contexts.

(Forde-Leaves, forthcoming, adapted from James (2017))

The inclusion of both practice and perceptions is significant here in that similar practices may be enacted (e.g., formative assessment, dialogic interchanges, authentic assessment practice

⁴⁵Terminology of ‘assessment subcultures’ utilised in the paper differs from the terms utilised in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

etc) yet perceived differently for different actors given the differing nature and extent of interconnectedness of the elements at play.

These elements encompass the positions, dispositions, and actions of both assessors and the assessed. They are imbued with power and structured by disciplinary norms, institutional hierarchies, resource allocation, and broader socio-economic forces. Assessment culture thus manifests as a dynamic interplay of habitus and capital within the field of assessment practice. As the field is structured by multiple actors it is characterised by a multitude of both individual, collective and institutional habitus competing for multiple forms of capital. As such a field may exhibit multiple assessment cultures, of varying dominance and significance. Assessment subcultures is also utilised in this thesis to represent constellations, or socio-cultural configurations of interconnections that shape and are shaped by assessment practices and perceptions. In this understanding and seeing assessment practice through a sociocultural, Bourdieusian lens, the underlying power relations, struggles, and institutional and social structures that shape assessment practices can be ‘seen’; thus, the underlying structuring principles of practice can be established.

2.5 Conclusion

Parts One and Two of this Chapter addressed Research Question 1, that is *perceptions* of assessment by reviewing extant paradigms and *perceptions* of assessment practice through quantitative and qualitative approaches. Assessment design, methods and strategies were understood from knowledge perspectives or task-specific localised practice-based perspectives, however a significant contextual gap exists in understanding *why* such practices are enacted.

Part Three addressed Research Question 2, that is the *influences* on assessment by investigating extant literature on the *influences* on assessment practice. A sociocultural approach would contend moving beyond epistemic means of understanding assessment (discipline), moving to exploring relational interconnectivities within and between micro, meso and macro influences.

Part Four addressed Research Question 3, that is how best to understand the interplay between *perceptions* and *influences* on assessment in a theoretically informed way. Evidence of a lack of theoretical underpinnings in the assessment literature was found, and theoretical approaches to inform this thesis (Bourdieu and Bernstein) were identified. It concluded on how a

sociological approach to understanding assessment practice is required via furthering the concept of learning cultures to that of ‘assessment cultures’ and ‘assessment subcultures’.

Chapter 3 now offers the means of ‘seeing’ assessment, through a sociocultural approach, affording explanatory power through adoption of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). LCT builds on the sociological theories of Bourdieu and Bernstein to answer Research Question 3; a means of understanding assessment practice.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the study. It presents critical realism as the meta theory guiding the study, then identifies the social realist analytical framework of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as an explanatory framework. The LCT dimension of Autonomy is utilised to develop an analytical methodological tool for analysing the interactions between *perspectives* of (RQ1), and *influences* (RQ2) on assessment practice. The developed model is referred to as the LCT Assessment Tool, as means of understanding assessment practice (RQ3).

The chapter also presents the research methods for the study, adopting the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. It then engages reflectively with the data through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Clarke and Braun 2021) with due consideration of ethical implications. Informed by the RTA, the chapter then demonstrates a ‘second reading’ of the data through the development and application of a ‘translation device’ (Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen 2016) to conduct the LCT Autonomy analysis.

3.2 The theoretical framework

Deployment of empirical research methods in education requires an underpinning meta theory (Scott, 2006). To conceptualise this, I utilise Maton’s (2014) schema to depict these linkages:

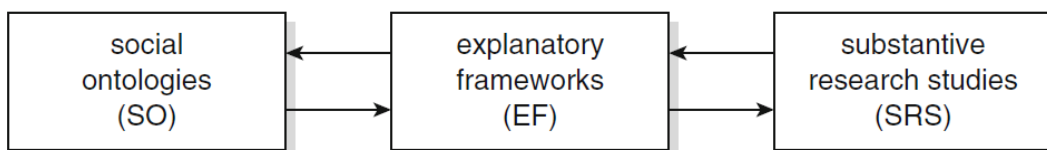


Figure 3.1: Meta theories, theories and substantive theories (Maton 2014c, p. 15)

For social ontology, or a meta theory, this study uses critical realism (CR). Critical realism is essentially a “post-positivist social science paradigm” (Zhang 2023, p. 15). Critical realism⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See the work of Bhaskar (2008), Archer (2010), and Sayer (2004) for a full understanding of critical realism

is founded on three commitments: ontological realism; epistemological relativism; and judgement rationality. The first, ontological realism, contends that there is a reality, both observed and unobserved, i.e., much of reality exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it (Archer et al. 2016). The second, epistemological relativism, acknowledges that “our knowledge of the world is not universal, invariant, transhistorical and essential truth” (Maton 2014, p. 10). As such critical realism acknowledges how actors are always socially and historically situated, and perspectives are always influenced by this situatedness (Bhaskar 2008). The final commitment of judgemental rationality appreciates that not all perspectives are equal, and not all knowledge claims are similarly valid (Archer et al. 1998). Applied to assessment, this acknowledges the legitimacy of knowledge claims in assessment practice and signals to find a rational basis for assessing competing claims. In this study this commitment to judgement is addressed via the adoption of LCT, to provide such a basis for understanding legitimacy of assessment practice claims.

This merging of both ontological realism and epistemological relativism postulates CR as a middle ground theory, denying purported false paradigmatic choices, both ontological (e.g., between constructivism/constructionism and objectivism) and epistemological (e.g., between interpretivism and positivism). This middle ground philosophical positioning is pertinent as this thesis addresses *perceptions* (RQ1) of a differentiated, structured and stratified reality (Danermark et al. 2005) and ‘dig’ (ibid) below the surface to understand causality, or *influences* (RQ2) in assessment practice. CR distinguishes between the ‘real’ world and the ‘observable’ world in that the former independent reality exists but cannot be wholly observed; only via perceptions and experiences is the latter observable reality constructed. CR focuses on causality and identifying causal mechanisms (Radulescu and Vessey 2009). Through CR’s depth ontology, that is the three domains of reality (Bhaskar 2008), one can understand how generative mechanisms and structures, (the real) and events (the actual) shape perceptions (the empirical). Using an analogy, Stutchbury (2022) explains CR depth ontology as:

like an iceberg: most of reality (the iceberg) is invisible to the observer. The casual mechanisms exist below the surface and are invisible but give rise to ‘experiences’ and ‘events’.

(Stutchbury 2022, p. 114)

CR approaches are somewhat rare in the field of assessment practice, (Kahn 2017; Fryer 2021; Roberts et al. 2021; Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023) and despite somewhat abstract engagement at the meta theory level, the linkage between Research Question 2, that is *influences* on assessment practice, and the ‘real’ causal generative mechanisms underpinning CR, demarcates the thesis as a novel contribution to the field.

CR aligns with my philosophical stance as a ‘middle-ground’ researcher⁴⁷ and my interpretation of the research problem. As Myers (2018) suggests, the researcher’s worldview informs how the research is analysed and interpreted. This middle-ground stance is a result of both my positioning as a social sciences doctoral candidate (with interpretivist tendencies) and my professional status as a Chartered Accountant (a discipline that may be deemed as being dominated by positivist, quantitative research approaches).⁴⁸ Thus, I see myself as neither wholly constructivist nor objectivist. This is not to conflate realism and pragmatism; (Elder-Vass 2022, p. 261) argues that “pragmatists distrust and discourage invocations of structural power in social explanations, whereas realism encourages them”, accounting for much pragmatist work emphasising the micro level at the expense of the macro.

A critical realist perspective thus advocates a socio-cultural framework for understanding generative mechanisms, structures, and events (*influences*) and empirical representations (*perceptions*) of assessment practice fusing the macro, meso and micro level influences, affording contextualised approaches of assessment extending beyond disciplinary boundaries. It offers:

a meta-theory connecting meaningful practices with generative mechanisms, and thus to underpin assessment acts and how they are perceived and intended by all agents, examiners, examinees, test developers, curriculum writers, policy makers and so on. It moves from the distinction between the ontology of assessment, that is, what is being evaluated and thus known through assessment, and the epistemology of assessment, that is, the conditions in which this knowledge is accumulated and used.

⁴⁷ As per the Introduction chapter, I write in the first person to acknowledge the personal reflective research process undertaken in this thesis.

⁴⁸ As Creswell and Creswell (2018) state “individuals develop worldviews based on their discipline orientations and research communities” (p. 6). Thus constructivist approaches were identified as being “quite relatively underutilised” or categorised as “the road less travelled” in Accounting research (Bisman and Highfield, 2012))

(Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. vii)

Critical realism acts as the philosophical ‘underlabourer’ (Bhaskar 2008) for the explanatory framework of LCT. Together these inform this substantive research study. A revised schema is shown below:

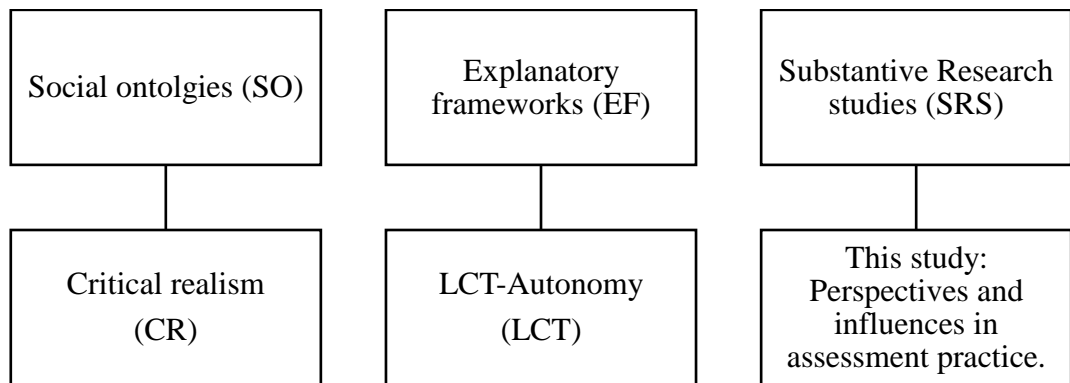


Figure 3.2 Modified Theoretical Framework for this study

LCT is used in this study as an explanatory or analytical framework. It is a sociological practical theory, representing neither a paradigm or an ‘ism’ (Maton, 2014). It both informs and is informed by research, hence offers a vehicle for ‘theory generation’ via its analytical power, pertinent given claims that “there do not seem to be any well-articulated theories of assessment” (Delandshere 2001, p. 113).

3.3 What Is Legitimation Code Theory (LCT)?

LCT is “a sociological framework for researching and informing practice” (Maton 2014c, p. 182). Key to this thesis is the ability of LCT to uncover the structuring principles of practice, to address how competing claims regarding assessment are legitimated within social contexts. It is a “multidimensional conceptual toolkit for analysing actors’ dispositions, practices and contexts, within a variegated range of fields” (Maton 2014c, p. 17). LCT “builds on, integrates and subsumes the relational ‘field’ theory of Pierre Bourdieu and ‘code’ theory of Basil Bernstein in order to capture higher education as an emergent and irreducible social structure.” (Maton, 2004, p. iv). This is pertinent given the need to understand assessment practice as a social practice, enacted in a social field (Bourdieu 1993).

LCT studies in the field of assessment practice are few but include assessment and the curriculum by Shay (2008a,2013,2016); managerialism in English Literature (Knoetze 2023); chemistry (Rootman-le Grange and Blackie 2018); feedback (Van Heerden 2020); engineering (Wolff and Hoffman 2014); and the field of music (Walton 2020). These studies have primarily adopted the Specialisation dimension of LCT. Other assessment studies have used the Semantics dimension, including Quinn (2020), Sigsgaard (2020) and Georgiou and Nielsen (2020). Walton (2021) and Garraway and Reddy (2016) utilise Autonomy to analyse assessment, but the framework for understanding assessment practice by Forde-Leaves et al. (2023) utilising data collected in this thesis is most relevant. Case (2015) suggested LCT offers an innovative means of analysis and the use of LCT in this thesis thus acts as a valuable⁴⁹ contribution to an emerging field of LCT assessment research.

LCT construes competing claims to legitimacy within social fields as languages of legitimation. These languages comprise viewpoints and practices of participants within a relatively autonomous ‘field’. These viewpoints, beliefs and practices of actors are understood as embodying claims for knowledge, status, and resources (Maton 2004). To best understand and conceptualise these languages of legitimation, LCT uncovers the organising principles behind them; the organising principles of dispositions, practices, and thus fields are made visible via the concept of legitimation codes (Maton 2014).

Legitimation codes provide a means of analysing the ‘basis’ of legitimacy in such social contexts or fields. These codes are represented by five LCT dimensions being: Specialisation; Semantics; Autonomy; Temporal; and Density; albeit the first three dimensions dominate the literature. Each dimension has an associated ‘premise’ and ‘aspects’ that combine to form code modalities. Code modalities are represented by different forms of ‘legitimation codes’ – these are shown in Table 3-1.

⁴⁹ To the extent that the research questions and tool developed differs significantly from literature in this area

Dimension of LCT	Premise of LCT dimension	Aspects of this dimension	Legitimation code modalities
Autonomy	Any set of practices comprises constituents that are related together in particular ways	Positional Autonomy (PA) Relational Autonomy (RA)	<i>sovereign codes</i> (PA+, RA+), <i>exotic codes</i> (PA-, RA-), <i>introjected codes</i> (PA-, RA+), and <i>projected codes</i> (PA+, RA-).
Semantics	Practices, dispositions, and contexts can be explored through notions of context-dependence and complexity	Sematic Gravity (SG) Sematic Density (SD)	<i>rhizomatic codes</i> (SG-, SD+), <i>prosaic codes</i> (SG+, SD-), <i>rarefied codes</i> (SG-, SD-), and <i>worldly codes</i> (SG+, SD+).
Specialization	Every practice is about or oriented towards something and by someone	Epistemic relations (ER) Social relations (SR)	<i>knowledge codes</i> (ER+, SR-), <i>knower codes</i> (ER-, SR+) <i>élite codes</i> (ER+, SR+) and <i>relativist codes</i> (ER-, SR-).

Table 3-1: Overview of three LCT dimensions adapted from Maton et al. (2016) and Maton and Howard (2018)⁵⁰.

The concepts of legitimacy, languages and codes provide a logical framework for this study by virtue of conceptualising the arena in which assessment practice is played out and identifying the various actors struggling to control what is deemed legitimate in the field of assessment practice. Specifically, legitimation codes assign a structure to analysing practices, a structure located in the internationally recognised⁵¹ methodological framework of LCT and thus is portable for theorising and analysing assessment practice across different assessment contexts. This contributes to RQ3, i.e., the development of a methodological tool to understand assessment practice.

In utilising the specific dimension of LCT Autonomy; this research study is orientated to uncovering structuring principles of assessment practice, it places particular emphasis on how structure and agency interplay to understand both the knowledge practices of assessment and *perspectives* of those practices (RQ1) and the significance of *influence* or control exerted on academics from both within and beyond the field of assessment practice (RQ2). For this, the

⁵⁰ Reproduced with permission from Forde-Leaves et al. (2023).

⁵¹ In testament to the published literature base of LCT discussed later in this section

dimension Autonomy is presented as a means of addressing insulation and boundaries around, and within, the field of assessment practice.

3.4 *LCT Autonomy*

LCT Autonomy asks: “how insulated is a set of practices from other practices?” (Maton and Howard 2020, p. 5). LCT Autonomy enables the conceptualisation of actors or agents⁵² in assessment practice as ‘constituents’. The ‘relational’ aspects of the dimension will enable analysis of the nature of assessment practice, underlying beliefs of assessment and ways of working. By way of a formal definition:

Autonomy (capitalized) is a dimension of LCT which explores practice in terms of relatively autonomous social universes whose organizing principles are given by autonomy codes that comprise relative strengths of positional autonomy (PA) and relational autonomy (RA). These are mapped on the autonomy plane and traced over time on autonomy profiles to explore the workings of the autonomy device, one aspect of the Legitimation Device.

(Maton, 2016, p236) [emphasis in original]

Three points require emphasis from this definition; firstly the reference to ‘autonomous social universes’ is indicative of Bourdieu (1993) field theory. Maton (2004, p. 36) suggests “[r]elative autonomy is crucial: a field is neither wholly autonomous from nor reducible to other fields is the precondition of its existence”. Maton (2005) therefore claims the key advantage of using Bourdieu’s field theory is that it enables a field to be seen as an object of study. This study conceptualises this as the field of assessment practice, with its own autonomous values and ways of working, given Bourdieu’s (1993) ‘autonomous’ and ‘heteronomous’ principles of hierarchization, as discussed in Chapter 2, part 4. These principles heavily influence this thesis in that RQ1 will thus address how actors *perceive* the field in terms of autonomous and heteronomous principles of hierarchisation that characterise assessment practice. RQ2 is concerned with the origins of this refraction process, the extent to which the field is insulated from external *influence* and thus internal autonomy is compromised.

⁵² Here I do not differentiate between these terms although I do acknowledge their sociological underpinnings (e.g., Actor Network Theory (ANT)). I use these terms to refer to individuals/institutions/communities of practice, essentially actors or agents that have agency in assessment

Secondly, the reference to ‘organising principles’ enables legitimacy to be established through autonomy codes. Autonomy codes are a means of conceptualising ways in which insulation between aspects of practices underpins boundaries within those practices. Specifically, the Autonomy dimension concerns boundaries underpinned by the relative insulation of constituents of practices (e.g., actors, ideas, artefacts etc), referred as ‘positional autonomy’ (Maton 2016a) and the means by which these constituents are related together (e.g., ways of working, beliefs etc.) referred as ‘relational autonomy’ (ibid). These are further explained below.

Thirdly, in having constructed my interpretations of positional and relational autonomy, these concepts are mapped to the ‘Autonomy plane’ to establish legitimation codes that conceptualise the ‘organising principles of practices, dispositions and contexts’ and thus will provide the basis of the languages of legitimation at work for this object of study in a visual analytical context.

3.4.1 Autonomy: positional and relational

Autonomy legitimation codes explore the “boundaries that practices establish around their constituents and the boundaries they establish around how those constituents are related together” (Maton and Howard 2018:p.6). These two notions of insulation are proposed as positional autonomy and relational autonomy respectively and were originally set out by Maton (2005). Maton (2005) applied these legitimation concepts in his early work to distinguish between both the nature of relations between positions of actors in HE and industry, and the relations between the ways of working in HE and those found, for example in the field of economic production. The formal definitions for the constructs are provided as:

positional autonomy (PA) between constituents positioned within a context or category and those positioned in other contexts or categories.

relational autonomy (RA) between relations among constituents of a context or category and relations among constituents of other contexts or categories

(Maton and Howard 2018, p. 6).

Key to understanding these definitions are the two main notions of constituents and relations that underpin autonomy codes, where :

constituents may be actors, ideas, artefacts, institutions, machine elements, body movements, sounds, etc.; how such constituents are related together may be based on explicit procedures, tacit conventions, mechanisms, explicitly stated aims, unstated orthodoxies, formal rules, etc.

(Maton and Howard 2018, p. 6)

Given this broad all-encompassing definition, Autonomy is suitably flexible for a wide array of research problems and objects of study.

Autonomy codes consider autonomy and heteronomy with respect to both these constituents and relations, i.e. autonomous/heteronomous constituents, autonomous/heteronomous relations. These are presented as two concepts – positional and relational autonomy – each presenting their own strengths (+/-) By means of formalising definitions and competing strengths, Table 3-2 can be used for reference:

	Definition	Strong (+)	Weak (-)
positional autonomy (PA)	between constituents positioned within a context or category and those positioned in other contexts or categories	constituents positioned in a context or category are relatively strongly delimited from constituents attributed to other contexts or categories	constituents positioned in a context or category are relatively weakly delimited from constituents attributed to other contexts or categories
relational autonomy (RA)	between relations among constituents of a context or category and relations among constituents of other contexts or categories	the principles governing how constituents are related together are relatively specific to that set of practices, i.e. purposes, aims, ways of working, etc. are autonomous	the principles governing how constituents are related together may be drawn from or shared with other sets of practices, i.e. purposes, aims, ways of working, etc. are heteronomous.

Table 3-2: Autonomy terminology (adapted from Maton and Howard (2018))

Strengths for PA are deemed to align with variations in the extent of ‘delimitation’. This alludes to the extent to which constituents are insulated from other constituents, thus address the concepts of boundaries and, particularly for this study, degrees or relative strengths of influence. For RA, there is a characteristic of ‘specificity’ or distinctiveness with regards to ‘relations’, and more pertinently distinctions between what is autonomous and heteronomous. These strengths draw influence from the strengths of Bernsteinian concepts of classification

and framing. Autonomy codes, “effectively apply external classification (C^e) and external framing (F^e) to construal’s of positions (*positional autonomy*) and principles (*relational autonomy*)” (Maton, 2016, pp236-237 emphasis in original).

3.4.2 Autonomy codes – how they combine

Positional and relational autonomy represent analytically distinguishable dimensions of autonomy that have relative strengths (stronger (+) or weaker (-)). The two continua of strengths (PA and RA) form the axes for the autonomy plane, visualised in terms of a Cartesian plane (Maton, 2005). Via analysis of the relative strengths of positional and relational autonomy, four principal autonomy legitimation codes are deciphered⁵³. The Autonomy plane is presented in Figure 3.3.

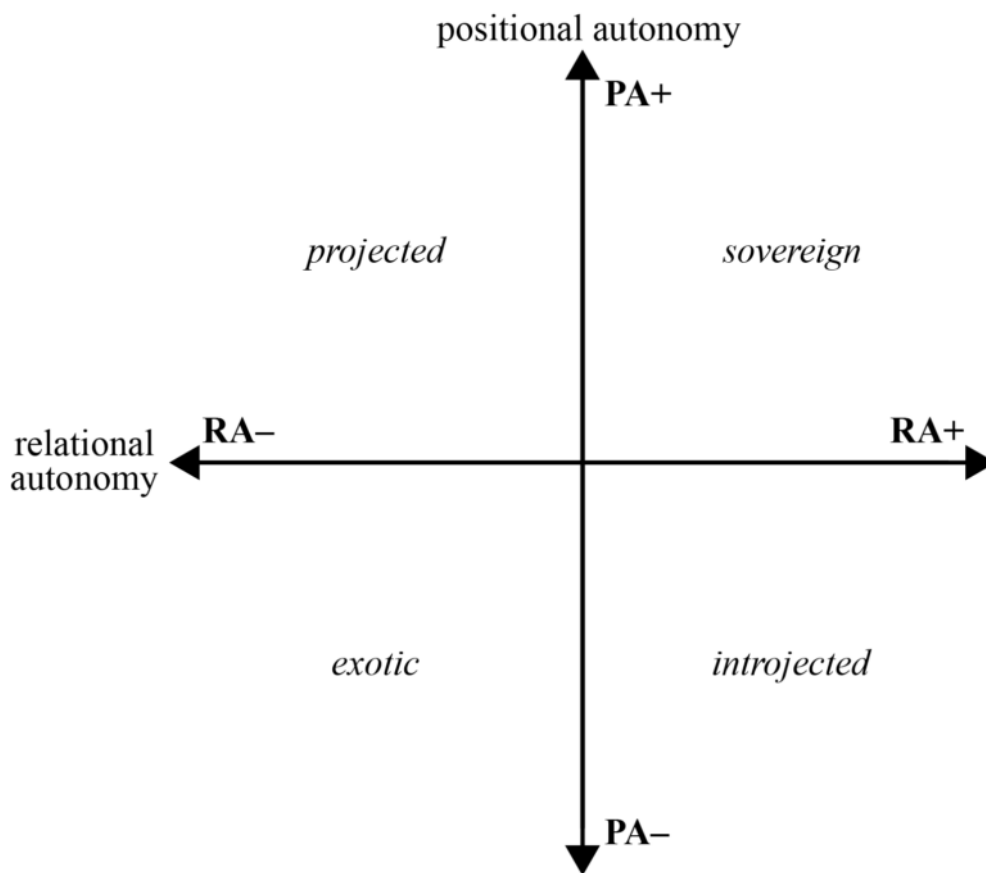


Figure 3.3: Autonomy codes (Maton and Howard 2018, p. 6)

⁵³ Prior publications e.g., Maton (2016), referred to *roman codes* (PA-, RA+), and *trojan codes* (PA+, RA-). This terminology was updated formally in Maton and Howard (2018).

Cartesian planes enhance the generative power of LCT by enabling practices to be seen as multiple ‘positions’⁵⁴ of these respective planes as a means of unveiling the organising principles of practice. They combine “a typology (four principal code modalities) with a topology, the relational space generated by two continua (a space of infinite positions)” (Maton et al. 2016, p. 236). The mapping of positions can be infinite. Maton and Howard (2018, p. 8) stress that “the plane is not limited to four ‘settings’. There are not four boxes or types: data may be spread across several codes”. Thus this adds to the generative power of the conceptual LCT Assessment model in that it allows for infinite degrees of comparison of practices across individual, institutions and varying objects of study.

The Cartesian plane gives rise to four legitimation codes: sovereign; exotic; introjected; and projected, as indicated in Figure 3.3 and explained in Table 3-3.

Legitimation code	Explanation
sovereign codes (PA+, RA+)	strongly insulated positions and autonomous principles, where constituents are associated with the context or category and act according to its specific ways of working
exotic codes (PA-, RA-)	weakly insulated positions and heteronomous principles, where constituents are associated with other contexts or categories and act according to ways of working from other contexts or categories
introjected codes (PA-, RA+)	weakly insulated positions and autonomous principles, where constituents associated with other contexts or categories are oriented towards ways of working emanating from within the specific context or category
projected codes (PA+, RA-)	strongly insulated positions and heteronomous principles, where constituents associated with the specific context or category are oriented towards ways of working from elsewhere.

Table 3-3: Explanation of legitimation codes by Maton and Howard (2021:p.30)

These codes can explicate current positionings, or autonomy pathways, including autonomy tours and trips (Maton and Howard 2018). This thesis does not take the latter approach, rather it utilises LCT Autonomy to ‘map’ points of intersection between assessment perceptions and influences.

To enact autonomy codes, positional and relational autonomy are required to be defined with reference to an object of study. The researcher ultimately asks “what constituents and what principles of relation (e.g. purposes, aims, ways of working) are considered constitutive of *this*

⁵⁴ In terms of a position on a map not in the Bourdieusian sense.

context, *here, in this space and time, by these actors?*” (Maton and Howard 2018, p. 10). The answer provides a starting point for autonomy or a ‘target’.

3.4.3 *Establishing a target*

A ‘target’ (Maton and Howard 2018) will be indicative of ‘target’ constituents representing strong positional autonomy and ‘target’ principles for relations between constituents representing stronger relational autonomy. This target is postulated to emerge from the data and is dependent on the object of study. It is a transitive concept as one actor’s perceptions of what constitutes a context differ from another’s. This is then commensurate with the critical realist standpoint whereby perceptions (experiences) differ dependant on influences (events, mechanisms and structures).⁵⁵ Thus Maton and Howard (2020) emphasise that targets can be multiple and conflicted, in that one actor may have differing conceptions of context. Locke (2020) suggests that a target may be determined via “gathering the perspectives of key players in a field” (p. 31). Thus, empirical data will inform this target.

3.4.4 *An external language of description aka a ‘Translation device’*

To position data in respect of this target, thus determine strengths of PA and RA, an external language of description (Bernstein 2000) or a ‘translation device’ is developed to determine more granular interpretations of positional and relational autonomy. As suggested, the value of LCT is due to it being a practical theory (Maton et al. 2016). LCT models are data-led. Notions of targets and translation devices are empirically developed, thus contributing to this practical nature and the ‘speaking back’ of the data to theory (Maton 2014c) attributes of LCT generally.

A translation device eschews the ‘false dichotomy’ of either imposing theory on data or deriving theories from data. It allows the reader to understand the researcher’s explicit coding mechanisms, involving ‘iterative moments between theory and data’ (Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen 2016, p. 33). In this way translation devices address the ‘discursive gap’ (Bernstein 2000) created between theory and data by defining the forms taken by autonomy codes within this object of study (Maton and Howard 2018). The ability of other researchers to adopt devices contributes to the generalisability and replicability of the LCT Assessment tool developed in

⁵⁵ As mentioned in the section on CR these experiences occur at the level of the empirical, events occur at the level of the actual and causally events are driven by mechanisms at the level of the ‘real’.

response to RQ3, that is a means of understanding the interplays between *perceptions* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2) on assessment practice .

To structure such a device, Maton and Howard (2018) propose a ‘generic’ translation device as a starting point. This explicitly identifies the ‘target’, as discussed above. The target and non-target can be further subdivided to add more granular levels to the analysis:

PA/RA	1st level	2nd level	3rd level
+ ↑ ↓ -	<i>target</i>	<i>core</i>	<i>inner</i>
			<i>outer</i>
		<i>ancillary</i>	<i>inner</i>
			<i>outer</i>
	<i>non-target</i>	<i>associated</i>	<i>near</i>
			<i>remote</i>
		<i>unassociated</i>	<i>near</i>
			<i>remote</i>

Figure 3.4: Generic translation device (Maton and Howard 2018, p. 10)

Generally, when read from left to right, the device translates theory into data, and when read from right to left, translates data into theory (Maton and Chen, 2016). The device provides a systematic coding structure for analysis and thus acts as a key/decoder for future researchers.

To develop and differentiate between granular levels with reference to a target, one must engage in iterative ‘theory building’ to construct a translation device from the empirical data. This allows for concrete and detailed interpretations to code empirical data and analyse the underlying legitimation codes.

3.4.5 Conceptualising PA and RA for this study:

Given the focus on *perceptions* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2), initial interpretations of positional autonomy (PA) and relational autonomy (RA) may be conceived of as:

Construct	Original theorising and pre-conceptions of the terms
positional autonomy (PA)	insulation between constituents (e.g. actors whom have assessment influence) positioned within the field of academic assessment practice, and those constituents (other sources of influence) positioned in outside the field of academic assessment practice
relational autonomy (RA)	relations among constituents in a context is interpreted as ‘ways of working’ or underling ‘purpose’ or ‘beliefs’. The way by which the sources of assessment influence (constituents) are related may be those of, for example, assessment strategies and perspectives of assessment purposes etc. These beliefs and purposes that underlie assessment practice could be conceived to be autonomous or heteronomous to the field.

Table 3-4: Initial Autonomy constructs for this thesis

3.4.6 Bourdieu positions and position takings

Maton (2005) claims that within a field, from a Bourdieusian perspective there is a conflation of positions and position takings, whereby each social field comprises both a field of positions and a (mirrored) field of position takings (Maton 2004).

Maton (2005, p. 690) critiqued Bourdieu’s assumption that, “one’s relational position-takings reflect one’s relational position (for example, dominant agents tend to adopt conservative stances and dominated agents tend towards more radical stances)” claiming that the foregrounding of two modalities being ‘autonomous’ (autonomous positions and autonomous position takings) and ‘heteronomous’ (heteronomous positions and heteronomous position takings) representing two poles of a field “retains a form of sociological reductionism” (ibid, p.696). He claims Bourdieu’s concepts for analysing practices “tend to reduce position takings to epiphenomena of the play of positions within a field” (ibid, p.696). It is this critique that opens the door for LCT.

LCT Autonomy challenges this conflation. Through the separation of PA and RA it challenges the way that autonomous positions (e.g., the autonomy of agents from outside influence) and autonomous position-takings (e.g., the extent to which agents valorise autonomous markers of achievement) tend to be viewed as inextricably intertwined (Maton 2005, p. 697). This enables the knowledge practice of assessment to be seen and to be detached from the undertaker of that knowledge practice, i.e., separating out the ‘who’ (positions or PA) from the ‘what’ (position takings or RA).

From an assessment perspective, actors (academics/institutions/external bodies) who deem themselves as dominant in the field of assessment practice (their *position*) exert their own assertions and perceptions of assessment (that stem from their habitus and interactions in the field) and hence take up certain positions (*position-takings*). I align ‘positions’ with positional autonomy, i.e., the notion of agents within and beyond the field who are in *positions of influence* over assessment practice (RQ2). For *position takings* I align these with relational autonomy and *perspectives* of assessment (RQ1).

Here autonomous and heteronomous principles align with ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ principles as presented by Maton (2005) and Shay (2016). Hence LCT has enabled a clearer demarcation to be made between *positions* and *position takings* and allowed for clearer conceptualisation and separation of RQ1 and RQ2, whilst affording insight into how *perceptions* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2) interplay to address RQ3, a theoretically informed means of understanding assessment.

3.5 Research methods

This section addresses the research methods employed to enable data collection and analysis to ensure the research questions were answered with sufficient rigour and develop the aforementioned translation device with which to code such data.

Being a critical realist study investigating assessment in the context of the three layers of social reality, this research seeks rich thick descriptions of assessment thinking and practice as opposed to broader derived ‘conceptions’ (Brown and Remesal 2012; Hidri 2016). Assessment *perceptions* (relational autonomy) will be gleaned, and allow the researcher to ‘dig deeper’ (Danermark et al. 2005) to understand *influences* on assessment practice (positional autonomy). This acknowledges that “causal processes involve complex interactions among generative mechanisms and contextual conditions” (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023).

As Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen (2016) suggest, LCT enables both “thick description and thick explanation, both empirical fidelity and explanatory power” (p. 47). For this study, this rich, thick description is mobilised by induction, undertaken in the early phases of the data analysis via Reflexive Thematic Analysis as a means of allowing the data to ‘speak’ to theory. The second (iterative) stage(s) of creating and refining an external language of description provided a means for translating between theory and data thus challenges traditional inductive/deductive

dichotomies. It has been argued by Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen (2016) that purely inductive explanations, free of pre-existing theory, is ‘fantasy’ (p. 29).

3.6 *Qualitative research*

Collation of rich deep meaningful perspectives and experiences (at the level of the empirical), would command gaining access to a complex social world of causal interactions through, for example “richly textured accounts of events, experiences and underlying conditions or processes” (Smith and Elger 2014, p. 14). To gather such rich accounts, interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them and to gain a deep understanding of an object of study in natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, p. 3) an exploratory qualitative research approach is adopted. Interpretivist approaches may have been traditionally deemed to sit at the heart of qualitative research⁵⁶ yet Silverman (2016) critiques attempts to generalise what may/may not be characteristic of ‘qualitative research’. Essentialising epistemological interpretivism and ontological constructionism in qualitative research fails to recognise the significance of qualitative research when employed from critical realist perspectives, those founded on epistemological relativism and ontological realism. As Fletcher (2017) suggests, “all explanations of reality are treated as fallible (Bhaskar, 1979), including the explanations provided by research participants ... an ontological departure of critical realism from interpretivism”. For me what is important is trying to understand the causal mechanisms driving such explanations through iterative theory data oscillations.

A multitude of qualitative research methodologies are presented in the literature. Holliday (2007) presents “strategies of enquiry” (p. 16) referencing case study, ethnography, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, grounded theory, and participatory action research. Research methods that may be adopted within these strategies include interviewing, observation, document analysis, content analysis, semiotic analysis, focus groups, or discourse and conversation analysis (Holliday 2007; Bryman 2016:378). Given critical realism as my worldview, it is apt to mention here how case studies represent:

⁵⁶ A detailed account of paradigm wars is beyond the scope of this thesis however see recent ‘Big Q’ debates (Clarke and Braun 2021) that do have some relevance for the adoption of reflexive thematic analysis

[t]he most common, and arguably most useful, form of CR research. In-depth exploration of a case to abduct causal mechanisms from their empirical manifestations

(Vincent and O'Mahoney 2018, p. 10)

Case studies can thus establish cause and effect by observing effects in real contexts (Cohen et al. 2011:p376), exploring “why things are as they are” (Easton, 2010, p. 119). Thus, a case study approach would align with the thesis’ preoccupation with a need for a deep engagement of context, as stressed by the lack of attention afforded to sociocultural notions of context. Case study research in the field of LCT is also common, particularly for large-scale PhD projects (Clarence 2013; Pountney 2014; Kirk 2018; Locke and Maton 2019; Richardson 2019). However, for my research a multitude of case study methods were not deemed to be necessary to answer the research questions as my foci was on academic *perceptions* of a phenomenon, i.e. assessment. From a critical realist perspective an in-depth account of the specific institutional context was not required; rather than observable localised contextual data or evidence of “objects and events that occur in the real world” at the ‘actual’ level (Stutchbury 2022) I was interested in the academic’s *perceptions* of this context i.e., the ‘empirical’ level, “the experiences and sensed perceptions of knowing subjects” (ibid, p115). The causality was to be inferred from the perceptions of academics themselves as opposed to seeking to determine ‘actual’ localised observations.⁵⁷ Influences on assessment practices are also often individually conceived, socially structured, complex and originate from micro, meso and macro interactions. They are implicit and embedded. One cannot necessarily read tacit ‘assessment thinking’ and ‘assessment culture’ from the explicit narrative of an assessment task/artefacts (e.g., document analysis) nor gain insights on ‘why’ practice is enacted in a particular way from selected instances of physical enactment in the classroom (observation). To answer the research questions a deep understanding of the thinking behind what is observed or observable is required (Cohen et al. 2011). I therefore utilise interviews as the research method for this study.

⁵⁷ For example, understanding that the enactment of regulations may constitute an ‘observed event’ and regulations may operate as an inhibitor does not require an in-depth document analysis of such regulations; understanding a preference for formative assessment as perceived does not require an observation or interrogation of formative assessment artefacts.

Interviews are supported in critical realist literature as the “quintessential instrument of realists ... and represent a realist’s preferred choice of data collection (Wynn and Williams 2020)” (Brönnimann 2022, p. 1). Semi-structured interviews feature extensively in discourse regarding academic perceptions⁵⁸ of assessment (Oleson and Hora 2014; Ylonen et al. 2018; Charlton and Newsham-West 2022; Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022) and represent a valid departure from quantitative ‘conception’ methods (Postareff et al. 2012; Hidri 2016; Hodgson and Garvey 2019).

3.7 Interviews

Interviews were adopted in order to gather *perspectives* of assessment practice.⁵⁹ Arksey and Knight (1999) reiterate how:

*The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on a person's mind
..., to access the **perspective** of the person being interviewed*

(Arksey and Knight 1999 emphasis added)

Interviews allow the researcher access to social worlds to understand how individuals sense-make of these worlds (Silverman 2016). They build on “naturalistic, interpretive philosophy and are extensions of conversations that involve interviewees as partners as opposed to research subjects” (Punch and Oancea 2014:p.183). This conversational element of interviewing is paramount, as researchers need to consider their independence and reflexivity. Qualitative research introduces strategic, ethical and personal issues and researchers should “explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values and personal background” (Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 183) in terms of past experiences and how these shape interpretations. These issues were pertinent as I deemed myself an insider (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Mercer 2007; McKenzie and Bartunek 2023) and fighting familiarity by “making the familiar strange” (Delamont and Atkinson 2021) was potentially a concern for my reflective approach.

⁵⁸ Semantically there are differences in the literature regarding perceptions, perspectives, conceptions and as Watty (2006) also indicates as beliefs (what is currently occurring in their departments) and their attitudes (what ought to be occurring). I do not delve into these differences as a detailed account is beyond the scope of the thesis but conceptualisations are provided in Appendix A.

⁵⁹ Lundie (2017) does signal how a perspective is “an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at it and tries to understand the reality Charon (2001:3)” which resounds with my realist ethos.

3.8 *The research site and context*

Given my personal motivation for the study, the disciplinary context for undertaking this research is that of Accounting and Business Management programmes within a UK Business School context. This context offers fertile ground for assessment inquiry given how Business Schools have long been sites of neoliberal contestation (Brady 2013; Clarke et al. ; Jabbar et al. 2018; Parker 2018; Dhanani and Baylis 2023).

3.8.1 *Business school context – ‘they should be shut down’*

Business Schools have attracted much negative attention. Claims that they have “lost their way” (Bennis and O’Toole 2005) and face “educational, intellectual and moral collapse” (Currie et al. 2010, p. 52) litter HE discourse. Business Schools have become the “ethically compromised ... cashcow” (Starkey et al. 2004, p. 1521), and Martin Parker calls to ‘Shut Down the Business School’ (Parker 2018). They are considered as:

little more than loudspeakers for neoliberal capitalism, designed to produce unreflective managers whose primary focus is on their own personal rewards

(Parker 2018)

Dichotomies such as academia versus employability (Speight et al. 2013) or the liberal versus the vocational (Carr 2009) pervade Business School contexts due to the ‘applied’, outward facing nature of the disciplines. Likewise Business Schools are exposed to particular nuances of academic autonomy given allegiances with accreditation bodies (Huber et al. 2024).

Accounting and Business disciplines represent ‘regions’. Shay (2016) refers to Bernstein’s “regionalization of knowledge” whereby “singulars” (the disciplines) are put to work. They “emerge at the interface between intellectual disciplines and external practices”, looking outwards to the field of practice. The field of accounting education balances multiple accountabilities: on the one hand, to the critical scholarship of accounting and on the other hand, to industry and the profession of Accounting; the former often left wanting (Tilling and Tilt 2004; Gebreiter 2022).

3.8.2 Assessment in the disciplines

In utilising Biglan-Becher type nomothetic approaches, stereotypical Business School modules reside in the soft applied classification as reported in other studies (Del Favero 2005; Chikoore et al. 2016; Simpson 2017). Arbaugh (2013) however suggests that with the advent of enhanced quantitative rigor, Economics became classified as a “harder” discipline, thus “such descriptions also have been applied to Accounting and Finance” (ibid, p. 18). Macfarlane (1997) also places accounting at the ‘hard’ end of a hard/soft continuum and Burke and Moore (2003, p. 43) classified Accounting as ‘slightly hard’, “accruing both to its structure (conceptual framework, quasi-regulatory environment, etc.) and the use of quantitative skills in its measurement system”. As a hard-applied discipline, one would contend examinations, multiple choice and professional practice-based assessments would dominate assessment design in Accountancy (Neumann et al. 2002).

3.8.3 Accounting assessment aligned with knowledge reproduction

Accounting education has been tarnished with claims of ‘production line’ and ‘text book’ teaching practices (Armitage 2011), being focussed on the “transfer of a discrete body of procedural knowledge” (Pereira and Sithole 2020, p. 21) aligned with assessment considered as ‘knowledge reproduction’ as opposed to knowledge transformation (e.g. see studies of Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) and Postareff et al., (2012)). Thus, AoL would be suggestive of the dominant assessment paradigm in this discipline (Ali et al. 2022).

Accounting is also subject to accreditation. Paisey and Paisey (2007) recognise circa 80% of a three-year accounting degree programme is designed to meet accreditation requirements, leaving narrow scope for liberalised perspectives of assessment or allowances for academic freedom to foster liberal critical thought, or ‘deep’ conceptions of learning. Douglas and Gammie (2019), suggest accreditation results in technical content usurping the curriculum and alternative instructional teaching strategies become hindered via restrictions on assessment. This disciplinary environment seems at odds with AfL.

3.8.4 Russell Group University UK (RGUK)

Purposeful selection of participants or sites is fundamental in research design (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Given my personal positioning as a former Chartered Accountant and long history of teaching in two UK Business Schools, I approached the study with a sense of

familiarity, understanding myself to be conducting ‘insider’ research (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Mercer 2007; McKenzie and Bartunek 2023). My personal experiences afforded both motivation and concern, as my situatedness as an insider may threaten objectivity. Flick (1998, p. 60) highlights four roles of the researcher: as stranger; as visitor; as insider; and as initiate (Cohen et al. 2011). Whilst the concept of an ‘insider’ will not be extensively debated here⁶⁰ a researcher is considered an ‘insider’ when he or she shares particular attributes with the participants of the study (Clarke and Braun 2013); thus an insider is conceptualised in this thesis as associating with the role of an ‘Accounting Academic’. . I suspected there was potential for myopia or ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (Mercer 2007) yet simultaneously opportunities were offered with this insider positionality:

there is no pretence of dispassionate objectivity ... [the researcher’s] position affects the nature of the observations and the interpretations that they make.

(Bukamal 2022, p. 327)

In response, I embraced insider research as an active reflective agent, being attentive to cultural aspects (Bukamal 2022), being aware of my own input into the research process, being transparent in the coding process for research and being explicit regarding personal motivations (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The thesis evidences this throughout, e.g., discussing my status as an Accountant, Business School academic, and assessment practitioner with participants; collating personal reflective diary notes, creating interview overviews and handwritten accounts. The adoption of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019) was commensurate with such an active reflective insider approach.

For data collection, RGUK⁶¹ Business School was purposefully targeted. Access to the school was granted via official communications between myself and the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning and the School Manager, who acted as gatekeepers for access to participants. RGUK was ranked within the top 10 Research Excellence Framework 2021⁶² and a member of the Russell Group, i.e., a group representing 24 leading research-intensive, world-class

⁶⁰ See Mercer (2007) for a lengthy discussion regarding these conceptions

⁶¹ The institution name has been anonymised for confidentiality purposes (see confidentiality section for further details)

⁶² See <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>

universities in the UK.⁶³ The rationale for selection was on the basis of access and ‘fit’ to characteristics per the literature review, i.e., research-intensive (Wu and Jessop 2018) teaching ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ disciplines that purportedly lend themselves to differing disciplinary practices (Norton et al. 2013; Norton et al. 2019) and a ‘large’ school with high student numbers (Higgins et al. 2002).

3.8.5 Participant selection and sample size

Data on the target population for the study, i.e., names of all academics teaching on Undergraduate Accounting and Finance and Business Management programmes for the academic year 2019/20 (n=77) was procured.⁶⁴ This data included modular assessment types across the two disciplines evidenced in Chapter 4 to provide an overview of assessment practices at RGUK. Publicly available information on the RGUK website was also accessed to create demographic profiles for stratified sampling purposes (Robinson 2014). Demographic information collection was informed by the literature review, suggestive that academic gender⁶⁵ (Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel 2019), experience and research identity (Norton et al. 2013; Norton et al. 2019) as potential influencing factors assessment practice.⁶⁶ These are not individually the subject of investigation but were envisaged to provide a diverse respondent sample. Access to staff email addresses was publicly available via the RGUK website. Participants were recruited by email in 2021 and academics were invited to attend the interviews via Zoom due to Covid restrictions as per official research ethics guidance when researching in Covid periods.

Descriptive analysis of the population of all academics across both disciplines is provided in Table 3-5. In total 28 academics from this population were interviewed in August-September 2021 after two rounds of recruitment. Analysis at this granular level of cross section is not provided for the stratified sample (n=28) to preserve anonymity as cases in categories may be

⁶³ See <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/>

⁶⁴ A focus was made only on Undergraduate programmes as the majority of the literature base utilised undergraduate programmes due to the specialist nature of Postgraduate study. Preparation for data collection was undertaken in the academic year 2019/2020 however actual data collection was conducted in 2021 due to maternity leave.

⁶⁵ Perceived gender as interpreted via publicly available information is not the most accurate or inclusive/sensitive means of perceiving of gender hence this is used as a proxy measure here.

⁶⁶ These factors are to inform the stratified sampling strategy and are not included as independent variables for any positivistic suggestions of hypothesis testing as to their legitimacy of being influential or not. The research is exploratory in nature.

less than suggestive best practice for data reporting (n<5); however an overview is afforded in Table 3-6.

	Female	Male	Totals (n)	Total (%)
Accounting & Finance academics				
Senior ⁶⁷	4	5	9	33%
Non senior	8	10	18	67%
	12	15	27	
Business Management academics				
Senior	12	8	20	43%
Non senior	10	16	26	57%
	22	24	46	
Grand total	34	39	73	
Senior	16	13	29	40%
Non senior	18	26	44	60%
Total (n)	34	39	73	
Total (%)	47%	53%		

Table 3-5: Population demographics for sample consideration

3.8.6 Sample size

Choosing a suitable sample size in qualitative research is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty.

(Vasileiou et al. 2018, p. 1)

In qualitative research, ‘sample size insufficiency’ threatens validity and generalisability. Vasileiou et al. (2018) suggests that generalisability is “frequently conceived in nomothetic terms” (p.1) and Dworkin (2012) suggests mainstream social science research can cite 5 to 50 participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest sufficiency of 20-30 individuals⁶⁸ for grounded theory, and 20-30 interviewees for general qualitative studies (Warren, 2002). Sample size is however not prescriptive (Bryman 2016), but should consider:

⁶⁷ Seniority is determined by Senior Lecturer or above, Non-Senior represents lecturer positions at the time of data collection and subject to accuracy and timeliness of collated data available on the internet.

⁶⁸ Dworkin (2012) reports that a non-educational journal specialising in grounded theory mandated into policy a recommendation of 25-30 participants as the minimum sample size required to reach saturation for in-depth interview studies.

the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study designed used

(Dworkin 2012, p. 1320)

Enhanced transparency of sample size sufficiency evaluation, understanding saturation parameters, and sample size norms in a field of study can address sample size insufficiency (Vasileiou et al. 2018). Thus, comparative sample sizes for studies in this assessment practice research context include: n= 6 (Ylonen et al. 2018), n=18 (Charlton and Newsham-West 2022), n=17 (Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022), thus 28 participants is considered ample for this thesis, representing 36% of the population.

Demographic information pertaining the sample is shown below:

Discipline:	Accounting & Finance: n =	Business Management:	Total: n=28
Disciplines represented: Accounting, Finance, Statistics, Marketing, Logistics and Management			
Gender:	Male: n=15 (54%)	Female: n=13 (46%)	Total: n=28
Seniority:	Non-Senior (n=17, (61%))	Senior colleagues (n=11, (39%))	Total: n=28

Table 3-6: Table summarising demographics of sample (n=28)*

** this is not a cross tabulation and should be read from left to right*

The sample was deemed representative of the overall population shown in Table 3-5. To preserve anonymity interviewees were assigned, or self-selected, pseudonyms (Allen and Wiles 2016) a strategy implemented to invoke both gender and cultural ‘smoke screens’⁶⁹ (Saunders et al. 2015). To support anonymity participant-specific traits will not be reported beyond the minimal amounts required for attribution. Participants will be referred to by their pseudonym and their relevant discipline throughout the remainder of this thesis, where discipline is denoted by ‘AF’ for Accounting and Finance and ‘BM’ for Business Management.

An overview of the participants is shown below by discipline only:

⁶⁹ Gender and cultural heritage are protected characteristics so all participants were contacted to ensure they were satisfied with assigned pseudonyms where applicable.

Accounting & Finance (AF)		Business Management (BM)	
Angela	Leni	Dave	Owen
Angharad	Madeline	Eskiva-BM	Robert
Bob	Newton	Garfield	Tamara
Dorian	Oakley	Harry	Tao
Jing	Radyr	Jacob	Twentyfour
Joanne	Simon	Lisa	Xinyi
Karl	Twentyone	Mahir	
Will			

Table 3-7: Table of anonymised participants (n=28)

3.8.7 Ethics and confidentiality

Ethical approval was granted by Cardiff University School of Social Sciences (SOCSI) (see Appendix C – Ethical Approval). Ethics committees were informed of significant changes. Permission to conduct the research was also granted from the RGUK Business School Research Ethics department.⁷⁰ Interviews were originally agreed as face-to-face participation, however this was revised in light of the Covid-19 pandemic to Zoom meetings and recorded via Dictaphone as per University policy. Consent forms and Participant Information Sheets were issued to participants and are in

⁷⁰ This is not documented in the appendix to preserve anonymity of the site

Appendix D – Consent And Participation Information Sheets.

Ethically, the insider researcher is in an erroneous position of trust. I acknowledged a duty of care to not betray participant honesty (Cohen et al. 2011). Saunders et al. (2015) highlight both internal and external confidentiality risks. Stringent confidentiality and anonymity measures were employed including anonymisation of names and disciplinary specific and assessment specific details. Where necessary these were omitted to ensure individual participants were protected, and. Participants were advised transcripts were available on request and contracted prior to publishing the Forde-Leaves et al. (2023) paper to highlight contributions.

3.9 Interview questions

Interview questions were designed to engender rich thick descriptions, deep and honest narrative accounts of perceptions and influences on assessment. Interpretations of both reality as it *should* or *could* look like and interpretations of reality as *lived*, *perceived* or *experienced* were sought. These twofold accounts may establish ‘code clashes’ or ‘code matches’ (Howard and Maton 2011) between normative assessment thinking and actualised /realised assessment practice. Specifically from an LCT perspective ‘code clashes’ or ‘code matches’ refer to relations between modalities of a legitimation code (Maton 2016b). Here ‘code clashes’ form when normative accounts fail to resonate, or directly contradict, perceived or experienced accounts, thus normative perceptions of the organising principles of assessment practice clash with perceived or experienced perceptions of assessment practice. Conversely ‘code matches’ allude to when both normative and perceived/experienced accounts align. Both ‘normative’ and perceived or experienced perspectives were represented in the interview schedule as presented in Appendix F – Interview Schedule.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest 5-10 questions for semi structured interviews. The interview schedule contained 15 questions to allow for contextual questions on discipline and a short biographical narrative was used to establish rapport. Probes were also included (Creswell , 2016) as was a ‘clean up question’ (Clarke and Braun 2013) to allow elaboration without the constraints of scheduled questions (Prior et al. 2020), i.e. ‘is there anything else you would like to share?’.

3.9.1 *Piloting the interviews*

Like fishing, interviewing is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience, and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile catch. (Cohen,1976:82)

(Arksey and Knight 1999, p. 89)

Two pilot interviews were undertaken (Eskiva-BM and Angela-AF) and as result interview questions were rearranged to ensure logical and conversational flow. Piloting is warranted to enhance research quality (Malmqvist et al. 2019). As the interview content and responses were rich and meaningful they were retained in the study.

3.9.2 *Conducting the interviews*

Interviews lasted for circa 1 hour, with several extending beyond 1 hour and 15 minutes. Repeated calls for anonymity were requested with sensitive, highly emotive or ethical concerns raised. I reassured academics of the measures undertaken to protect their honest accounts. Disciplinary questions were asked for context, many respondents providing a detailed narrative of their module content. This was an example of ‘focus’ over ‘basis’ (Maton 2014c) whereby “*focus/basis* distinguishes between what practices concern (focus) and their underpinning of legitimacy (basis).” (ibid, p.239, emphasis in original). Disciplinary content was not immensely relevant for the interview. Several participants provided detail on postgraduate assessments as opposed to the undergraduate focus; these programmes represented different affordances and constraints, thus I was conscious to reaffirm and validate undergraduate assessment practices where necessary. The interviews were significantly dense despite piloting, yet the sociocultural perspective sought wide-ranging perspectives thus the scope of the interviews were broad. Regarding timing of data collection, interviews were undertaken relatively post pandemic so whilst Covid was not a focus for the study specifically it was reflected in several accounts. Specifically for Business Management, references were made to a recent ‘meeting, where marking practices were debated and consequentially were temporal and may have biased or dominated some interviews.

3.9.3 *Transcription process*

Transcription was undertaken using the auto-transcribe function in Panopto as per Cardiff university Official Research guidance. Audio recordings were uploaded to the secure personal

meetings folder of the Cardiff University Panopto account in line with Cardiff University protocol. The interviews (audio and transcript files) were then uploaded to NVivo to allow for editing, coding and further analysis. All files are saved on the secure Cardiff One Drive and only the researcher has access. The data transcription process utilised software tools including Panopto, Microsoft Word, Excel and NVivo. This is explained and represented visually below. The automated transcription required extensive editing of both format and text, circa 1 day per interview.

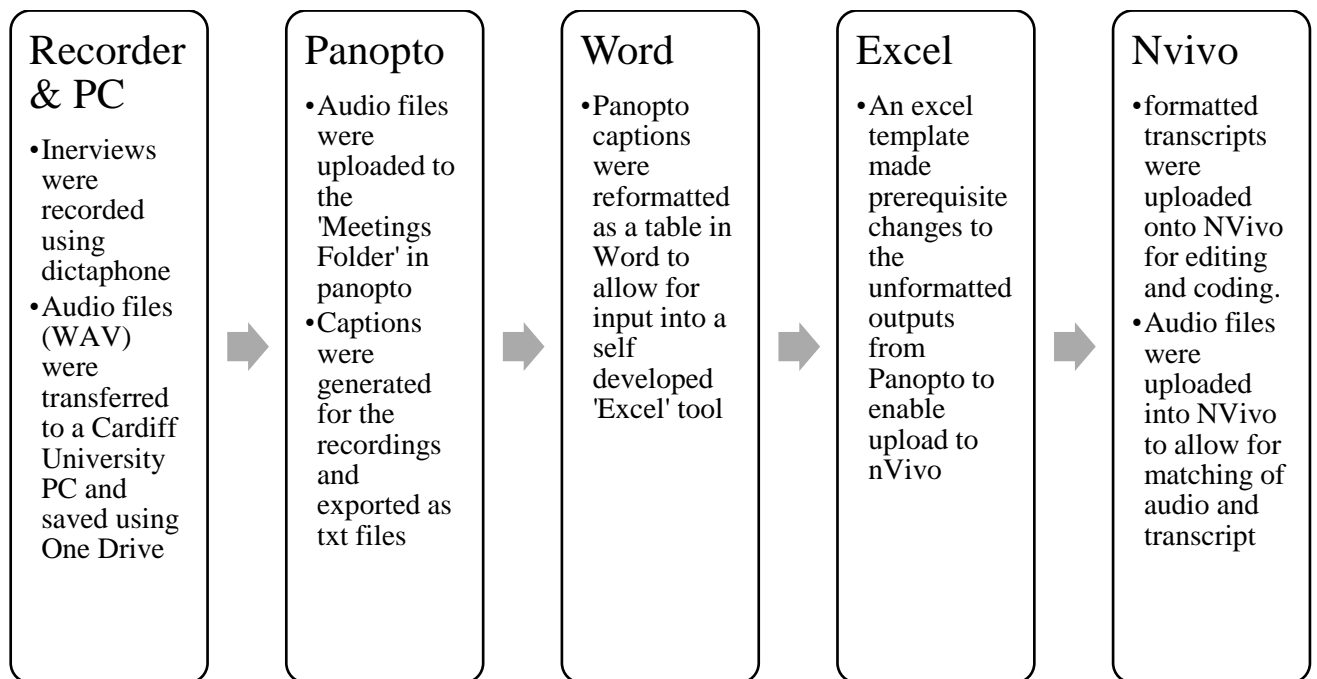


Figure 3.5: Transcription process

Atkinson (2015) critiques that transcription negates the social encounter and transcription is selective transformation (Cohen et al. 2011). Hence, preservation of interview tone was addressed through retention of handwritten notes and visual physicality or signs of emotions/stresses were noted. The audio recordings were available in NVivo so could be recalled to re-play samples of text line by line if necessary.

Outputs of the data collection process comprised 28 audio files totalling 1931 minutes or circa 32 hours in total. 28 transcripts were uploaded onto NVivo 12 and exported to Microsoft Word. In total these comprised 515 pages and 268,355 words, averaging circa 9500 words per

interview.⁷¹ Given data collection, the next logical stage was that of analysing the data. This was undertaken in two stages (Chen 2010), initially thematic analysis then a supplementary LCT coding exercise as a ‘second reading’.

3.10 Analysis stage 1: Thematic analysis

Whilst LCT is an analytical framework it is important not to ‘jump to codes’ too soon, as Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen (2016) explain:

The temptation to reach for theory too soon is perhaps strongest when moving from data collection to analysis. ... novice researchers may thus begin imposing concepts on data before it has a chance to speak.

(Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen 2016, p. 39)

The authors propose thematic analysis prior to LCT, but acknowledge how analysis may be theory-laden owing to the ‘researchers gaze’, thus entailing reflectivity. This validated my ‘insider’ concerns regarding researcher reflexivity in the traditional understanding of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006); however, reflectivity is more firmly emphasised in recent publications (Braun and Clarke 2019,2021,2022), reaffirming the enhanced Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach.

3.10.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

Reflexive Thematic Analysis offered “an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes in a given data set” (Byrne 2022, p. 1392) to foster a reflective active engagement and interpretation of the data (Clarke and Braun 2021).

RTA enabled formulation of the translation device to uncover organising principles underlying assessment practices. It was well suited to my research design as it could be used with a range of “philosophical meta-theoretical, methodological, explanatory and political/ideological frameworks” (Braun and Clarke 2022), mine being critical realism.

In RTA, Braun and Clarke (2019) encourage the researcher to embrace “reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity as assets in knowledge production” (Byrne 2022, p. 1393). I

⁷¹ These included both interview responses and interviewer questions

demonstrate how RTA was applied to the data via the table below,⁷² outlining the six stages, as per Byrne (2022).

⁷² This is presented as a table as space precludes extension discussion, supplementary evidence and narrative of the enactment of RTA – however Appendix G – RTA Stages provides more detail.

RTA Stage	Summarised strategies adopted in this study
<p><i>Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data.</i> Familiarisation entails the reading and re-reading of the entire dataset in order to become intimately familiar with the data. (Byrne 2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking audio files and written transcripts in Nvivo enabled a close proximity to the data as opposed to a socio-material segregation between written transcript and original audio files • summarise responses, whilst listening and editing each interview and constructing an ‘overall summary of interview responses’ in excel • re-reading the initial handwritten notes made at interview and documenting an overall vignette of the interview in a Word file (see Figure 3.6)
<p><i>Phase two: generating initial codes</i> A process of inductive open-coding was used to code the interviews (Byrne 2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • codes were used as superficial segregations to essentially identify ‘topics’ as opposed to deep latent themes conducted from a ‘codebook’ perspective (Braun and Clarke 2021); If discussing purpose of assessment a selection of nodes were used to distinguish between purposes of certification, differentiation, learning entailed little reflexivity and undertook some ‘structural coding’ (Saldaña 2021)
<p><i>Phase 3; Generating initial themes.</i> The focus shifts from the interpretation of individual data items within the dataset, to the interpretation of aggregated meaning and meaningfulness across the dataset. (Byrne 2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the process of deducing aggregated meanings ensued. • Initial themes were generated via amalgamating concepts and meanings in relation to the research questions. • Due to the inter-relation of the research questions the ability to act reflectively and take an active role in interpreting themes was crucial, understanding linkages between perceptions and influences was difficult, needed to tease out causality. • 96 sub themes were established and were grouped under 12 main themes (see Figure 3.7)
<p><i>Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes.</i> Reviewing for internal homogeneity within themes and external heterogeneity among themes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant conflation between themes of employability, consumerism and managerialism; all potentially could be construed as neoliberalism, yet neoliberalism too abstract a theme
<p><i>Phase 5; Refining, defining and naming themes.</i> Defining themes requires a deep analysis of the underlying data items (Byrne 2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via extensive consideration and manipulation, a final 6 themes were defined (see Figure 3.8) • Definitions, boundaries and unique features of the themes were conceptualised • Maintained a separate summary of assessment landscape
<p><i>Producing the report.</i> The final stage of RTA entails producing the report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings are presented in Chapter 4; • Example quotes are provided as representations of such themes

Table 3-8: Reflexive Thematic Analysis application to this thesis

Angela – overview

Assessment practices engaged in at RGUK Uni: exams, formative exams

Angela discussed an inner drive associated to her culture where teaching was highly valued and placed emphasis on learning to learn. She felt thwarted by management whom essentially outsources tutorial teaching away from her that disabled much of her ability to enact formative assessment and build dialogic formative assessment relationships with students. A past history of attempts to innovate had led to disappointment and disillusionment. Workload concerns also dominated the conversations with the ultimate consequence of engagement with traditional assessment types for efficiency purposes in dealing with large student numbers.

Figure 3.6: Example of interview overview notes taken during phase one

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement/categorisation/distinguishing function • Summative 	Romanticism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative perspectives of criticality/autonomous learners – yet fail to engage 	Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own experiences/influence of colleagues shaped assessment practice 	Good practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of AfL
Institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research focus/workload allocation models dominate • POA/Sharing best practice 	Oppression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk/singled out / dumbing down 	POA/Sharing best practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silo mentality where assessment is not <u>discussed</u> and pedagogy not embraced generally 	Pragmatism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just go with tradition • ‘what works’ • Implicit notions of ‘best’ methods
Innovative Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIMBY – good but not for me/maybe I could if I had time 	Managerialism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want full control... but...‘we need to be told • A need for oversight control/QA at programme level 	Consumerism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority evidenced student as consumer views – tactical/ instrumental / lacking engagement 	Accreditation/Employability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting – accreditation constraint • Employability contested

Figure 3.7: Stage 3 of RTA – 12 initial themes



Figure 3.8: Stage 5 of RTA – 6 initial themes

The walkthrough and accompanying figures demonstrate how the researcher undertook a reflective sociocultural approach to interpretation and acts to enhance the study quality through explicit recognition and audit trail of the RTA. It recognises:

[t]hemes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they are not ‘in’ the data waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher (like diamonds scattered in the sand, waiting to plucked-up by a lucky passer-by [9,10]). Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves [2].

(Sud 2020 para 7)⁷³

The empirical data informing this research was thus a result of my personal active engagement with data, informed by my own personal position as an insider not despite it. This transcends insider research from a deficit model (potentially where efforts are made to “make the familiar strange” (Delamont et al. 2010) to a celebration of interpretivity and reflectivity.

⁷³ In this quote the author refers to works of: 2. Braun V, Clarke V. Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 2019; 11(4):589-597. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2019.16288068; 9. Boyatzis RE. *Transforming qualitative information: thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage; 1998. 10. Braun V, Clarke V. (Mis)conceptualising themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts’ (2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 2016; 19(6): 739-743. Doi: 10.1080/13645579.2016.1195588.

3.11 Analysis stage 2: LCT analysis

This section details the subsequent strategy of the LCT analysis to determine languages of legitimation at play in the field. LCT analysis is enabled firstly by development of the translation device from the empirical data derived from the RTA. Secondly, original data are analysed and coded using the translation device to interpret languages of legitimation. Thirdly, and the novel contribution of this paper, the translation device is enacted using Microsoft Excel at differing levels – being an individualised detailed level where the unit of analysis comprises the sentence of each interview, and then at the individual summarised level of paragraph analysis. The use of the translation device and the corresponding excel tool are cumulatively referred as the ‘LCT Assessment Tool’. Results are then presented visually engendering both LCT informed person-centred accounts and extrapolations of more cultural accounts of practice.

The use of both RTA and LCT allows for all research questions to be addressed, yet the LCT Assessment Tool specifically targets RQ3, emphasising the interactions between *perceptions* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2). The tool is offered to provide a means of conceptually ‘seeing’ complex practices by uncovering the underlying structuring principles (structures, mechanisms and events) and methodologically applying a sense of ‘structure’ to data analysis, coding and representation. This process I label as the ‘second reading’ of the data. A second coding activity using the translation device contributed to enhancement of research quality through a second deep immersion in the data and enabled a re-consideration of the interview texts to establish which of the spatial possibilities, i.e., the various points on each of axes of the Cartesian plane, the data would occupy. The mapping of the data onto this plane is made possible by applying the translation device to the data to determine the strength of both positional autonomy (PA+/-) and relational autonomy (RA+/-); the former being with reference to *influences* on assessment practice, the latter referring to the *perceptions* of practice.

3.12 Development of the translation device using the collected data

This section draws on the thesis data to evidence the ‘second reading’ and development of the translation device.

To establish the spatial possibilities of both positional and relational autonomy one asks ‘what is being insulated?’, i.e., a understanding a ‘target’ (Maton and Howard 2018). A target represents constituents and principles of relation (e.g., purposes, aims, ways of working)

considered constitutive of a given research problem and context. Informed by both the normative responses in the data and by work of Maton (2005) and Shay (2016), the normative data emphasised how assessment ‘should’ be in this context in this space and time.

In conceptualising Research Question 1, that is the *perceptions* of assessment and thus relational autonomy (RA), overwhelmingly there were idealised *position takings* that the principles of relation, i.e., the purposes and ways of working regarding assessment ‘should’ be being aligned to the pursuit of learning and education, with highly liberal ideals of learning cited.

In conceptualising Research Question 2, that is the *influences* on assessment, thus positional autonomy (PA), constituents in the field included the academics under study, and their relative *positions*, in terms of their autonomy. Normatively, it was widely recognised that academics as individual module leaders ‘should’ have agency and autonomy in assessment.

Thus, the target was heavily informed by normative perceptions and is recognised as:

Assessment practice is influenced or controlled primarily by academics (PA+) in the field of assessment, and assessment is enacted for autonomous educational purposes orientated to learning (RA+).

The target signifies assessment orientated to education and learning, being autonomous to academia and HE. It therefore encompasses all assessment practice concerned with educational activities. Importantly, a target does not valorise one position taking over another and given the complexities of assessment as social practice, the target is inevitably contested. It is not set to recognise AfL as espoused best practice or orthodoxy (Taras 2005). Target is a reference point from which relative strengths can be deduced. Hence target in this thesis would include all paradigms of assessment if these were legitimised as being aligned to ‘learning’ and ‘education’; thus including assessment *of, for, or as* ‘learning’. The strengths between such paradigms can be recognised but the target encompasses assessment for ‘educational purposes’ above all.

Importantly focus and basis require attention. Maton (2014c) suggests the ‘focus’ of knowledge claims describes the ‘content’ of languages of legitimation, essentially ‘what’ is being discussed, e.g., for the three paradigms this may represent summative, formative, or performative assessment. In contrast, to conceptualise ‘basis’ would be to describe the ‘form’

of the language of legitimation (e.g., for Autonomy this would be the autonomy codes, the extent to which summative or formative are conceived as orientated to ‘learning’ or not). The extent to which one perceives the ‘focus’ of the knowledge practice (e.g., formative assessment, authentic assessment etc.) as being ‘internal to academia’ or ‘educational’ thus determines the ‘basis’ of legitimation. PA and RA are concerned with basis.

3.12.1 Positional autonomy (PA) and a translation device

Iterative engagements with the conceptualisation of positional autonomy and with the data itself led to development of a translation device for positional autonomy. An abbreviated version of this translation device is shown below in

Table 3-9 (for illustrative purposes) and the full extended version presented in Appendix F – Interview Schedule.

In building the translation device, target *constituents* represent strong positional autonomy. In this study, academics comprise target (core) ‘constituents’ within the field of assessment practice in HE, normatively demanding most influence and occupying ‘autonomous positions’. Other academic colleagues were also significant influences (ancillary), irrespective of being internal or external to the institution; there was a cross-institution, cross-boundary sense of ‘academic identity’ or ‘collegiality’ that satisfies this ‘autonomous’ positioning. Likewise academic tribes and disciplinary influences sat within ‘target’.

Other (associated) constituents feature within the field of assessment practice in HE but were not considered a target, e.g., actors such as management (who were essentially ‘othered’ despite being ‘*academics with managerial hats on*’⁷⁴ (Angela-AF)) and students or internal structures, artefacts (e.g. regulations). Non-target constituents boast weaker positional autonomy. Likewise, actors outside of the field of assessment practice (non-associated) represent ‘heteronomous positions’. Non-target constituents include accreditation bodies, governmental regulations, employers, or market-led league tables.

Regarding the proximity or strength of constituents to target, the translation device takes a micro/meso/macro perspective whereby the micro level of the individual academic boasts strongest positional autonomy (PA++), extending to meso level corresponding with

⁷⁴ Quotes from interview participants are provided in italics and single quotation marks throughout.

disciplinary influence from a professional practice perspective⁷⁵ (PA+) or institutional (PA-) and macro level comprising macro sociocultural forces (PA--).

In applying strengths to PA this does not absolve recognition of complex interplays between individuals' internalised concept of identity, and externalised concepts of influences, i.e., agency and structure.⁷⁶ PA encapsulates both agency and structure. For individual agency and conceptions of individual dispositions and habitus (Bourdieu 1993) it is acknowledged that habitus is both structured and structuring, thus not considered in isolation from other factors. Likewise the field both shapes, and is shaped by, actors within it. However, this study takes a realist stance and attempts to demarcate or interpret generative mechanisms or events that may serve to influence assessment practice whilst acknowledging the “complex social nature of interwoven personal and environmental influences on assessment design” (Bearman et al. 2017, p. 2); thus individual agency and cited dispositions or habitus are recognised as strong PA.

⁷⁵ Here I refer to ‘practice’ as the field of professional practice e.g. law, accounting, nursing, social work etc. This field may exert more influence on what may be considered as ‘applied’ disciplines using a Biglan Becher typology.

⁷⁶ A full debate of this is beyond the scope of this thesis but see calls from Ashwin (2008)

PA	1 st level	This study	2 nd level	This study	Example:
++	target	Assessment decisions are influenced by the academic /inside field of academia	core	Academic: Assessment design influenced from academic self/experience	Madeline-AF: <i>I think of assessment how I would like my children to be assessed– it comes from inside me like ‘hope’</i> Eskiva-BM: <i>I just tried to emulate the lecturers I liked..</i> Angela-AF: <i>we all just tend to do our own little things</i>
			ancillary	Disciplinary/ collegiate/ pedagogic norms: Assessment design resultant of academic community of practice	Mahir-BM: <i>one of the things that influences me is other colleagues that use different types of assessment practises</i>
-	Non-target	Structural influence dominates assessment decisions. Significant influence outside field of academia	associated	Institution related: Assessment design influenced by internal 'structural' issues (management) or external accreditation/professional body requirements	Angela-AF: <i>So the really big one is student numbers that really determines what we do certainly at the business school ... and accreditations,</i> Oakley-AF: <i>But I guess the responsibility lies with the more up in the hierarchy</i>
			unassociated	External: Assessment influenced by economy/state or market controls (credentialism/ consumerism)	Madeline-AF: <i>I have concerns about for whom are we categorising? At moment driven by getting a job</i> Leni-AF: <i>borderline customer relationship where students are focussed on the end game</i>
--					

Table 3-9: Positional autonomy (PA) external language of description (Maton and Howard 2018) for this study.

3.12.2 Relational autonomy (RA) and a translation device

The abbreviated translation device for relational autonomy is shown in Table 3-10 (for illustrative purposes) and the full extended version presented in Appendix F – Interview Schedule.

. Relational autonomy (RA) refers to the strength or distinctiveness of relations between these actors, which include the ways of working (assessment methods or strategies) and underlying principles or beliefs (purposes of assessment). Relations are either educational, i.e. orientated to learning (autonomous) or for other purposes (heteronomous).

This RA conception aligns with Locke (2019)⁷⁷ and Locke and Maton (2019) being either ‘educational’ (RA+) or for ‘other pragmatic purposes’ (RA-); the former aligning with ‘autonomous principles of hierarchisation’,⁷⁸ the latter with ‘heteronomous principles of hierarchisation’ (Bourdieu 1993). For this study, educational assessment purposes and ways of working accentuate the role of the student and student learning. For other/pragmatic purposes the RA includes ways of working that emphasise pragmatic, practical, operational rationales that divert from the student or purposes that are not orientated to student learning, e.g. designing assessment for cheating.

A significant number of academics voiced the purpose of assessment as a measurement of learning (AoL), yet many held idealised perspectives of formative assessment (AfL) and liberal conceptions of assessment associated with the love of learning, hence representing the strongest form of relational autonomy (RA+). For some, assessment in itself was seen as detrimental to learning; often a mere credential with little learning benefit, resultant of externalised principles of credentialism and certification with no educational orientation. Assessment choices here were governed by efficiency concerns, e.g., managing workload as opposed to concerns for learning. These were thus framed as heteronomous principles (RA-).

⁷⁷ Locke (2019) was investigating VET in the field of HE rather than assessment, the theoretical rationale is still valid.

⁷⁸ There is inherent contestation here regarding which principles are deemed as ‘autonomous’ in the field, for example contestations about assessment for liberal pursuit or assessment employed for employability purposes.

RA	1 st level	This study	2 nd level	This study	Example:
++	target	Purpose and practices of assessment are perceived to be pedagogic/ educational	core	Liberal Future learning & assessment for learning sake or future prospects	Oakley-AF: <i>students should be let free in terms of to expand their knowledge base</i> Radyr-AF: <i>should.. prepare students for their future, their future life,</i>
			ancillary	Measurement Current/past measurement of 'learning' as valid rationale	Oakley-AF: <i>assessment should assess whether those skills have been learnt by the students</i> Dorian-AF: <i>how do you measure that then say break it down to knowledge and skills and so on at a module level. So that's ideally, what assessment should do</i>
+	Non-target	Purpose and practices of assessment are perceived to be pragmatic/ utilitarian	associated	Internal pragmatic Purpose and practices stem from internal/ wider HE environment, institutional purposes/ practices - workload pressures	Mahir-BM: <i>Teaching has become a business in the UK so that we want to process as many students through the system</i> Angela-AF: <i>students have become much more tactical I think in terms of passing exams or assessments and that sort of thing, rather than wanting to be engaged in learning</i>
			unassociated	External pragmatic Practices that stem from external requirements, functional role or categorisation	Madeline-AF; <i>Assessment part of the categorisation mechanism</i> Tao-BM: <i>we are flogging qualifications</i> Mahir-BM: <i>You know, we're a certification institution, like the DVLA. You take your theory, test your practical tests and then you're assessed ... so much of our institution is geared towards certification rather than learning.</i>
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Table 3-10: Relational autonomy (RA) external language of description (Maton and Howard 2018) for this study

3.12.3 *The need for a granular level translation device*

The generic translation device structure as previously shown in Figure 3.4 sets out a “principled means of dividing up continua of strengths of positional autonomy and relational autonomy, with progressively finer-grained levels of delicacy, from simply stronger/weaker (‘target’/‘non-target’) through subdivisions, use of which depends on the needs of the researcher” (Maton and Howard 2018, p. 10).

Thus granularity of detail is both researcher and research-problem specific. Two layers of granularity were presented in the previous sections for explanatory purposes however, for this study a purposeful extended four-layer granularity approach was eventually utilised to enable more sophisticated data analytics and visualisation. The final translation device is shown in Appendix H –Translation Device. A more granular approach enabled ‘mapping’ of perspectives across a sixteen-point continuum, eight points to differentiate stronger PA or stronger RA and a further eight points to differentiate weaker PA or weaker RA. This finely grained approach to mapping enables ‘dispersal patterns’ or plotting of multiple positions akin to a scatter plot, to be visualised on LCT cartesian planes. This analytical approach is a move towards Maton (2024 forthcoming) calls for recognition of an infinite number of possible positions on the plane, thus each axis needing to be seen as an infinite continuum. The full granular level device represents the ‘background’ workings of the LCT Assessment Tool, an output in response to RQ3 of this study, that is, a means of understanding both *perceptions* and *influences* on assessment practice.

Translation devices unambiguously translate between concepts and data. When read from left to right, the device translates theory into data, and when read from right to left, translates data into theory (Maton and Chen, 2016). Via reading from the left, the theoretical concepts i.e. the underlying organising principles of practice in terms of insulation and autonomy are conceptualised and interpreted for this study, , enabling both RQ2 (*influences*) and RQ1 (*perspectives*) to be answered respectively and directly using empirical evidence. When reading from the right this tool enables others to read the analysis, thus the translation device makes analysis convincing and persuasive, enabling the researcher or the reader to see what the author has done. This transparency also enables other researchers to use or adapt the device. The translation device is thus then both a tool for analysing the data and conducting the research in as much as it in itself an outcome of the research.

Regarding validity or credibility of the translation device, significant research was undertaken to both inform development and evaluation and comparisons of this TD with TDs from other studies. Direct comparisons cannot be made because each interpretation of PA and RA is unique, the TDs are empirical manifestations of specific sociocultural contexts, and each based on distinct objects/fields of study however influence for TD developments was drawn from Maton (2005), Shay (2016) and Locke and Maton (2019).

3.12.4 *A novel adjustment to the translation device:*

The translation device as developed in

Table 3-9 and Table 3-10 accommodated interpretations of both normative and actual⁷⁹ statements. These have been simplified for illustration purposes below:

Illustrative example of normative statements:	Illustrative example of actual statements:	Original legitimization codes
assessment should be influenced by academics	assessment does get influenced by academics	(PA+)
assessment should be influenced by industry	assessment does get influenced by industry	(PA-)
assessment should fulfil educational purposes	assessment does fulfil educational purposes	(RA+)
assessment should fulfil 'other' purposes	assessment does fulfil 'other' purposes	(RA-)

Table 3-11: Normative and actual interpretations for this study

However, the TD failed to account for the counterfactual, i.e., statements of 'should not' and statements of 'does not'. For example, if influence is deemed as 'should not' come from inside there is an inference that such influence 'should' come from outside. This requires recognition in the TD to ensure that perspectives are not ignored and are accommodated despite a knowledge practice 'not' being enacted or intended.⁸⁰ In a personal communication with Karl Maton this was emphasised in terms of ensuring anything that was non-target was recognised

⁷⁹ Actual practices or actual perceptions are participant statements of the way they believe things to be, how academics currently think, as opposed to normative statements that represent how academics believe things 'should be'.

⁸⁰ This is fundamental to the thesis in that I am mapping 'perceptions' of assessment and not the actual knowledge practice undertaken itself. A perspective on an absence of assessment practice is just as legitimate as a perspective on assessment that is physically/practically undertaken.

as non-target through the revision of PA and RA strengths. Essentially, non-target is anything but target, thus a minus. There is the ability to distinguish between ‘should not come from inside’ and ‘should come from outside’, for example a minus could be used for ‘should not come from inside’ and double minus for ‘should come from outside’, for both PA and RA (Maton, personal communication, 2024).

In adopting this approach set out non-target statements can be approached through sophisticated mechanisms of understanding whether they arise due to either an absence or disagreement/opposition of a target theme. This was not, to the researcher’s knowledge, an approach clearly evidenced elsewhere in the LCT literature, thus this is novel in its application. In essence it ‘provides the finer grained delicacy required for the translation device to accommodate for any cases whereby a counterfactual opposes a recognised category, this is achieved by recognising the difference between, for example, ‘should not come from inside’ and ‘should come from outside’ is that while both are non-target, the former is more ‘associated’ with the target, because it’s explicitly mentioning inside

3.12.5 Mapping the counterfactuals

The adjusted table and associated Autonomy planes demonstrate how counterfactuals were accommodated through an amendment of strengths or inverting the factual. The translation device does not need to be replicated here as mapping of counterfactuals represent an absence/disagreement or opposition to the pre-existing criteria recorded in the translation device.⁸¹ However Table 3-11 is extended to accommodate for the inversion (as referenced as ‘counterfactuals’):

⁸¹ Empirical examples of disagreements or absences are demonstrated throughout Chapter 4 by RTA theme and presented in Chapter 5.

	Example normative statements of:	Example actual statements of:	Basis of legitimation
	assessment should be influenced by academics	assessment does get influenced by academics	(PA++)
Counterfactuals	assessment should NOT be influenced by industry	assessment does NOT get influenced by industry	(PA+)
Counterfactuals	assessment should NOT be influenced by academics	assessment does NOT get influenced by academics	(PA-)
	assessment should be influenced by industry	assessment does get influenced by industry	(PA--)
	assessment should fulfil educational purposes	assessment does fulfil educational purposes	(RA++)
Counterfactuals	assessment should NOT fulfil 'other' purposes	assessment does NOT fulfil 'other' purposes	(RA+)
Counterfactuals	assessment should NOT fulfil educational purposes	assessment does NOT fulfil educational purposes	(RA-)
	assessment should fulfil 'other' purposes	assessment does fulfil 'other' purposes	(RA--)

Table 3-12: Revision of strengths for PA and RA to accommodate for the counterfactuals

Visually this can be represented on the plane as follows (NB the term 'Disagreements' in the visual also include absences – together they represent counterfactuals):

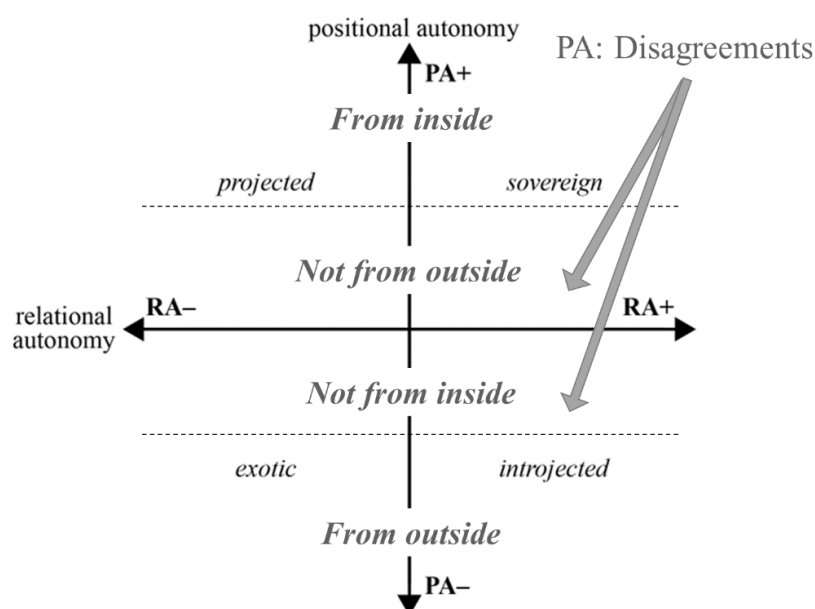


Figure 3.9: PA representations for the counterfactuals

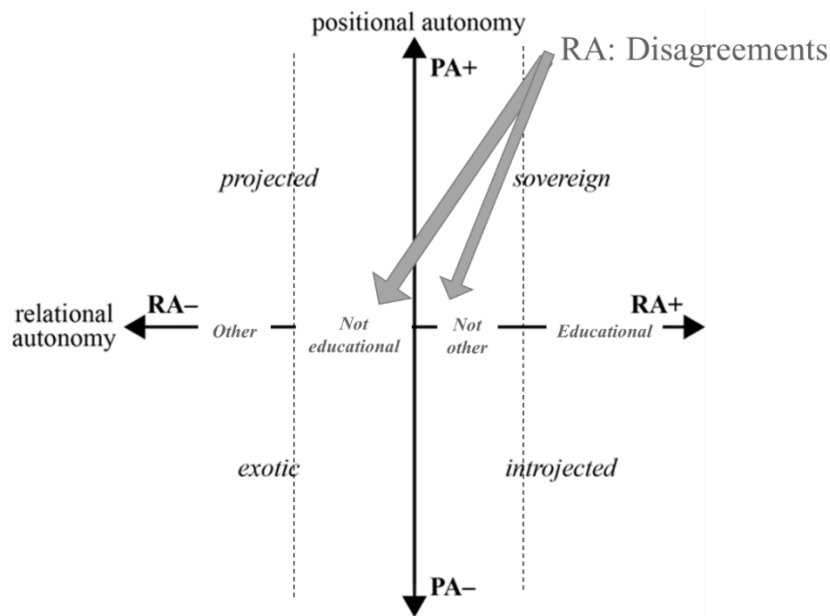


Figure 3.10: RA representations for the counterfactuals

A further amendment to more traditional LCT use was in mapping positions on the plane a visual adjustment was made to accommodate for sentiment. For example, the focus, e.g., formative assessment, may be categorised as RA++ when orientated to educational purposes (the basis). An absence of formative assessment (e.g., this practice does not happen) is categorised as non-target in accordance with the counterfactual (RA-). However, the counterfactual absence of a practice does not recognise sentiment. In this example the basis of legitimation is non-target (RA-) as an absence of educational practice, however, this does not shed light on whether the absence of formative assessment is a ‘positive’ sentiment or ‘negative’ sentiment. Whether an absence is valorised or demonised is important given the pre-occupation of the thesis with dichotomic valorisation issues associated with AfL and canons of assessment theory. One cannot assume that all perceptions of formative assessment for example would be positive ones.

3.13 The LCT Assessment Tool

Given the amendments and adjustments discussed, the all-encompassing Autonomy plane as interpreted for this object of study is shown below.

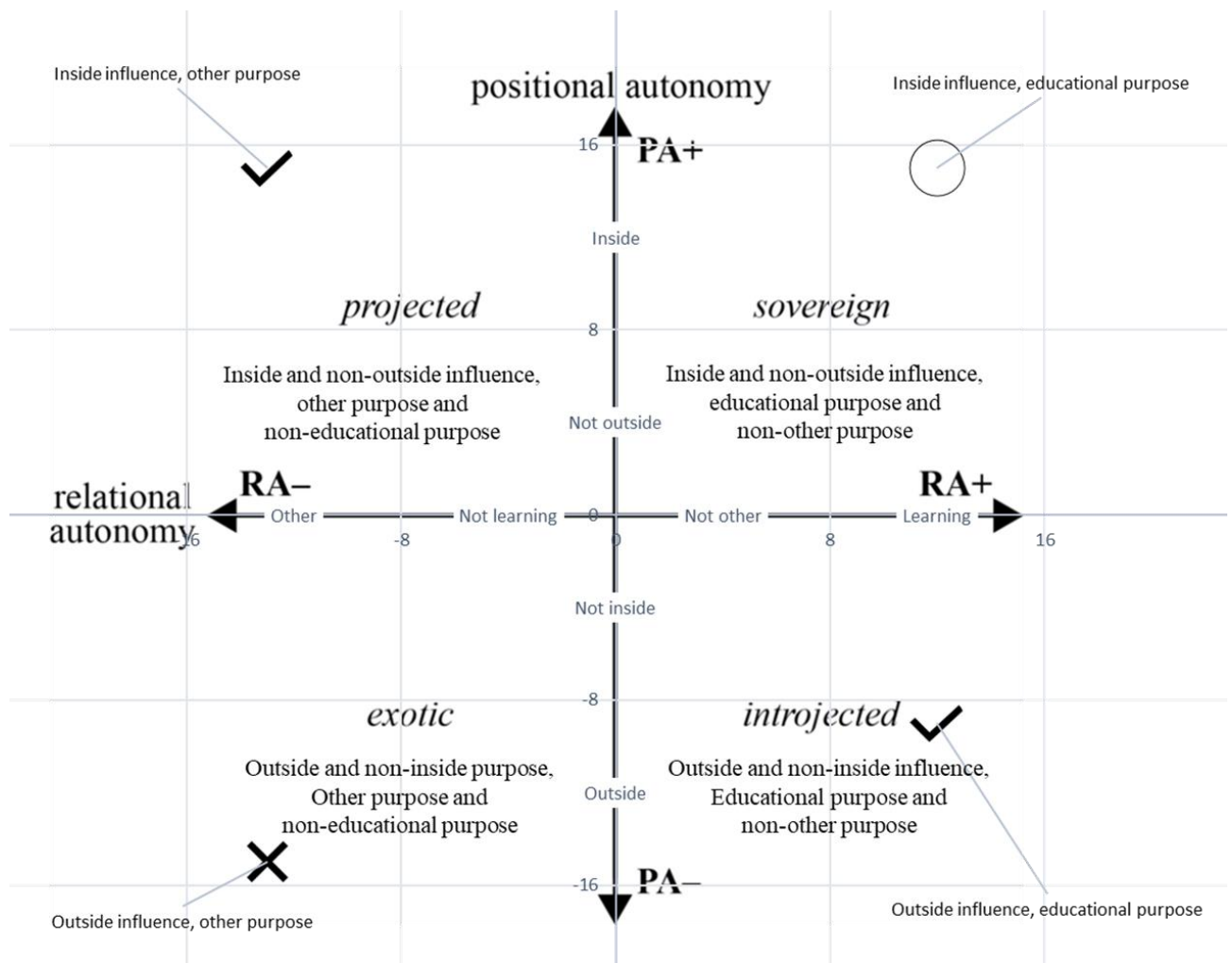


Figure 3.11: Final Autonomy plane with interpretations for this object of study

Key for symbols used in the LCT Assessment Tool plane:



Normative statements of *should* or *should not* be. Sentiment does not need separate markers as positioning on the plane will represent sentiment for normative statements (sentiment is implied from *should* (positive) or *should not* (negative), i.e.: Positive sentiment when basis of legitimation is inside or outside, and purpose is educational or other. Negative sentiment when basis of legitimation is non-inside or non-outside, and non-educational purpose or non-other purpose.



Statements of actual practices, what *does* and *does not* happen, where interview participants are unsupportive of comments, or express negative sentiment.



Statements of actual practices, what *does* and *does not* happen, where interview participants are supportive of comments, or express positive sentiment.

Table 3-13: Key for symbols used in LCT Analysis

Whilst this may seem overly onerous and complex in comparison to pre-existing Autonomy studies, it does represent a cohesive, coherent logical approach to coding for research projects

that suffer from multitudes of possibilities (normative/actual/counterfactuals and sentiment). Projects that feature varying stakeholders, fields, and perspectives may thus benefit from such a logical means of dealing with a myriad of possibilities in the data.⁸²

Taken together the translation device and the visual autonomy plane as represented in Figure 3.11 collectively represent the LCT Assessment Tool. This demonstrates that assessments for educational and other purposes need not be binary segregated dichotomous ends of one pole but can be located relative to one another within a space of possibilities in degrees of emphasis, to comprise at least four distinct quadrants. Ultimately assessment practice can be seen through spaces occupied in four legitimation codes:

*Sovereign codes (PA+,RA+)*⁸³:

In the sovereign code legitimacy is derived from internal control or influence and educational practices/principles. Academics from within and beyond the institution, communities of practice and disciplinary norms exert influence (PA++/+). The purposes of assessment are educational, be it academic education, e.g., academic excellence, assessment that valorises liberal humanist ideas, or education for purposes of enhancing employability skills (RA++/+). At its strongest point the code aligns with liberal notions of learning for ‘interest’ as derived from an inner academic habitus:

Madeline-AF: I think of assessment how I would like my children to be assessed (PA++), to remember the bits they found interesting (RA++), not just get into ‘gaming’ to get results (RA+)⁸⁴ but to actually enjoy it. It comes from inside me like ‘hope’ for the future for my children (PA++).

Exotic codes (PA-,RA-)

Here legitimacy emanates from external control or influence and other practices /principles. Assessment may be subject to external governance, e.g., by professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies, government, industry, or the market (PA--). Principles may be derived from

⁸² This is noted as a methodological contribution to the LCT discourse in the conclusion.

⁸³For simplicity and in-keeping with tradition when discussing ‘legitimation codes’ strengths are shown here coded as only +/- . On the planes ++/- are utilised also once data has been interrogated.

⁸⁴ This is an example of a counterfactual, ‘not to’ be for gaming would be coded as a counterfactual to ‘for gaming’ (RA--); thus inverted to an inferred RA+.

the economy or the marketplace where assessment is construed as a credential or return on investment for paying customers (RA--):

Angharad-AF: I think we've lost somewhere that idea of the love of learning and the curiosity of learning (RA-), I think that gets lost. It all becomes terribly financialised and strategic (RA--) ... students as consumers (PA--) want things packaged up and neat and easy to digest ... they just want to be spoon fed (RA--) ... They just want predictability because they view it as currency (RA--).

Introjected codes (PA-,RA+)

These refer to situations where influence emanates from outside, e.g., industry (PA--) but for intrinsic educational purposes, e.g., transferable skills development (RA++). Actors within the field may work with external influences due to their co-alignment of goals and purposes. For example, authentic assessment as influenced by 'real-life' industry to facilitate learning:

Eskiva-BM: So, what we did was to get the [company] who were initiating this (PA--) into the lecture theatre, told all the students what they'd like to do. We set students off for the task of researching schemes, ... that would suit this particular [company] (RA++). And then the best 10 projects I then sent off to the [company] and they implemented some of the student's ideas.

Projected codes (PA+,RA-)

These represent internal academic influences (PA++) orientated to other/outside purposes (RA-), e.g., for economic gain or instrumental in orientation, more pragmatic, e.g., designed to mediate cheating (RA--). Legitimacy here can stem from the need for self-preservation. Assessment practices construed as non-educational, such as grade-inflation (RA--) or those premised on efficiency purposes, e.g., workload concerns, may be internalised, ultimately to survive.

Tao-BM: if you're the only person in the exam board, who is in the 50s and everyone else (PA++) is in the 60s and 70s, you can't carry on doing that for long it's just too uncomfortable and you don't. Why? Why? Why would you persistently mark another 50 or 60 essays during the summer when

everyone else just goes off and has their holidays, just because you failed them, why would you do that? I'm resolving to soften up (RA-)

In summary, the value of this Autonomy interpretation rests with its ability to inquire into, and consequently map out, both influences on assessment and perspectives on purposes underpinning assessment in a logical consistent means based on the established translation device.

3.14 Visual representations

The visual representation of data through Cartesian mapping as per Figure 3.11 acts as a means of 'systematic comparison' by making the organising principles underlying contexts and practices explicit (Maton 2016a). Visual representations can enrich qualitative data and may allow for enhanced communication, representations, enhanced data quality and validity, facilitate researcher-participant relationships and effect change (Glegg 2019), however few LCT researchers directly discuss data visualisations as a research method and their immense benefit for representing qualitative research. Kinchin (2019), highlights the value of visualising knowledge structures in professional education through cartesian LCT planes (Semantics), citing a "desire to see what was going on" (ibid, p71) and claiming how instruments to visualise learning in the field of education were not well established. Second to the 'powerful tool' of concept mapping he draws on the Cartesian plane trademark of LCT as 'a teaching tool', emphasising their utility as one can "visualise the structural arrangements of knowledge that are likely to be found populating the quadrants" (ibid, p.77) a similar argument would stand for utilising the plane to understand the structuring mechanisms of assessment perceptions and practice.

Glegg (2019, p. 301) also explains how visualisation is particularly used within anthropology and ethnography where images are used "to represent culture visually, as an adjunct to traditional written observations or field notes (Mason, 2005)". Thus, the plane enables visual represent clusters of interactions between both PA and RA. Amalgamation of perceptions, practices and influence can then be considered as cultural clusters of beliefs, as further discussed in Chapter 5.

3.15 Application of the translation device

The visual component of the LCT Assessment tool was not applied to the entire 28 interviews, rather as a proof of concept it was utilised to develop visual maps for a sub-sample of responses (n=18). The sub-sample of 18 interviews for LCT visual analysis represents 64% of the study sample (LCT sample n=18/total sample n=28) and 25% of the available population at RGUK (LCT sample n=18/total population n=73).

The sample size was deemed adequate and the rationale for application to 18 cases is threefold: Firstly, RTA interpretations were based on all participants (n=28) thus all research questions (including *perceptions* (RQ1), *influences* (RQ2) and their *interplays* (RQ3)) were addressed qualitatively to varying degrees. The visual analysis is an extension of RQ3 (a means of understanding the interplays and practice generally) and did not require the same level of breath, more so it is a proof of concept. Secondly, a full LCT analysis utilising all responses was considered excessive in recognition of the scope of the thesis and the large amount of data that would require detailed analysis under LCT (268,355 words). Finally, personal detailed and summary profiles were created iteratively. In approaching 18 responses the variety of responses were found to repeat, the translation device had adequately captured the wide range of ‘possibles’ and no new datapoints were emerging to provide new insights. As per Dworkin (2012, p. 1319), saturation occurs “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113)”. Despite the sample affording adequate representation across the legitimisation codes the author does cite the sample size as a limitation. That is, assessment cultures as determined in Chapter 5 are reliant upon frequencies and clusters; thus whilst adequate coverage of perceptions was achieved, the frequencies of such coverage may have entailed some cultures being more prominent than others. This is discussed in the limitations in Chapter 6.

A summary of the sample (Table 3-14) and list of participants (Table 3-15) is provided below. For anonymity purposes the participants are represented by gender and discipline only.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The split for senior and non-senior staff / new and established academics was: Senior: 14 Non-Senior: 4. The population was imbalanced in this respect being a 60%-40% split between senior and non-senior.

Discipline	Gender	Number of individuals	of Number of data observations coded for LCT ⁸⁶
Accounting	Male	5	237
	Female	4	255
Subtotal:		9	492
Business Management	Male	5	377
	Female	4	183
Subtotal:		9	560
Grand totals:		18	1052

Table 3-14: Table summarising demographics of LCT sub-sample (n=18)

Accounting & Finance (AF)		Business Management (BM)	
Angela	Karl	Dave	Owen
Angharad	Will	Eskiva	Tamara
Bob	Oakley	Garfield	Tao
Dorian	Radyr	Harry	Xinyi
Joanne		Mahir	

Table 3-15: Table of sub-sample participants (n=18)

The sample of LCT interviews (n=18) was coded at the paragraph or question-response level and interview responses were plotted in Excel to generate visual maps, referred to as *Individual LCT Summary Profiles* (see Appendix J- Individual LCT Summary Profile). A further proof-of-concept also presented was the person-centred application of the LCT Assessment Tool. Of the summary profiles, seven interviews underwent further detailed analysis, referred to as *Individual LCT Detailed Profiles* (n=7). Here the unit of analysis was sentence or significant wording. The seven interviews were selected for expansion based on their emphasis on specific legitimisation codes, e.g., some emphasised a sovereign code (PA+,RA-) others exotic code (PA-,RA-). A detailed person-centred approach was enacted to ‘dig deeper’ (Danermark et al. 2005). This enriched the data landscape from which interpretations about cultural traits may be made (see Chapter 5).

⁸⁶ The number of data observations will vary depending on the unit of analysis. For detailed personal profiles (as shown in Chapter 6 the unit of analysis is a sentence or word selections. For summary profiles as shown in Appendix the unit of analysis can be paragraph or entire interview question response. Both measures are dependent upon the number of points elaborated on in the interview.

3.16 Doing 'quality' research

The validity issue has already proven itself useless ... reliability has no relevance in qualitative research ... generalisability makes qualitative research look suspicious ... no thought of its irrelevance in the qualitative context

(Stenbacka 2001, pp. 551-552)

To conclude Chapter 3, the 'quality' of the research methods is considered. Given the above quote and the critical realist accounts of subjective, observed and unobserved, stratified reality and the reflectiveness of RTA accompanied with insider research, I agree with Stenbacka (2001) that discussions of validity, reliability and generalisability can be construed as 'suspicious' (Stenbacka 2001) if not irrelevant. Javidroozi et al. (2018) summarise multiple sources to corroborate this stance, in addition it is argued::

the concepts of reliability and validity cannot be imported from positivist approaches to qualitative ones. ' ... it is important to recognize the futility of imagining that 'if you could strip the interview of all of these [biasing] factors, the "real" or "true" or "unbiased" response would emerge' (Briggs, 1986: 21).

(Arksey and Knight 1999, p. 54)

The assertion "[s]ystematic and careful work is always relevant, no matter the type of research" (Stenbacka 2001, p. 553) is also relevant, however this does not absolve the researcher from providing an account of 'quality'.⁸⁷ The reflective accounts in the RTA walkthrough (see Appendix G – RTA Stages) discuss how the coding exercise was interpretive based on my own situatedness as a researcher. An audit trail has been established comprising handwritten and typed interview notes, an audit trail of NVivo codes through the initial 4 phases of RTA, the iterative development of the translation device and reflections on its appropriateness through research presentations⁸⁸ and development of the Excel LCT coding matrix to match each

⁸⁷ Thus reflections on reliability, validity and generalisability are thus addressed here in umbrella terms as more general concerns of 'quality of research'. There are a number of sub-categories I could use to replace the three terms and argue the positions from those categories, e.g., rather than generalisability I could argue for analytical generalisation as per Yin (1998), as suggested in the Stenbacka (2001) article. However I feel the amalgamation of terms is apt given the approach taken in the Locke (2020) study.

⁸⁸ Conferences are listed in Appendix B

‘coded’ piece of text against the 16 points on the translation device. This last activity, building the LCT Assessment Tool, allows for systematic consistent analysis to enhance replicability (Maton and Howard 2018).

3.17 Conclusion

Chapter 3 demonstrated how critical realism guided my research approach, how LCT was used as an analytical framework, how the dimension of Autonomy and construction of a translation device can address insulation and boundaries in assessment practice, and how RTA has been used to celebrate reflexivity in interpreting the interview data collected. The value of using LCT for this study is not only how it breaks apart the conflation of Bourdieusian notions of positions and position takings, by offering positional autonomy and relational autonomy respectively, but by enabling an empirically and conceptually informed LCT Assessment Tool; a visual model to address both realised and unrealised possibilities that can be applied across varying contexts to uncover the structuring principles of assessment practice.

The following chapters discuss the reflective findings, in terms of the interview content (the focus) and the LCT Analysis, in terms of their legitimacy (the basis) (Maton 2014c) of this research.

CHAPTER 4: THE ‘FOCUS’: THEMATIC FINDINGS CONTENT

4.1 *The (Neo) Liberal Pursuit*

A liberal orientation of HE was evident whereby the role of HE and therein assessment were founded upon Humboldtian-like idealised principles of the university (Elton 2008), engaging in the advancement of knowledge by original and critical investigation undertaken by a “community of scholars and students” in the disinterested search for truth (Anderson 2010).

HE was seen as a place of cultivation of knowledge primarily and academically orientated: a place:

- *just about learning because you're interested in learning something (Madeline-AF)*
- *[where] students actually want to learn and want to engage (Tamara-BM)*

Tamara-BM especially perceived criticality and challenge fundamental to this liberal purpose:

to learn, to unsettle, to make students find and get different perspectives, to see things from a different way, to start to question things (Tamara-BM)

The quest and advancement of knowledge was evident and linked to concepts of emancipatory human flourishing for students (Kahn 2017). Tamara-BM and Will-AF emphasised the need for assessment to engender *freedom* to engage, learn and *enjoy* such intellectual engagement. This resonates with McArthur (2022) calls to rediscover the joy in assessment through assessment for social justice. Tamara-BM pleaded for students to be *creative*, whilst *Twentyone-AF* spoke of facilitating such journeys through opening doors:

- *The ideas that they would be able to play with their knowledge, play with the material, play with ideas. (Tamara-BM)*
- *this is just opening the door for them to new things, to learn (Twentyone-AF)*

These grand liberal ideals were postulated in the interviews and occupied much normative space, given they were self-reported as *completely idealised notions (Tamara-BM)* or referred as *pie in the sky ... Utopian perspectives (Madeline-AF)*. These ideals were unachievable given the neoliberalised university. Assessment in its current guise was generally seen to inhibit liberal learning (Madeline-AF, Mahir-BM, Will-AF):

- *My ideal assessment would be no assessment at all (Harry-BM)*
- *For me, I'd be quite happy without assessment to be honest (Lisa-BM)*
- *I also tell my students, I hate assessment because I think if you are really interested in something, that assessment is not really essential (Will-AF)*

These perspectives were not inimical to how participants perceived the role of institution. Dave-BM legitimated this by reference to the *absence* of assessment in the liberal vision of the institution:

the strategy of our university, ...to provide education, knowledge for all – I don't remember seeing in the main headline of our strategy, any mention of assessment – it is about providing education. (Dave-BM)

This suggests a divorce of assessment from education, or a separation of assessment and learning (Boud 2012), despite the inference that assessment is necessary. Tacit links to public accountability were also made:

Our main focus within universities, the public university departments where we're teaching is to try and promote maximise learning and actually think, assessment does get in the way of this (Mahir-BM)

The reference to *public* university alluded to a 'public duty'. Similarly, Angela-AF expressed liberal perceptions of education for the *public good*. However as Knoetze (2023, p. 1678) argues, "commercial values, such as competition, monetisation and metrification, have taken hold and are antithetical to a belief in higher education as a social or public good." Neoliberal discourses and associated discourses of the marketisation of HE⁸⁹ tended not to relate directly to assessment design of individual tasks but indirectly influenced assessment through assessment processes and structures, acting as generative mechanisms on assessment practice. For example assessment was entangled in the discussion of devalued degrees and grade inflation.

⁸⁹ Although related, the marketisation of HE differs from the Student As Consumer discourse in their orientations to HE and the student respectively. Students as consumers is addressed in a separate theme.

4.1.1 Devalued degrees/grade inflation

Jacob-BM cited the marketisation of HE as leading to not only a decline in the reputation of RGUK specifically, but a decline in the reputation of the UK globally:

*these grappling business models that all universities are taking on now ...
What the hell are you doing to higher education? You're destroying it ... it
leads to a cheapening of the degrees (Jacob-BM)*

Jacob-BM and Tao-BM raised significant concerns about the international profile of UK universities and the demise of the liberal institution, and thus RGUK. Given these macro influences, their perceptions of assessment were framed around reliability and validity, specifically grade inflation. Questions arose such as *who should we be passing?*(Lisa-BM). Business Management participants specifically (Jacob-BM, Tao-BM, Lisa-BM and Tamara-BM) raised ethical issues around disparate and inflated marking strategies. Lisa-BM echoed how grade inflation (thus assessment practices) was ingrained in performativity and has become a recruitment tool:

*the way it's [HE] been marketised incentivises higher grades, ...[students]
gravitate towards universities which give high grades and universities are
going to follow that ... because some of the league tables ... are based on
how many people get firsts, So you get all these incentive built into the system
to get higher marks, I absolutely understand why we're doing it, we have to
do it (Lisa-BM)*

This quote reaffirms how Business Schools are at “the forefront of commercialising their educational activities at an institutional and a discipline level to enhance revenues” (Dhanani and Baylis 2023, p. 1). In addition to international student recruitment strategies, grade inflation and assessment as mechanisms to generate income and recruitment have a profound impact on academics’ ethical positioning.

Tao-BM raised validity concerns and challenged academe as a profession to *agree exactly what it is that we are assessing* (Tao-BM) and implement quality assurance procedures to do so with *robustness and reliability*. Much of their discussion was focussed around marking, standards and moderation. Akin to Jacob-BM’s earlier reputational concerns, Tao-BM also raised concern for external perceptions of the integrity of the award:

employers will realise that RGUK graduates, masters students can hardly string a sentence together ... and we pass these students (Tao-BM)

Hence institutional integrity was under threat from the neoliberal regime. Liberal ideologies and neoliberal constraints commonly led to the purpose of assessment being contested, as Dorian-AF acknowledged:

ideally, it's about measuring sort of educational capital or the increasing educational capital, on the practical side, it's about a sort of certification process (Dorian-AF) [emphasis added]

Too often in the literature this perspective is oversimplified as dichotomies about AfL (liberal/ideal) versus AoL (certification/practical). To address this contestation from sociological perspective is to go beyond concepts of acknowledging a double duty (Boud 2000), or shifting paradigms by introducing more formative assessment (AfL). Macro-level mechanisms present fundamental challenges to assessment, representing a 'dark underbelly' of assessment, a destructive force arising from macro structures within and beyond HE. Here neoliberalisation of HE acts as a generative mechanism to inhibit AfL practice. These conversations require inquiry.

4.1.2 Formative assessment

(Neo)Liberal discussions of assessment operated in the gap between 'formative assessment as ideal' and 'formative assessment in practice'; the fulcrum where the liberal and the neoliberal collide. For the former there was an idealised 'liberal longing' for dialogic formative assessment of symbolic of a "golden age of academia" (Tight 2010), the Humboldtian 'idea' of the university whereby academics and students engage in continuous formative assessment; yet the latter conceived of formative assessment as an impossibility, ingrained in discourses of massification (fuelling the myth that expansion of the participation rate lowers academic standards ('more means worse') (Macfarlane 2020, p. 534).

Radyr-AF discussed how historically *we used to take work in each week from students and mark it*; now a misnomer due to massification and high student numbers. Mahir-BM discussed how elite universities such as Oxford required *weekly essays*, whilst Dave-BM drew on Cambridge's terminal assessments in year 3, with rich formative assessment and feedback,

inculcating assessment as *assidere* (Swaffield 2011). The longing for *building up a personal relationships* (Tamara-BM) and dialogue in assessment was again idealised as:

It's very difficult to provide a kind of developmental function via feedback because we're supposed to mark everything blind (Tamara-BM)

Likewise, Angela-AF was unable to build dialogic relationships with students because *I don't see them*.⁹⁰ Tamara-BM engaged in 'storytelling', relaying a close interaction with a student to provide informal face-to-face feedback leading to their overall success in an assessment. Yet this individualised dialogic relationship was rare and almost *unthinkable* given the institutional constraints (student numbers and academic workload). Ultimately assessment as done 'with' students in a democratic community as citizens was a fallacy; reality held it was done 'to' them (Roberts et al. 2021).

Students however were not deemed passive victims (Boud 1995; Torrance 2017) in this neoliberal machine. They were positioned as *explicitly focussed on the end point ... on the grade* (Lisa-BM). In addition:

I think we've lost somewhere that idea of the love of learning and the curiosity of learning, I think that gets lost. It all becomes terribly financialised and strategic ...the attitude of students being just tell me what I need to know sadly (Angharad-AF)

The 'trope' (Macfarlane 2020) of 'what do I need to know for the exam' is rife in HE (Kenwright et al. 2017), Macfarlane (2020) eschews the myth of students in the past being more intrinsically motivated, more pertinently critiquing academics for producing assessments that value recall of knowledge rather than its critical evaluation.

Angharad-AF continued with claims of students wanting to be spoon-fed, placing emphasis on *predictability*, a term aligned to the concept of transparency in assessment:

they just want to be spoon fed. ... are very blatant in asking 'what's going to come up' They just want predictability because they view it as currency

⁹⁰ This is a reference to Angela-AF's inability to work closely with their students due to institutional work allocations of lectures and tutorials.

... It's not about that. Assessment should be fair, not about 'I've learnt this I regurgitate it and I get the award' (Angharad-AF)

Spoon-feeding discourse (Emery et al. 2001) is indicative of responsibility shifts to the academic as academics become 'responsibilised' (Torrance 2017). Torrance (2017) suggests exams validate the "construction of identity through discourses of 'passing and failing'" (p.92) which in turn leads to pursuit of "grades, grades and more grades" (ibid, p.92) as opposed to educational quality itself. As assessment professionals, academics ought to reflect on assessment strategies that self-replicate conditions they then critique; else we spiral in an academic driven self-fulfilling prophecy. Mahir-BM verbalised this responsibilisation whereby both teacher and student succumb to instrumentalism:

students become too obsessed with the assessment ... quite dependent on you, providing them with the necessary... learning becomes a tick box exercise, so that means your teaching could potentially become quite instrumental ... you don't make the sort of demands that you should be making with students ... the emphasis is on helping them through the assessment process, rather than thinking about ways in which they can learn (Mahir-BM)

'Helping them through' and spoon-feeding become bedfellows aligned to critiques of AaL and criteria compliance (Torrance 2007). Calls for formative assessment, feedback, and transparent assessment rubrics, all representative of AfL, are then embedded in a discourse that inherently regards motivations of students to be instrumentalist.

4.2 Introduction

This chapter is the first of two findings and discussion chapters that respectively address the focus and basis (Maton 2014c) of assessment practice. Chapter 4 will address the focus of the interviews, that is the content and the thematic findings of the study, being six dominant themes emerging from the RTA. Chapter 5 then utilises the LCT Assessment Tool (developed in Chapter 3) to analyse the findings and uncover the basis of legitimation. Together they provide a deep rich account of the data.

This chapter begins with a section for context entitled 'First, what about assessment?'; an overview of the field of study, in terms of 'enacted' assessment practices in RGUK, and perspectives about practice generally to offer readers context prior to 'digging' further

(Danermark et al. 2005). The six themes constructed from the RTA are then presented: The (Neo)Liberal Pursuit; It's all about the GLM (Graduate Labour Market); Students are Customers?; But we are a Research University...; Pedagogy, what Pedagogy?; and The Perils of Academic Agency. Holistically the themes begin to answer the research questions of *perspectives* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2) on assessment, and their subsequent interactions.⁹¹ This enhances the interconnectivity of the relational elements, affording a sociocultural understanding of practice. The chapter is structured according to the RTA themes, presented sequentially as described above and concludes with a rationale for the adoption of a cultural approach that enables the rich qualitative insights to be 'seen' through LCT.

4.3 *First, What About Assessment?*

Disciplinary assessment diets are presented in Table 4-1, Table 4-2 and Table 4-3⁹². Not to reinforce the disciplinary debate but to acknowledge the meso context and gain restricted, but useful, insight into assessment practice on-the-ground,⁹³ of 'in situ' assessment methods adopted across both programmes. Data pertains to the academic year 19/20:⁹⁴

	Accounting & Finance modules (n=30)	Business Management modules (n=37)
Total assessments (core + optional modules)	49	79
Summative assessment	48	75
Variety	6	20
Examination %	40/48 (83%)	40/75 (53%)
Essay %	4 (8%)	18/75 (24%)
Average number of summative assessments per module	1.6	2.03
Ratio of 10 credit/20 credit modules	40:60	12:88

Table 4-1: Overview of programme level assessment structures for both disciplines.

⁹¹ The RTA analysis presented here addresses RQ3 from a qualitative conceptual perspective whilst Chapter 5 offers a methodological means of understanding assessment practice through development of the LCT Assessment Tool; more specifically aimed at RQ3, that is, a means of seeing and understanding assessment practice.

⁹² As Chapter 3 asserted, the management of RGUK made available participant information and assessment diet information.

⁹³ Assessment methods are not proposed to encapsulate all assessment practice 'as done', this was discussed in the Methodology chapter as observations and document analysis would be required for a full understanding of practice as enacted.

⁹⁴ This assessment is pre-Covid as a more stable measure of long-term assessment diets

Table 4-1 summarises assessment across all modules on all programmes offered within the Accounting & Finance or Business Management ‘suite’ of programmes.⁹⁵ The total number of unique modules offered across both programmes is 67, delivered by 77 academics.⁹⁶ Significant in Accounting & Finance is the prevalence of examination assessments (83%), whilst Business Management utilised ‘traditional combinations’ (essay and exams) with circa 77% exam and essay assessments. These findings align with Simpson (2016) in that examination % increases due to the quantitative nature of the discipline. Given that the Accounting programmes at RGUK attract several professional exemptions from accreditation bodies,⁹⁷ the dominance of examinations may be characteristic of a saturation of examination-based assessment as required by the PSRBs, in cases where accreditation is dominant (Swarat et al. 2017).

Whilst ‘variety’ of assessment in Table 4-1 (Accounting: 6, Business: 20) alludes to Business Management evidencing a highly diversified portfolio of innovative assessment types, these high-level statistics are misleading given the one-to-many relationship between modules and assessment modes. Relatively few modules offer diverse assessment types beyond examination and essay combinations, thus innovations may be confined to a small handful of ‘innovative’ modules only and not systematic across the programme, as alluded to by the ratio of assessment to modules. This is symptomatic of programme structuring also as Accounting is characterised by 10 credit (largely optional) modules generally ascribing one summative assessment per 10 credits, whilst Business Management is typically structured via 20 credit core modules, with typically two summative assessment points.⁹⁸ Diversity of assessment types across the programmes is presented in the tables below:

⁹⁵ These will not include shared modules across both programmes. These will be reported under their ‘home’ programme.

⁹⁶ As per Chapter 3, the overall population was 77. Academics may teach on several modules and modules may be shared whereby two academics are responsible for assessment design and delivery.

⁹⁷ Accreditation bodies that are cited on the RGUK webpage include CIMA, ACCA and ICAEW

⁹⁸ Not shown in the table but for 10 credit options there was a disparity in the number of summative assessments with 74% of Accounting modules reporting one summative assessment compared with 67% of Business management modules reporting two summative assessments. For 20 credit modules the level of assessment was relatively consistent with both departments reporting circa 80% of all modules reporting two forms of summative assessment per module. Based on this Business Management may be perceived as over-assessing if assessment weighting is naively construed as being based on individual number of assessment components only.

Level	Types of assessment	Varieties	Summative	Exams	Essays	Other
4	Group Report & Presentation Individual Class Test Individual Examination Individual Report	5	13	10	0	3
5	Individual Essay Individual Examination	2	17	14	3	0
6	Individual Essay Individual Examination Individual Journal	3	18	16	1	1
Totals		6⁹⁹	48	40	4	4

Table 4-2: Overview of assessment types by level for Accounting & Finance Modules

Level	Types of assessment	Varieties	Summative	Exams	Essays	Other
4	Individual Examination Individual Essay Individual Report Individual Class Test Individual Tutorial Contributions	5	14	8	3	3
5	Individual Examination Individual Essay Group Oral Presentation Individual Reflection Individual Case Study Individual Reflection & Presentation Group Report & Presentation Individual Project	8	27	14	7	6
6	Individual Examination Individual Essay Individual Report Group Oral Presentation Individual Portfolio Group Essay Individual Journal	7	34	18	8	8
Totals		20	75	40	18	17

Table 4-3: Overview of assessment types by level for Business Management Modules

The data above suggests Business Management adopt collaborative techniques as students develop their assessment literacies throughout levels 5-6. Diversification is also scaffolded differently, with Accounting demonstrating on overtly individualistic culture at the levels

⁹⁹ This is a unique count, not a subtotal

defining award (levels 5 and 6) characterised by the lack of reported group assessment tasks. Business Management programmes allude to enhanced reflection (as suggested by individual logs) and also alluded from the limited insights in the data.

These profiles agree with Neumann et al. (2002), Norton et al. (2013) and Norton et al. (2019) in that: 1) hard applied Accounting disciplines are dominated by examinations: and 2) soft disciplines utilise a wide range of methods. From a superficial standpoint, in conjunction with the lack of formal formative assessment¹⁰⁰ (Accounting: 1, Business Management: 4), this is suggestive of AoL focus in Accounting and AfL focus in Business Management. Enhanced diversity may also suggest weaker classification from a Bernsteinian perspective (Young et al. 2021) whilst reflective assessments may suggest a weakening of framing in valuing student voice in assessment.

4.3.1 *Assessment Paradigms:*

All participants were asked *What is the purpose of higher education* and subsequently *What is the purpose of assessment?*¹⁰¹ Responses corroborated much of the literature with “no clarity over the purposes of higher education whether it is about democracy, enlightenment, personhood or economic growth” (Sin et al. 2019, p. 921). For assessment, in line with Maclellan (2004) and Fernández-Ruiz et al. (2021), individual respondents provided a multitude of purposes recognised across all three paradigms. These are positioned in terms of relational autonomy (RA) strength to the target of ‘educational’ purposes discussed in Chapter 3 and below. Often normative liberal purposes of assessment were undermined by pragmatic constraints. Stakeholders were pertinent in the discussions, with concerns of ‘measuring for whom’ (e.g. management/student) aligning with purpose-stakeholder approaches (QAA 2018) addressed through positional autonomy (PA) and in the RTA themes discussed below.

4.3.2 *It's about measurement – AoL*

The measurement paradigm (Serafini 2000) was most frequently referenced and assessment was understood in summative terms. Measurement was not always through a typical AoL lens

¹⁰⁰ Informal formative assessment is likely to be undertaken but not reported via official institutional systems thus not represented here. Formal formative represent zero weighted summative tasks officially recorded.

¹⁰¹ To address varying assessment literacy levels and harness informed responses the question continued with “you are free to talk about summative assessment or formative assessment, summative being it is formally marked and formative being no formal marks”.

of certification but more orientated to learning, e.g., *measuring educational capital (Dorian-AF)* and measurement of individual *self-improvement (Oakley-AF)*. Measurement was cited for differentiating and categorising students, *who is at the top and the bottom (Tao-BM)*. Measurement for categorisation purposes was also deemed legitimate practice to provide internal marking confidence for academics in their own practices, for example *Tamara-BM* commenting that if all students were to receive a first then the assessment is a failure in its capacity to differentiate. Likewise, *Eskiva-BM* deemed categorisation as legitimate for employability concerns as academics legitimately must categorise for the job market. Many academics felt significant pressure from the ‘need’ to certify, prove or validate learning and the accumulation of knowledge and skills, as per knowledge-based approaches of Samuelowicz and Bain (2002), Watkins et al. (2005) and Postareff et al. (2012).

Assessment was generally construed as ‘evidential’ in purpose, so academics like Leni-AF could *know* or *see* if students had *learnt*, signalling AoL in function. Several participants, including Tao-BM and Tamara-BM, ascribed significant emphasis on measurement being quality assured, focusing on reliability and robustness, however emphasising how assessment standards via marking practices should be consistent and fair.

Dominance of AoL and summative regimes is widely recognised in the literature acting as an inhibitor of formative assessment (Harrison et al. 2017; Panadero et al. 2019) and characterising of a testing culture (Birenbaum 2016). This was echoed by staff in what was left unsaid; there was a notable absence of examples of formative purposes of assessment.

4.3.3 *We don't do formative – AfL*

Very few respondents e.g., Tamara-BM, saw the primary purpose *to act as a feedback developmental mechanism (Tamara-BM)*. Formative assessment was commonly romanticised from an idealised stance *I would love to do formative (Tamara-BM)* but very quickly overlaid with it being a *nice to have (Dave-BM)*. Lisa-BM was cynical of formative assessment due to the instrumentalist approach of students:

if you're forcing them or making them do assessments that aren't going to count towards that degree ... you're going to encounter pretty substantial degree of scepticism and cynicism, So I always preferred to make my assessments, you know, count (Lisa-BM).

Formative assessment was often utilised as a tool for engagement, for surveillance/monitoring purposes, akin to Raaper (2016) findings of governmentality. *Karl-AF* discussed using formative assessment as an engagement tool to *force* certain behaviour or compliance motives. Formative assessment was essentially devalued in that the pedagogic arrangements enabled students to still succeed without engaging in formative assessment; *they get by*, *Karl-AF* asserted. *Dorian-AF* explained how the university was instrumental in *reinforcing* this, enabling students to succeed without attending tutorials as a form of formative feedback: *it's okay not to do it because there is no penalty to it* (*Dorian-AF*). Balancing flexibility for inclusivity and managing formative assessment digitally was also mentioned:

If a student wants to leave everything until the last four weeks before the exam. That just might be how they do best ... they could do extremely well, they are doing all these practise MCQs ... They're just doing it in a very condensed window ... we can't really argue about that because the more we move online, the more we give them the flexibility as to when they do it.
(*Dave-BM*)

Online flexibility and automation was suggested to make formative assessment feasible. In its absence, formative remained an *optional* extra, rarely taken. Also common was a disentanglement or lack of assessment and feedback literacy surrounding formative assessment and feedback. Seldom was feedback entrenched in this discussion.¹⁰² Essentially, in the backdrop of large student numbers and academic time scarcity, formative assessment was a luxury that RGUK just couldn't afford *it is the first thing to go isn't it*. (*Dave-BM*).

The above discussions centred on 'formative assessment' as prompted by the interviewer. The term 'assessment *for* learning' was barely mentioned if at all. Assessment literacy, as inferred as engagement with scholarly assessment research, across the participants (excluding pockets of individuals) was largely absent, bolstering many of the concerns of Rust (2007); Medland (2019). Assessment experience and craft knowledge centred on pragmatic application in practice was however abundant, often voiced in terms of relaying assessment experiences.

¹⁰² Feedback was not however the object of this research study so was not explicitly asked as part of the interviews nor discussed at length.

4.3.4 *Supporting or spoon-feeding? – AaL*

Also corroborating deficit assessment literacies/assessment scholarship, the term ‘assessment as learning’ from a Yan and Boud (2022) perspective of generating new knowledge was not used in any of the interviews, other than by the interviewer. Semantics and an obfuscation of what AaL entails may contribute. Continuous assessment¹⁰³ and learning logs were praised as assessment ‘integrated’ with teaching, as were idealised as AfL related traditional Humboldtian practices of *weekly essays (Mahir-BM)*. However, *Twentyfour-BM* abandoned weekly exercises due to time constraints consequential of large student numbers.

Across all three domains of assessment, time scarcity and workload were factors prevalent across all interviews, evidencing significant constraint in both assessment practice and assessment professionalisation, aligning with the work of Norton et al. (2019). All three domains were met with a practical experience-based pragmatic orientation; no knowledge of the three paradigms from the field of assessment research was gleaned.

Issues of standardisation; *predictability, spoon-feeding (Angharad-AF)*; transparency and student assessment literacy¹⁰⁴ dominated. Some were *very ‘anal’ about showing model answers and how these were aligned to learning outcomes (Eskiva-BM)*, enhancing transparency and stressing how this was considered *general good practice* and emanated from much of the pedagogic training hence legitimating clear alignment with transparent explicit criteria. Much aligned with the AfL agenda. Conversely, others spoke of tick box exercises that chimed to discourses of criteria compliance (Torrance 2017).

4.3.5 *Academics’ views on assessment methods:*

Regarding assessment methods, academics utilised a *what works (Owen-BM)* and *what assessment suits best (Radyr-AF)* approach, notwithstanding their acknowledged lack of awareness of potentially superior methodologies. Owen-BM drew preference on *traditional assessment* modes for traditional conceptions of valued knowledge (e.g., academic, theoretical knowledge, *critical thinking*), whilst innovative assessment modes (e.g., presentation) suggested articulation of *practical* skills:

¹⁰³ Whilst this may be positioned as AfL the literature review suggested continuous assessment would be considered through the AaL paradigm.

¹⁰⁴ This terminology was not directly used owing to the low assessment literacy/scholarship levels, rather this alluded to students’ understanding of assessment processes, expectations, standards and rubrics

For the conceptual side of it, you know, I still feel that the essay is the right way to go ... or whether it's an exam timed, ... then the sort of practical application of knowledge ... the [presentation] is a great example (Owen-BM)

'Traditional' methods for traditional values (e.g. critical thinking) was a recurring theme whilst innovative assessment were deemed to align to softer 'skills'. This resonates with AfL's interweaving of interdisciplinary assessment for graduate attributes (Ya-hui and Li-yia 2008). References to *the qualitative ... the critical evaluation ... the discursive elements (Angela-AF)* were automatically conceived as aligned to examinations, or essays posited as fundamental for *critical thinking (Dorian-AF, Harry-BM)*. These alignments were almost taken-for-granted, potentially evidential of a collective habitus (Jawitz 2009). 'Innovative' methods such as portfolios were seen as secondary, unless in a liberal context of *a portfolio of essays (Dorian-AF)*, as per 'traditional' Oxbridge practice. Self and peer assessment discussions were generally a result of the innovative assessment prompt question in the interview schedule, and met with both pragmatic and conceptual concerns of *what are we assessing? (Tamara-BM)* suggesting methods are mere *channels, mediums* that eclipse *what we actually want to assess*. If accentuation rests with *critical thinking skills and the ability to write (Harry-BM)* then *why don't we have essays from year 1 to year 3? (Harry-BM)*.

Hence what is valued in the field, in terms of the intellectual capital of students, was aligned with assessment method with both disciplines favouring traditional modes. Examinations attracted prominence in Accounting whereas Business were aligned to the *traditional combinations (Owen-BM)* of examination and essay. These modes facilitated assessment of qualitative and quantitative knowledge accordingly:

if the concepts are qualitative, there should be a qualitative assessment, if quantitative, quantifiable type of assessment .. (Leni-AF)

In conclusion, strong liberal values engrained in a traditional, AoL, measurement-oriented paradigm of assessment were legitimated across both disciplines. Simultaneously, values oriented to soft skills for lifelong learning legitimated focus on innovative means of measuring and enhancing such skills. Rather than two distinct disciplines representing two different assessment cultures, there were shared understandings of both traditional liberal conceptions and alternative perspectives across academics, across disciplines.

The following sections discuss the 6 main themes as derived from the RTA, addressing both shared and differing conceptions. They ‘dig’ into specific influences or specific *positions* in the field and the relational specific perceptions, *position takings*, or empirical practices they engender.

4.4 *Its All About The GLM*

Whilst no academics referred to the term Graduate Labour Market (GLM) directly, a series of discourses that amalgamate under this heading emerged in the data e.g., assessment for employability, for the job, for practice/industry and concepts of authentic assessment.

4.4.1 *The employability divide?*

Across both disciplines individuals voiced the purpose of HE and assessment as aligned to those of employability:

- *the role of assessment is to encourage students to develop those, skills to indicate to employers for their future (Garfield-BM)*
- *a springboard into the world of work (Eskiva-BM)*
- *it prepares you for a profession (Jing-AF)*
- *to make them ready for a job to get a job, basically (Simon-AF)*
- *Employability, it should definitely link to employability. .. we’re preparing them to work, as employees of the future, So I think the assessment should be much more practical, much more work based (Xinyi-BM)*

This resonates with literature suggesting “Employability has become a central concern for many universities, students and other stakeholders” (Sin et al. 2019, p. 922). Individuals supporting assessment for employability spanned disciplines similar to how cross-disciplinary ideologies were evident in the liberal theme.

The data however suggests a cluster of cross-disciplinary academics emphasised in the liberal theme orientated to critical liberal perceptions of assessment who associated less with conceptions of assessment for employability (Tao-BM, Tamara-BM, Jacob-BM, Lisa-BM, Angharad-AF, Angela-AF Madeline-AF, Mahir-BM and Dorian-AF).

Academics characterised by the more liberal orientations similarly boasted beliefs aligned to ‘academic learning’ opposed to ‘learning for employability’ (Speight et al. 2013), voicing *I*

would rather industry stay out of assessment (Mahir-BM). When queried about the interaction between practice and industry and the implications for assessment, Dorian-AF also suggested *I think ideally not, I think the whole point of a business school is to be independent of a business ideally (Dorian-AF)*. The anti-employability agenda has not gone unnoticed in the literature (Kinash et al. 2018; Kanuka and Smith 2019; Sin et al. 2019). Specifically this finding attends to Sin et al. (2019) in that academics demonstrate different degrees of acceptance of employability.

The data evidenced generative mechanisms that underlie an anti-employability stance as founded on the commodification and commercialisation of knowledge. Transactionalist, monetised mechanisms were alluded by Mahir-BM, whereby the employability narrative is one nestled in the marketised nature of HE where assessment was driven by credentialism:

we create this perception, you get a degree, it's all part of this employability narrative and they [the institution] have to come up with that narrative, even though a lot of it is a load of rubbish because students are now having to pay tuition fees (Mahir-BM)

Here, akin to the marketisation of HE and grade inflation discourse, the employability agenda is positioned as an institutional return on investment (ROI) for payment of fees. Implications for assessment then centre on not only a 'job' focus but a grade focus at the expense of learning:

unfortunately, ... it is just a way of getting a job, [students] just see it as, picking up points ... What is it they need? They need more points because the more points they get, the better the degree classification and that increase their chances of getting a better job (Dorian-AF)

Here 'points' are nestled in assessment practice. Assessment itself is seen as a means of 'collecting points'. The data suggests academics exhibit clusters of these collective beliefs, or collective habitus (Jawitz 2009).

Employability contestations were thus evidenced *within* academic tribes (Trowler et al. 2012) contradicting the finding that "Management academics aim to train professionals fitting into specific employment" (Sin et al. 2019, p. 920); rather there was a divide *within* both the discipline of Management and within Accounting. Divergences of educational ideologies more likely emanate from socially nurtured and culturally embedded differences that arise in response to structures and mechanism in the field, or the wider social contexts within which

academics' habitus is formed, i.e., their personal and professional histories, interactions with industry, their academic identities etc.

4.4.2 *Accounting and accreditation*

What was more aligned to discipline was the antipathy towards PSRBs. Despite the Accounting discipline characterised by a greater force of 'facing outward' (Shay 2016) there was evidence of a liberal/professional contestation fuelled by accreditations. Even academics supportive of employability voiced concern with PSRBs, in that they over-emphasised the technical: *the accreditation requirements tend to focus more on the numbers rather than on the soft skills* (Joanne-AF) and inhibited assessment innovation:

Joanne-AF: So basically, we are following the syllabus. ... using similar exams and we make sure that students know the structure of the exams and the questions that might come up. So basically, we are ticking boxes there so that we are following the same strategy as all universities who need this accreditation by the professional bodies,

Interviewer: right, and that doesn't leave a lot of room for innovation in assessment then?

Joanne-AF: No, no, no.

Angharad-AF also evidenced discontent with accreditation bodies' emphasis on exams only as assessment method, stifling innovation, relating accounts of how they had approached this in their assessment practice:

the constraints of the accreditation, because everything that you change, you have to run by them. ... they wouldn't like it, . You can't introduce any sort of element. Coursework is not recognised. ... They don't like the essays, but we insist we keep it (Angharad-AF)

Accreditation bodies here acted as an 'invisible pedagogic college' (Fanghanel 2007) with accounting assessment prioritising the professional, vocational or technical curriculum (Boyce, 2019) at the detriment of liberal critical thought (Tilling and Tilt (2004). These perspectives both mirror and contradict those of Hardy (2010), deeming accrediting bodies to be a mechanism of enforcing regulation under the guise of 'quality control', and one met with discontent.

4.4.3 *Scapegoating the professional bodies*

Despite generalised conceptions of PSRBs stifling innovation, Karl-AF suggested academics used this as a *cop out*, suggesting academics retained an element of freedom¹⁰⁵ yet utilised the bodies as a *scape goat* for non-innovatory practices. How much freedom is debatable given Ali et al. (2022) citing the need for accounting disciplines “to ensure that all accredited accounting courses have at least 50% of invigilated assessments” (p.536). Conversely, in opposition to Angharad-AF, Karl-AF saw PSRBs as a source of educational and assessment leadership suggesting *we could copy them, ask them what they want* also acknowledging how *students see the credibility and authority coming from professional bodies*. Karl-AF’s beliefs were not widespread; they were perhaps the antithesis of other colleagues who supported the critical liberal agenda of academia, and actively leant against cooperation with external industry, positioning themselves in the field as insulated and demarcating themselves to ‘challenge’ industry, not serve it:

Accounting is driven by an exam led profession so understandably we have to categorise students for the profession ...but assessment shouldn't be 'authentic'. I want students to challenge organisational practice not train them for it (Madeline-AF)

Madeline-AF essentially reaffirmed the liberal over the professional, alluding (as did several colleagues) that students should be prepared for lives beyond employment and for the betterment of society. Angela-AF corroborated this liberal focus:

higher education should be education for the sake of education, those employments and things will follow, but they are not, we should not, be directly preaching or teaching to those – those will be outcomes but not necessarily our initial objectives (Angela-AF)

This supports Knight and Yorke (2003), who regard employability and free critical liberal thought to be complementary, that employability entails complex learning. Owen-BM also acknowledged the equity between the two stressing the need for a *broad set of assessments on*

¹⁰⁵ Karl-AF referenced 50% in exemplifying how some Accounting modules could design assessment to enable only one of two assessments to be considered for exemption by the PSRB.

the programme, that there is a nice matching between very professional skills ... and this other space.

In conclusion, contradicting clusters of beliefs *across* and *within* disciplines were evidenced; yielded by various academics boasting varied personal beliefs, backgrounds, dispositions and industry experience. Direct causality of these differing beliefs cannot be simplified to a discussion of discipline. The empirical observations are a result of structures and generative mechanisms. These included PSRB accreditation structures alongside properties such as module-level subject-specific content and skills that ‘face outward’ towards applied, practical professional practices. A qualitative analysis is unable to single handedly inter-relate these complex networks of influence, hence why RQ3 of this thesis (a means of understanding practice) sets this as its project, to be addressed in Chapter 5.

4.5 *Students Are Customers?*

The third theme is related to that of neoliberalism. Academics voicing a liberal orientation referenced consumerism discourse through varied means, whilst the majority of academics ascribing to the employability orientation made little reference to students as consumers (SAC) (Bunce et al. 2017) . Thus consumerism as an extension of neoliberalism erodes the student-as-partners narrative (Matthews et al. 2021) and undermines the pedagogical relationship, as Mahir-BM describes: *it becomes a much more commercial relationship rather than a pedagogical one (Mahir-BM)* with particular consequence for AfL assessment efforts, these are seen as inimical to student-as-consumer perspectives where

- *[assessment] tend to be not that demanding. ... we don't want to give too much to students, or too hard because, ... they are our customers (Will-AF)*
- *We are in a borderline customer relationship where students are focussed on the end game (Leni-AF)*
- *a push from our market, our customers to have less assessment (Dave-BM)*
- *[other university] believed the students were always right, it's very much like they're customer, they are clients, this is a business, whatever they want, you give it to them (Dorian-AF)*
- *stomp up your thirty thousand ... it doesn't actually get you much (Tao-BM)*

A cluster of RGUK academics thus positioned student as customers, referencing that assessment should be less in term of volume and challenge. These attest to claims in the literature of the burden of assessment and calls to reduce such a burden (Tomas and Jessop 2019), yet derive from a ‘darker’ means. This burden of demand or challenge aligns with claims of dumbing down assessment (Thomas 2006) for purposes of grade inflation (Richmond 2018) and student satisfaction, aligning with literature querying the over-reliance on National Student Survey (NSS) assessment and feedback metrics (Winstone et al. 2022). Concepts such as instrumentalism, demands of assessment, predictability and satisfaction, shrouded the interviews. Literature (Molesworth et al. 2009; Barnett 2010; Foskett 2010; Jones-Devitt and Samiei 2010; Williams 2011) has signalled how marketisation inculcates these utilitarian, individualistic tendencies.

4.5.1 *Instrumentalism and satisfaction*

Academics relayed how students have become passive and instrumental learners in consequence of student fees:

because they pay now, they kind of have this expectation of us that they should be given those degrees ... return on investment. They've become much more tactical (Angela-AF)

This expectation of the degree and the pursuit of grades, Madeline-AF suggests, leads to a hierarchical relationship reinforcing positioning of tutor-centred pedagogy limiting academic opportunities to engage in innovative assessment or co-creation and partnering with students, due to students' incessant focus on ‘receiving’ information, ‘receiving’ assessment:

a hierarchical assumption. I'm here to take something away. I need it in note form. video form. whatever form it is. I need a tangible object to take away (Madeline-AF)

Garfield-BM also reinforced this passive receipt / consumer role in their positioning of the student as *the recipient or victim of good and bad assessment*; yet there is an empathy inherent, aligned with the infamous Boud (1995, p. 35) quote “Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.” Given that assessment processes “are underpinned by a fundamental element of domination between assessor and assessed” (Raaper 2016), ‘the

customer is always right' mantra signals a power shift to the student as consumer. Academics become entangled in politics of control, whereby sacred notions of 'academic judgement' are now embroiled in customer complaints procedures:

they don't want the feedback, they just want to come and tell me that I'm wrong and that 'I should have got more marks' or 'this is not fair' (Dorian-AF)

The incessant 'grade focus' (Bunce et al. 2017) entails students becoming obsessed with assessment, with a heightened focus on marking, marking systems, marking procedures and grades disparity. When combined with AaL systems of overly transparent assessment rubrics (Torrance 2007) and 'coaching' strategies in the guise of enhancing assessment literacy (O'Donovan et al. 2004), academic judgment becomes confined to the 'hidden curriculum' or divisive marking procedures to circumvent process.

Grade focus and disparity of marking was a contentious issue in the interviews as it was cross-collegiate. Academics were simultaneously emotive and uncomfortable at criticising colleagues, several claiming RGUK suffered from a lack of quality assurance, lacking *agreement between colleagues on the sorts of standards that we expect and a preparedness to enforce (Tao-BM)*. Yet systems to ensure 'fair'¹⁰⁶ assessment are "based on false assumptions that procedural certainty is possible" (McArthur 2016, p. 972). However, in a consumerist relationship between institutions and students, grades and students themselves become the 'standardised' product of the McUniversity (Parker and Jary 1995), as such attract expectations of consistency, it is:

no wonder our students are dissatisfied or confused if they get a 70 on one of the 50 on the other, and they feel they've done exactly the same thing (Tamara-BM)

Dorian-AF also emphasised aspects of fairness as inhibiting innovation, for example group work was shunned for a perceived lack of fairness and dissatisfaction '*they don't like it*'. This was exacerbated by Dorian-AF's own negative personal, undergraduate experiences. As Jing-AF corroborated *it's difficult, ... it might be total disaster for some students if they have many*

¹⁰⁶ See the work of Jan MacArthur for exemplary discussions on assessment and social justice that use critical theory and a capabilities approach. An in-depth discussion on social justice is beyond the scope of this thesis.

free riders in the group. With limited assessment literacy or scholarship and with deficient resource to support assessment professionalism many academics shied away from groupwork for feasibility reasons.

4.5.2 *Validating students as consumers*

The claim in this research is that assessment practices (AoL, AfL and Aal) are the empirical instances arising from structures and mechanisms that position students in a certain way. Many of the RGUK academics were influenced by consumerist mechanisms that operate in HE, e.g., student fees, NSS, and internal institutional evaluation processes represent mechanisms that validate students as consumers. Structures and mechanisms that work to position students as partners, e.g., pedagogic literature, and thus attest to liberal learning ideals, were rarely if at all observed. The causal argument here is that the method of assessment, or its function or purpose, is the empirical observed practice *resultant* of these mechanisms. As Madline alluded, students have been conditioned by the assessment regime through schooling:

This is how we've taught them throughout their entire life, that this is the teacher, you're the student. This is your role in this interaction. So, we've conditioned them to behave in a particular way and then sort of critique them for behaving in the way that we've conditioned them to do (Madeline-AF)

If assessment reform initiatives want to move beyond consumerist assessment practices, one must engage in open honest discussions about these underlying mechanisms engaging both students and staff in a dialogic interchange of the deleterious impact of consumerist preconceptions on assessment practice.

4.6 ***But We Are A Research University...***

It's general knowledge. Publications are what gets you going and what helps you get promoted (Leni-AF)

Academics at RGUK demonstrated both individual oppression (see the RTA theme 'Perils of Academic Agency' yet a sense of belonging: belonging to institution, but more presently, belonging to academia or a community. This chimed with much collegiality literature (Kligyte 2019; Gavin et al. 2023). RGUK was understood by academics in terms of its research focus. Many academics felt at home in this setting, Dorian-AF spoke of his *cultural fit* with the institution from both a research and teaching perspective. However, significant concerns about

the research–teaching nexus and the marginalisation of teaching were raised, in virtually all interviews tensions created by the “greater, self-imposed importance” attached to research (Dhanani and Baylis 2023, p. 5) was evident. At RGUK research targets and indicators were construed as incentives. Harry-BM discussed how by focusing on teaching you were *self-harming yourself professionally*, thus ultimately for promotion *research was what counted* (Joanne-AF).

4.6.1 *Research identity as an influence*

Research identity was cited as an influence on assessment practice, particularly by several of the more liberal-oriented participants:

Interviewer: What influences your assessment practice?

Angharad-AF: My research. Coming from a critical research background makes me question everything. It's kind of re-wired how I think, how I don't take anything for granted, ... nothing's as neutral as it seems

However, one cannot allude that mechanisms and structures will influence actors in similar ways (as per the underlying ethos of critical realism). Joanne-AF, who was a proactive voice for employability and authentic assessment, concurred that critical research habitus was of similar influence:

Interviewer: What influences your assessment practice?

Joanne-AF: Being a qualitative researcher ... on the critical side of qualitative research ... has allowed me to just see the alternatives and to think in a different way and even more open minded way

Given similar influences, the assessment practices of Angharad-AF and Joanne-AF materialised differently: for Angharad-AF, their focus was on trying to ensure essays were integrated into modular assessment strategies to enhance critical thinking skills and restrict the dominance of technical content and focus, whilst Joanne-AF's practices focussed on being ‘open-minded’, facilitating students through assessment, enhancing assessment literacies of assessment criteria, providing exemplars and *guiding them to think about their assessment from the very start* (Joanne-AF). Hence transparent assessment criteria (O'Donovan et al. 2004;

Mountain et al. 2022) strategies for Joanne-AF were the result of not only a research identity but the interview highlighted family influence, experience as a student and Higher Education Academy (HEA) workshops. Thus, causality is complex.

4.7 Pedagogy What Pedagogy?

Interviewer: should assessment research and literature influence practice?

4.7.1 Yes it should influence

Pedagogic influence (conceptualised here as assessment research and assessment scholarship/scholarly discourse) in assessment practice was often referred to in an idealised normative manner. Rather, actual perceptions of assessment were informed by craft knowledge and experience, derived from an anecdotal evidence-base. Several participants expressed a longing for enhancement of ‘assessment professionalism’ (Norton et al. 2019); there was a focus on how academics *should pay much more attention to the research ... on different types of assessment on how assessment impacts on learning (Mahir-BM)* and calls for assessment to be pedagogically informed and ideally *evidence based, in terms of what works and what doesn't work (Tamara-BM)*. Interviewee Twentyone-AF drew on the ‘wisdom’ of the assessment literature to support the use of assessment theory to inform practice:

the wisdom is correct, and the wisdom of the pedagogy ... [academics should be] learning it from more experienced, more competent pedagogues (Twentyone-AF).

4.7.2 Professionalisation of assessment

The interviews were designed to explicitly focus on questioning the role of assessment scholarship, assessment literature and assessment research, yet limited understandings of scholarship of assessment (Rust 2007) or professionalisation of assessment (Murphy 2006; Raaper 2016) was evident. Thus, assessment research was ‘brushed over’ and subsumed under the general banner of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), or general ‘teaching’. Comments often conflated assessment with wider teaching discourse:

Pedagogy and theory and all the rest clearly it should have some impact on teaching practise (Lisa-BM)

This may be arbitrary semantics, but was interpreted as deficiencies in awareness of contemporary assessment literature. To the same extent teaching was relegated secondary to research, assessment was relegated to more general teaching practice. This corroborates Rust (2007) concerns in that the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) movement might be thwarted due to not having a discernible focus on assessment and not featuring ‘assessment in the name’ (Rust 2007).

4.8 The Perils Of Academic Agency

If assessment is at the heart of learning (Davies and Taras 2016) then academics are at the heart of assessment. One cannot detach oneself from the process, as Madeline-AF commented *it comes from inside* and as Karl-AF claimed, good assessment practice is down to the individual, *it all comes down to who has the personal pride in wanting to do it (Karl-AF)*. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has exemplified how dispositions, attitudes, and identities of individuals shape assessment practice. Thus, in consequence assessment becomes a personal act, a personal practice as much as a social practice, for the two are relational and interconnected.

4.8.1 Silo mentality

However there may be negative connotations. Bob-AF acknowledged how *people are quite protective of their module* at RGUK and how academics in a prior institution were told *you need to get group work into [your module], you need to do a presentation, and academics were up in arms about it (Bob-AF)*. Thus, inherent in assessment practice is the academic freedom and academic agency required to design and enact such assessment.

The individual focus can be detrimental, as Xinyi-BM evidenced:

I do my module, I focus on my module, I might have a chat with X about what they’re doing but I don’t know how they’re assessing ... we just start of term say, let’s get on with it, let’s do my module (Xinyi-BM)

This creates situations where *we all go back into our own silo thing (Tamara-BM)* and *we don’t think about the big picture (Xinyi-BM)*. Implications for assessment are dire in that despite normative consensus amongst participants of a need for diverse assessment across their programmes (Heeneman et al. 2015; Jessop and Tomas 2017; Jessop 2019; Charlton and

Newsham-West 2022) this was an unrealised ideal. Rather, academics developed modular assessments based on what they deemed *appropriate* (Dorian-AF), focussed on modular *content that is being asked not how it's being asked* (Leni-AF), and boast little to no cohesion or awareness of assessments beyond the myopia of their module. Holistic conceptions of an intentional purposeful programme-level assessment strategy were relegated in place of organically developed, yet disparate, collation of silo approaches:

module leaders develop their own assessments and then they all kind of put together on a big spreadsheet, really, aren't they? (Lisa-BM)

There was an obliviousness to recognition of assessment of programmatic-level learning outcomes and a lack of awareness of skills assessed across a programme. Given the silo mentalities, knowledge of assessment diversity across the programmes was limited thus inferred: *I think It's mostly exams (Leni-AF) ... It needs diversity which I'm not sure we have (Jing-AF)*. Assessment diversity across a programme was thus an idealistic goal with no infrastructure to support its attainment.

Hartley and Whitfield (2012) suggests consequences of such disparate assessment approaches include: atomisation of assessment; failure to integrate and assess complex, higher-order learning; a lack of synergy whereby the sum of parts do not make the intended whole; students and staff failing to see the coherence of the course; students and staff adopting a 'tick-box' mentality focused on marks, engendering a surface approach to learning which can 'encourage' plagiarism and 'game-playing; over-burdening of summative assessment, overworked staff, little formative assessment and inability to 'see the wood for the trees' in the accumulated results (Hartley and Whitfield 2012, p. 32). The data attests to much of this. Eskiva-BM did recall attempts to engage in 'assessment conversations' but across most participants was the understanding that *we just don't do it enough (Angharad-AF)*.

Academics were thus afforded significant individual autonomy, free to practice as they determined, the ramifications of which being a silo mentality where academics operate *like little independent units doing our own thing (Angharad-AF)*. Consequence to this is 'agency overload' whereby academics were felt unsupported by the institution in their pedagogic practice and alone. This runs counter to research collegiality that seemed alive and well at RGUK.

Virtually all academics saw assessment practice as *the responsibility of the module leader... you should take ownership of your course (Radyr-AF)* and academics *should be given the freedom and autonomy (Mahir-BM)* to do so. Most academics acknowledged a need for coordination, e.g. for diversity of assessment across a programme:

usually I am all for autonomy of module leaders but there does need to be consistency so someone to approve assessment on the programme and for diversity (Leni-AF)

Programme Directors were cited as occupying this oversight role. Imposition of diversity was seen as an assault on academic freedom, as Bob-AF explained academics *they don't want to be told, right you've got to incorporate this particular skill into your module (Bob-AF)*. In support, Owen-BM noted a degree of *arrogance* associated with academic freedom in assessment and suggested *I do wonder whether we need to do more telling, I'm afraid to say (Owen-BM)*. The proverbial 'we' reflecting the need for an institutional collegiate collective to implement governance on individual academics. However, *telling* was likely construed as unwelcomed managerialism, e.g., Tao-BM found it *entertaining* when management conducted a programmatic review of marks at exam boards:

We have an Excel sheet of the marks on the screen colour coded, green is good and red is bad, If you've got low marks, shaded red on the screen, well, they say oh red doesn't mean anything, and of course it does, we all know what red means (Tao-BM)

Assessment structures thus act to govern behaviour as a surveillance mechanism (Raaper 2019). They can fuel adverse behaviours in cultures where neoliberal values of performativity are sought, essentially 'what gets measured gets done'. Thus, in this managerial environment several academics voiced a sense of oppression and peer group pressure. One academic discussed how they *did not want to be a lone voice and were just passing people that 'I don't think should be here'*, whilst another academic faced ethical issues around adding 5 marks to grades as not to be in the proverbial red, because peer pressure is emotive and *at some point you say I'm out.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ These comments are intentionally not attributed to individuals due to their potentially controversial nature and to protect anonymity.

4.8.2 Modularisation

A structural mechanism that reinforced the fragmented deleterious siloing of assessment practice was critiqued by Mahir-BM and Jacob-BM, evidencing grave concerns for assessment, i.e. the modularisation of HE:

a modular system where students did five or six modules, and then by the end of it, they've got to produce five or six pieces of assessed coursework or exams, ... affects how they approach their learning, where everything is not geared towards learning for students, but it's geared towards the assessment ... the modular system, I think is deeply problematic ... but it is sort of like the elephant in the room that nobody raises, that structural problem about modularisation, but it's just terrible for learning (Mahir-BM)

This reference to a 'structural problem' chimes with critical realist conceptions of causality (Vincent and O'Mahoney 2018; Lawani 2021; Roberts et al. 2021). Thus, the modularisation of HE represents a generative mechanism at the level of the 'real' (Mingers and Standing 2017) and alludes to causality in how academics are forced into silos to focus on modular assessments at the expense of more programmatic approaches or collegiate collective determination.

Jacob-BM also highlighted a lack of collegiality and the necessity of managerialism required to sustain such a modular system:

Instead of having a collegiate group of people guiding a group of students through a programme, we have a completely modular system ... it's a kind of a paradox in a sense, because on one hand, we're completely modular and we can do whatever we want and on the other hand, there's an enormous amount of constraints, administrative constraint from above in what we do and how we do it diktats of what's expected ... if we want to develop a good programme and ensure things like a variety of assessments so it's all coordinated, it's going back to a collegiate system (Jacob-BM)

This reinforces debates of an eroding collegiality (Macfarlane 2005) and an uprising of managerialism in neoliberal universities (Deem 1998; Kolsaker 2008; Tight 2014). Remedies for modular systems were posed by both Mahir-BM and Dave-BM, referencing Oxbridge institutions who have *terminal assessments (Dave-BM)* and *much more emphasis on formative*

assessment (Mahir-BM). Ironically, progressive literature in the field of programmatic assessment attests to this (van der Vleuten et al. 2012).

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter draws on the six themes as constructed from the data using a Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach (Clarke and Braun 2021). It has evidenced how various *perceptions* of assessment (liberal pursuits, authentic practices for employability, formative strategies) have formed in response to a myriad of generative mechanisms, structures and events. Assessment is correspondingly seen as a manifestation of HE. The *assessment machine (Mahir-BM)* has potentially become too complex or too powerful a sociological construct to challenge. HE is abound with academic autonomy yet the interwoven complexities of autonomy within the micro personal, meso institutional and macro HE tapestry act to stifle and constrain assessment change.

Chapter 5 furthers these conversations, proposing a means of ‘seeing’ assessment, or understanding its ‘sayings and doings’ (Boud et al. 2018b). It proposes the concept of assessment cultures as derived from James (2014) work on learning cultures. The application of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) and the lens of Autonomy enables one to see how positioning in a space of possibilities (Maton and Howard 2018) may enable the underlying structuring principles of practice to be seen.

CHAPTER 5: THE ‘BASIS’: PERSON CENTRED AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The content, or *focus* of assessment practice, was discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter uses LCT Autonomy to establish the *basis* of legitimacy, that is the “organizing principles underlying practices rather than their content” (Martin et al. 2019, p. 28). Chapter 5 applies the LCT Assessment Tool to propose four primary ‘assessment cultures’, and ten identified ‘assessment sub-cultures’.¹⁰⁸ It presents integrated accounts of *perspectives* and *influences* through consolidation of micro, meso and macro levels.

The chapter is structured according to a three-layered analysis strategy.¹⁰⁹ Firstly, the LCT Assessment Tool uncovers languages of legitimation at the person-centred level, depicting individual *detailed* accounts of practice (n=7). Secondly Section 5.2.6 extrapolates application to a wider sample (n=11) at the *summary* level. Thirdly, section 5.3 consolidates the patterns in *detailed* and *summary* individual legitimation code profiles (n=18) to propose four assessment cultures, present across the four legitimation code modalities. Each cultural type is informed by both participant data and the reflexive thematic analysis. The findings are discussed in context of the extant literature as evidenced in Chapter 2. The chapter then demonstrates a disciplinary analysis, applying the cultural approach to the two programmes considered in this study. It concludes by proposing the LCT Assessment Tool and the sociocultural approach as a means of addressing RQ3, that is, a means of seeing and understanding assessment practice; uncovering patterns of beliefs, ways of working, and dominant structures that act to shape assessment practice.

5.2 Person-centred understandings

An individual’s diverse experiences and perceptions (the empirical) of diverse events (the actual) emanating from diverse structures and generative mechanisms (the real) give rise to a collection of diverse instances where *perceptions* of, and *influences* on, practice collide.

¹⁰⁸ These terms take on particular novel meanings in this thesis, as suggested in Chapter 2, as such represent novel contributions to the field.

¹⁰⁹ This is not an established approach in the literature nor was it an intentional strategy, as such offers a proof of concept, not evidenced elsewhere. It represents a unique, iteratively developed approach evidential of proximity to the data and repeated attempts to ‘make visible’ patterns and understanding as deriving from the data.

Chapter 4 demonstrated this diversity qualitatively via contestations regarding the liberal–employability nexus, the students-as-consumer or students-as-partner nexus and the research–teaching nexus. Given the complexities of diversity, and the aim of ‘zooming out’ to make inferences as to a sociocultural understanding, an individual level analysis is adopted. This enables individual languages of legitimation to be understood, be them sovereign, exotic, projected and/or introjected legitimation codes.¹¹⁰

The point of intersection or connectivity, i.e., where *perceptions* and *influences* can be causally identified and related, offers just one mapping in a multitude of ‘spatial possibilities’ (Maton forthcoming). Thus, which spaces are occupied, when, by whom, and to what extent informs assessment cultures. LCT applied at the individual level provides a visual, systematic means of analysis across participants, allowing for a multitude of spatial possibilities to be seen.

As a means of scaffolding, to aid in interpretation of the LCT individual profiles, and demonstrate the translation device ‘in action’, a simplified illustrative¹¹¹ example is provided in Figure 5.1. This uses formative assessment and categorisation as examples of the ‘focus’ of conversations, and mapping of various ‘basis’ of legitimation for those topics.

¹¹⁰ The use of ‘and/or’ in this sentence is pertinent as these codes are not mutually exclusive, rather one individual may exhibit multiple legitimation codes at any time given diverse perspectives.

¹¹¹ To convey how the tool works a simplified fictitious example is best as it removes any subjectivities of interpretation of real data. It is intended here only to illustrate as to how real interview data was coded..

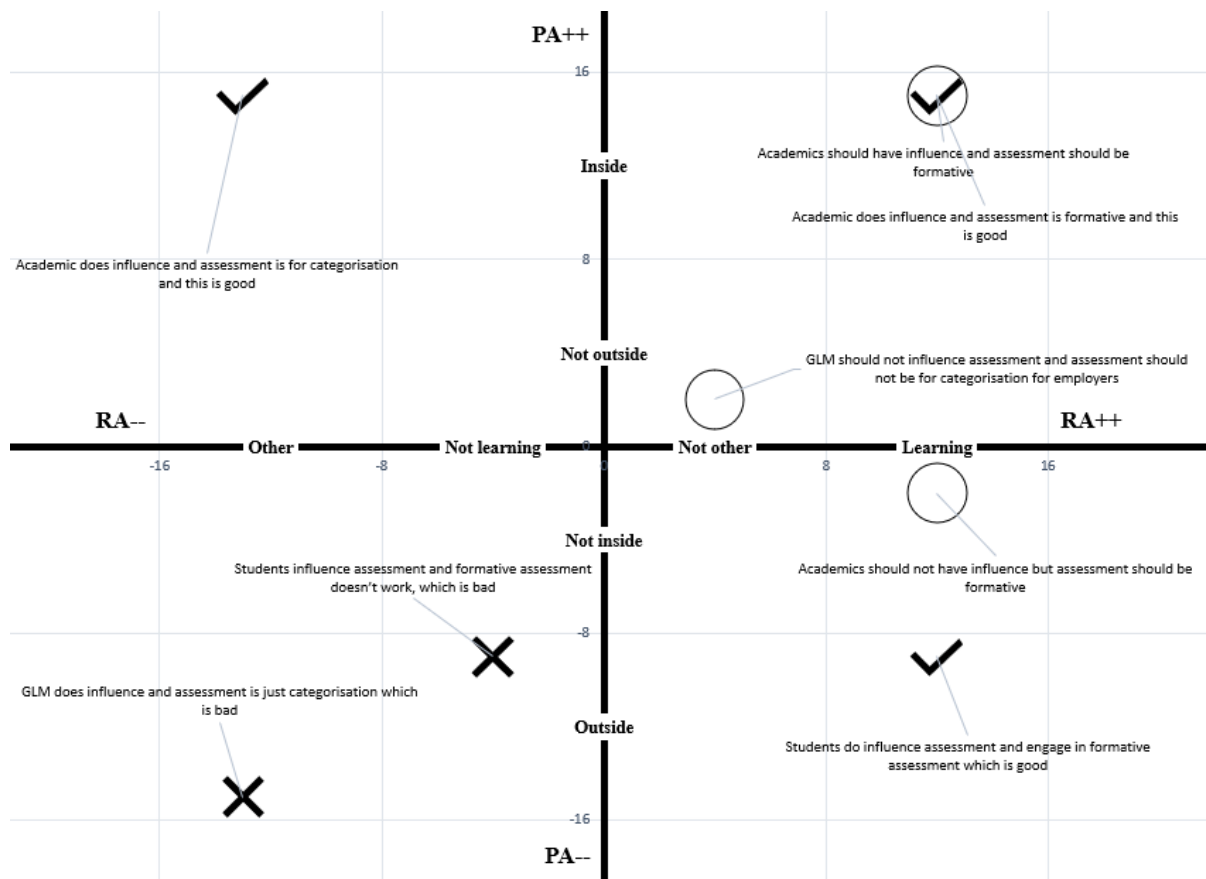


Figure 5.1: Illustrative Autonomy plane for fictional interview responses

Key for Figure 5.1:



Normative statements of *should* or *should not* be.



Negative sentiment statements of actual practices, what *does* and *does not* happen.



Positive sentiment statements of actual practices, what *does* and *does not* happen,

- The size of the icons in Stage 1 and Stage 2 analysis, i.e. the detailed and summarised person-centred understandings are denoted by the number of occasions that participants discuss the phenomenon.
- The size of the icons in Stage 3 analysis, i.e. the consolidated assessment cultures, represent the number of unique participants whom have discussed that phenomenon irrespective of the number of times it was discussed.

Table 5-1: Key for Figure 5.1

In the illustrative example above, eight data items are plotted onto the plane utilising the translation device to allocate data onto spaces on the continua for both PA and RA collectively. This is achieved through plotting the data observation to a corresponding PA point on the axis,

and an RA point on the axis, the resultant ‘coordinates’ provide the destination for the data to be plotted on the autonomy plane.

As an example the illustrative summarised statement in the sovereign code of ‘academics should have influence and assessment should be formative’ would be coded in terms of ‘academics should have influence (PA++, coded at PA15) and assessment should be formative (RA++ coded at RA12). The use of the wording ‘should’ would entail a normative statement thus a circle icon is used to distinguish this from an actual perception or experienced perspective. The resultant coding is PA++/RA++ and mapped against the sovereign code coordinates (PA15,RA12).

Appendix I - Illustrative extract from the LCT Assessment Tool for fictional interview responses, presents a detailed extract from the ‘LCT Excel File’, used for LCT data analysis, and re-constructed for the fictitious illustrative example above. It provides an indication as to the discourse which is derived from the RTA thematic analysis process and provides a code book for the ‘second reading’ of data analysis. The file maps interview quotes¹¹² and assigns summary labels for charting purposes. This extract demonstrates how the TD is critical in plotting statements to any of the 16 positions on both the PA and RA axis, subsequently used to develop mappings at person-level or thematically onto the Autonomy plane. The TD and the excel tool comprise the LCT Assessment Tool developed in this thesis to contribute to answering RQ3, that is to understand the interactions between *perceptions* and *influences* in a theoretically informed way. The fictitious example is illustrative of the LCT Assessment Tool ‘in action’.

5.2.1 Staged analysis 1: Individual LCT Detailed Profiles

Moving to the empirical data analysis, the LCT Assessment Tool was applied at a detailed level to the interview data for a sub-sample of seven participants. Participants were selected based on competing perspectives across the six RTA themes.¹¹³ The unit of analysis was each sentence in the interview transcription, coded using the developed translation device (see Appendix H –Translation Device).

¹¹² The Appendix does not show the interview quotes as this is an extract made for the purposes of the fictional example.

¹¹³ The LCT coding approach for this sample and sample selection rationale is detailed in Chapter 3.

The individual LCT ‘Detailed Profiles’ (n=7) are presented in full throughout this chapter. However, to scaffold, to aid interpretation, and avoid overly dense presentation of data, the profiles are initially presented in piecemeal form; Extracts are organised according to legitimization code emphasis initially then person centred LCT Detailed Profiles are presented. The basis of legitimacy is thus explored initially from sovereign code perspectives, then exotic code, projected code and ultimately introjected codes, with each code discussion supplemented by a ‘zooming out’ to understand the whole person perspective. The extracts are presented from both disciplinary perspectives and labels are assigned to data points to summarise the interview responses occupying each node/coordinate..¹¹⁴

5.2.2 *Sovereign Code as a basis of legitimization: Bob-AF (Accounting) and Owen-BM (Business)*

In line with all person centred profiles in this study Bob-AF and Owen-BM individual detailed LCT profiles demonstrate how individuals occupy spaces across different legitimization codes; their full LCT detailed Profiles are shown in Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5. However they are used here to illustrate the sovereign code (PA+,RA+) modality, thus extracts from the person-centred profiles are shown in and for the sovereign code only.¹¹⁵

From an assessment mode perspective, the participants utilised a combination of traditional and non-traditional assessment methods including exams, essays, presentations and peer assessment.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ The key for icons used in the visualizations is available in Chapter 3, in essence ‘o’ represents normative, ‘✓’ represents actual statements that are supported, and ‘x’ represents actual statements that are unsupported.

¹¹⁵ When discussing naming conventions of legitimization codes, singular expressions of strengths (+/-) will be used as is convention. However when coding and discussing relative strengths for this particular research project these are denoted by +++/++ or --/- as per the coding conventions in the translation device developed in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁶ Assessment methods have not been aligned with individuals to preserve anonymity.

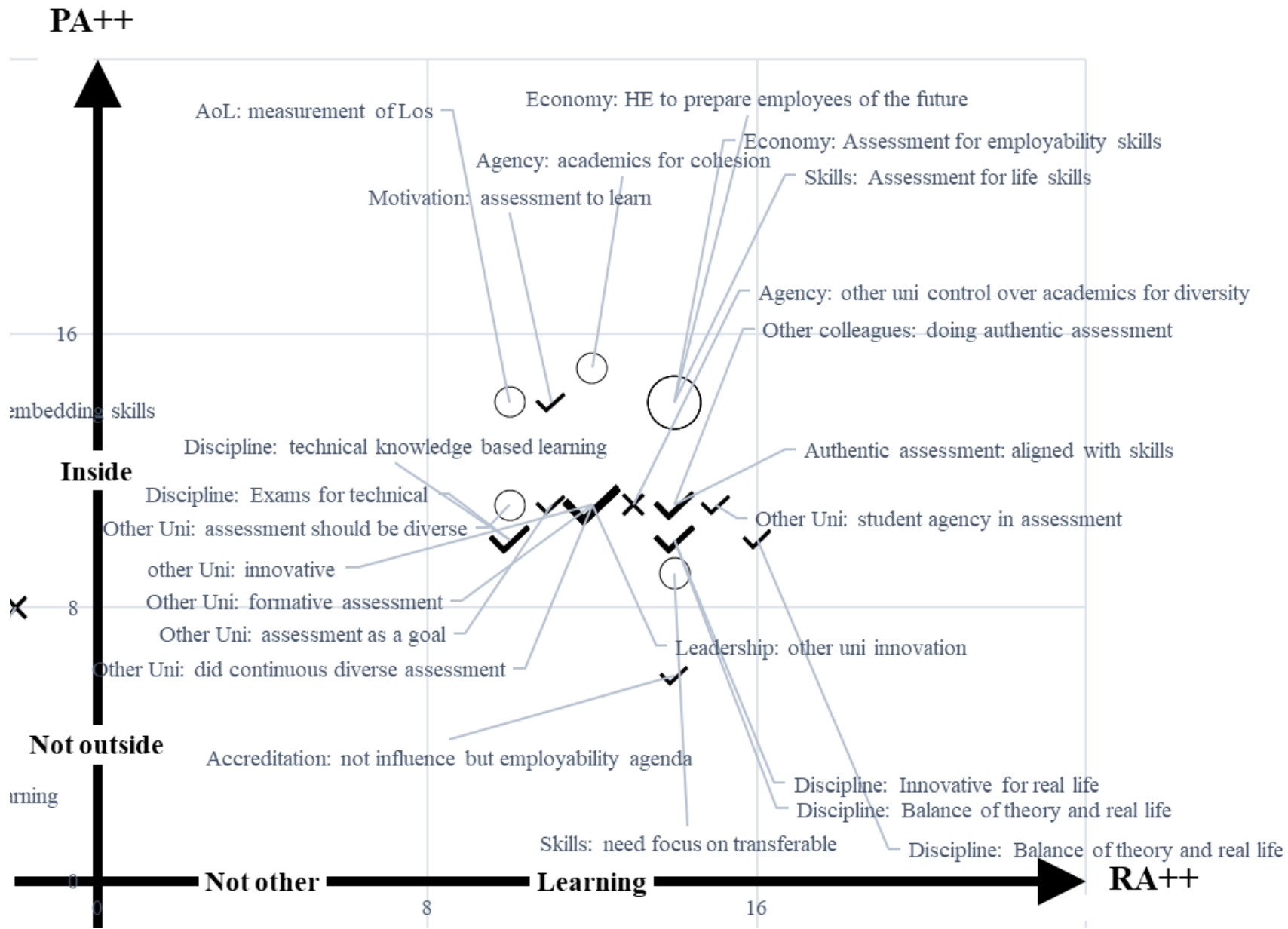


Figure 5.2: Bob-AF: individual detailed profile extract for sovereign code (PA+,RA+)

For sovereign codes, much positioning can be explained through the RTA themes of ‘The (Neo)Liberal Pursuit’ and ‘It’s all about the GLM’, wherein the normative positive ideals of liberal or employability-focussed education represent stronger relational autonomy (RA++) being more aligned to educational orientations of assessment to learning.. Owen-BM occupied space in the liberal segments, denoting stronger PA whilst Bob-AF placed more emphasis on skills for the economy. Both ideologies, despite being contested for many participants, are ‘target’ (Maton and Howard 2018) as represent ‘educational purpose’, both occupying autonomous positions (RA++), albeit differing orientation. However, as Chapter 2 discussed, there is a weakening of Bernstein (2000) classification (-C) due to the ‘outward pull’ (Shay 2016) of commerce. This is recognised in Bob-AF’s case via a weakening of relational autonomy, thus employability orientated assessment beliefs and practices shown to the left (RA=14) of the more liberal pursuits (RA=16). In Bob-AF’s case, the employability emphasis was causally determined to stem from experiences at other universities (PA++) as opposed to being driven from outside industry influence (PA--):

I feel like [innovative assessment], that’s what I used to do at [other university] (PA++) and not particularly what I do now ... I think that we do need, to shape students with what we provide them with, and how we test them, to make them employable (RA++)

(Bob-AF: Sovereign code example)

Whilst Owen-BF shared the ethos of a focus on employability, Owen-BM envisaged assessment for both economy and liberal pursuits in equilibrium. Their positioning represented stronger relational autonomy due to their liberal outlook around preparation for societal challenge (RA++), causally linked to their academic identity (PA++):

I see myself as a ... scholar of research, I also see that in terms of teaching (PA++), so I want to I want to challenge ideas and established ways of thinking ... the key thing about assessments is in challenging students understanding ... (RA++)

(Owen-BM: Sovereign code example)

Both examples signify stronger positional autonomy with influence from autonomous positions ‘within’ academia being their own identities (PA++), coupled with stronger relational autonomy perceiving assessment as cultivation and measurement of skills for employability

and liberal purposes (RA++). Owen-BM particularly demonstrated a sense of capital in shaping or structuring their habitus, given their perception of themselves as being a research scholar (valued capital in the field of academia),¹¹⁷ and the associated dispositions (habitus) towards challenge and critique. Whilst useful, the sovereign code insights need to be taken in the context of the dispersal patterns within and across codes by individual. Thus, Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5 denote how Bob-AF's sovereign emphasis complimented a significant projected code (PA+,RA-) emphasis, whilst Owen-BM's sovereign occupations were offset by exotic codes (PA-,RA-).

¹¹⁷ Particularly valued capital in a Russell Group research-intensive institution

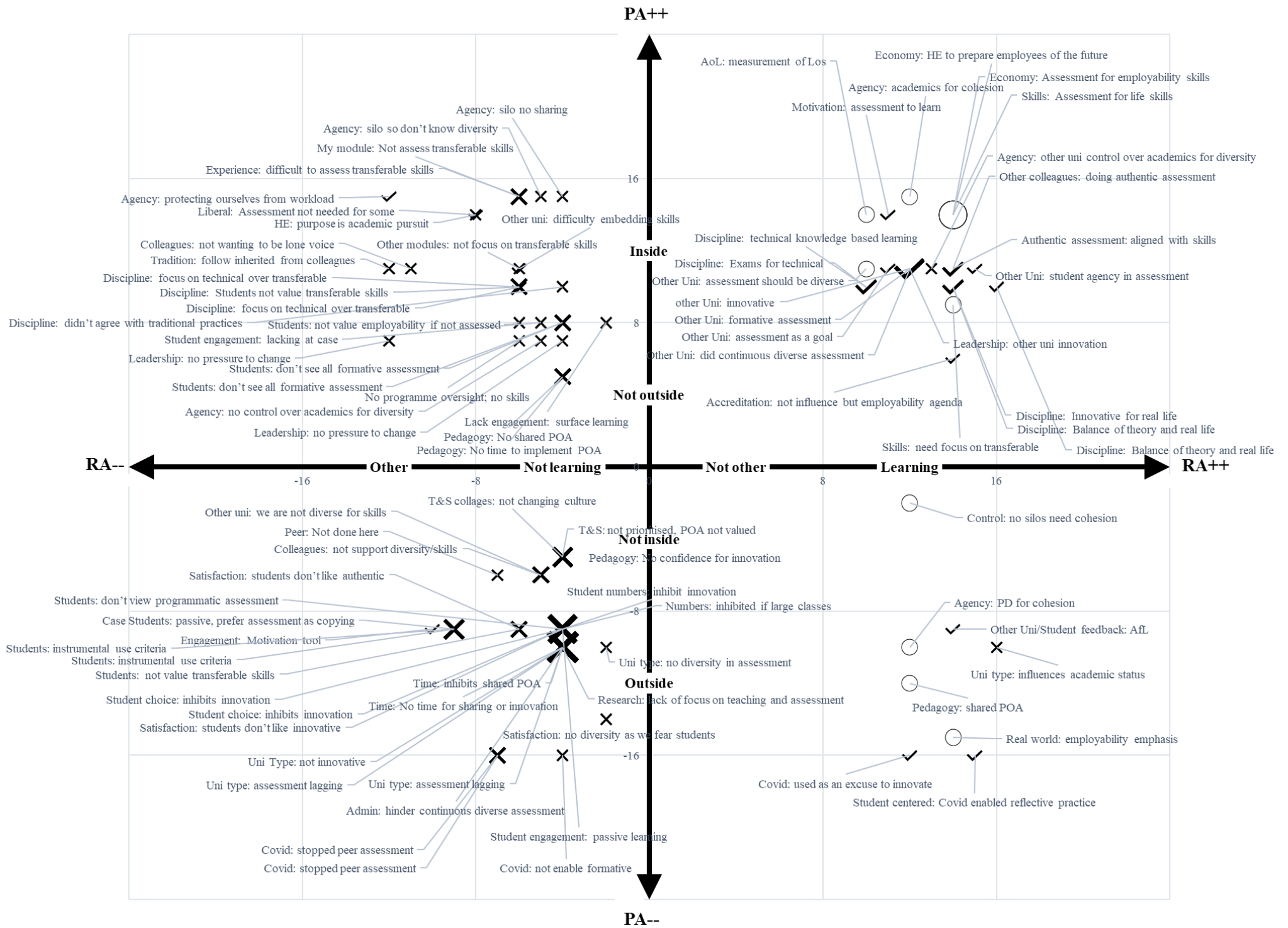


Figure 5.4: Bob-AF individual profile emphasising sovereign (PA+,RA+), exotic code (PA-RA-) and projected (PA+,RA-) codes

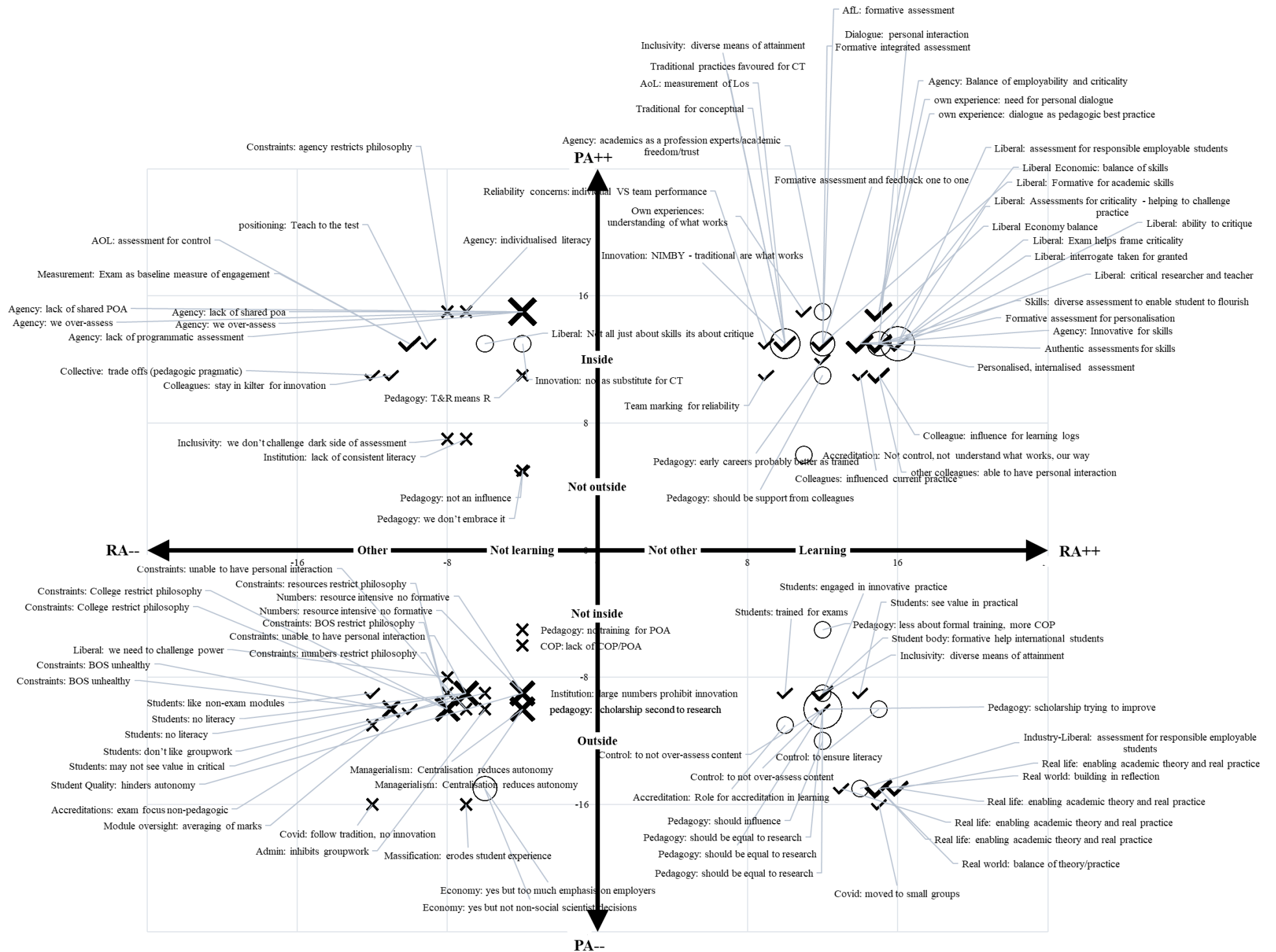


Figure 5.5: Owen-BM individual profile emphasising sovereign (PA+,RA+), exotic code (PA-RA-) and introjected (PA-,RA+) codes

Whilst both participants took up positions in the sovereign code ascribed to strong positional autonomy (PA++), Bob-AF expressed significant concerns with this ascribed agency, citing silo working and protective cultures as a means of self preservation thus leading to practices not conducive to assessment for educational purposes (RA-). Bob also placed significant emphasis on the disciplinary influence suggesting the technical nature of Accounting marginalised transferable learning skills (RA-) As a result Bob occupied much space in the projected code (PA+,RA-) in contrast to Owen-BM whom despite raising similar issues of agency leading to a lack of shared professionalisation of assessment (POA) (RA-) tended to occupy other spaces on the plane, particularly those of a more favourable situation whereby a weakening of agency (PA--) allowed for influences of pedagogy and real life to enhance assessment orientated to educational purposes (RA++).

Thus, in interpreting these visual personal profiles, what is mapped is pertinent, but what remains unmapped is equally pertinent. For example, despite sovereign and exotic code similarities, Bob-AF evidences much occupation in the projected code with little integrated code basis, whilst Owen-BM's perceptions were vice-versa. Owen-BM's introjected code occupations were due to normative and actual practices and principles that prompted collaboration of both real-world challenges¹¹⁸ and academic practice; an outward pull from industry or a weakening of classification:

[the assessment is] a kind of authentic offering (RA++), it's the [real life] scenario (PA--) where we, introduce it to the students and we use the taught elements from the theory piece of the module ...so we use [real life] and then we unpack it using theoretical ideas and of course, the whole point about that is for them to be able to make the link (RA++)

(Owen-BM: Introjected code example)

Owen-BM balances both liberal and economic purposes, exemplifying a focus on 'authentic assessments' (RA++) imbued with both realism and cognitive challenge (Villarroel et al. 2018) to ensure students were prepared for lifelong learning (Nguyen and Walker 2016) as both employable and critical citizens in society (Giroux 2010).

¹¹⁸ Acknowledging discussions about the terminology of 'real world' as disparate to academic practice – real world is used here to signify principles and practices that originate from beyond the field of academia, that is in the world of commerce, business and work for example.

The integrated codes for Owen-BM also highlight the ‘Pedagogy What Pedagogy’ theme, and the normative function of ‘outside’ pedagogic influence to restore the balance between research and teaching scholarship (PA--,RA++). This resounds with many calls for enhanced scholarship of teaching and learning (Boshier and Huang 2008; Elton 2010) and more particularly visibility of the concept of assessment scholarship (Holroyd 2000; Price 2005; Rust 2007).

Despite the strong emphasis on academic autonomy (PA++) and educational purposes (RA++) as illustrated in the sovereign codes, both participants felt constrained and subject to ‘outside’ influence (PA--) at the expense of these educational purposes of assessment (RA-) and experiencing assessment for ‘other’ purposes beyond that of learning (RA--). Where both positional and relational autonomy weaken we see the emergence of a strong exotic code basis of legitimation (PA-,RA-) and Bob-AF and Owen-BM were not alone in this as for the majority of participants, exotic code (PA-,RA-) perceptions were strong. Bob-AF and Owen-BM both experienced conflict and constraint. A profound lack of/absence of innovative assessment was recognised, weakening relational autonomy, recorded as a counterfactual to ‘educational’ autonomous principles (RA=-4). The weakening was causally ascribed to students, student satisfaction, student characteristics and student engagement (PA--) and particularly for Bob-AF, the research orientation of the institution (PA--) as explicated in the ‘But we are a research university’ theme. Owen raised particular issues regarding constraints of the institution being time, workload, student numbers and College structures (PA--) all inhibiting educational practices of assessment (RA--).

5.2.3 Exotic Code as a basis of legitimation: Angharad-AF (Accounting) and Dave-BM (Business)

Angharad-AF and Dave-BM’s profiles are as most of the sample fragmented across codes, however they are drawn on here to illustrate the dominance of exotic codes (PA-,RA-).

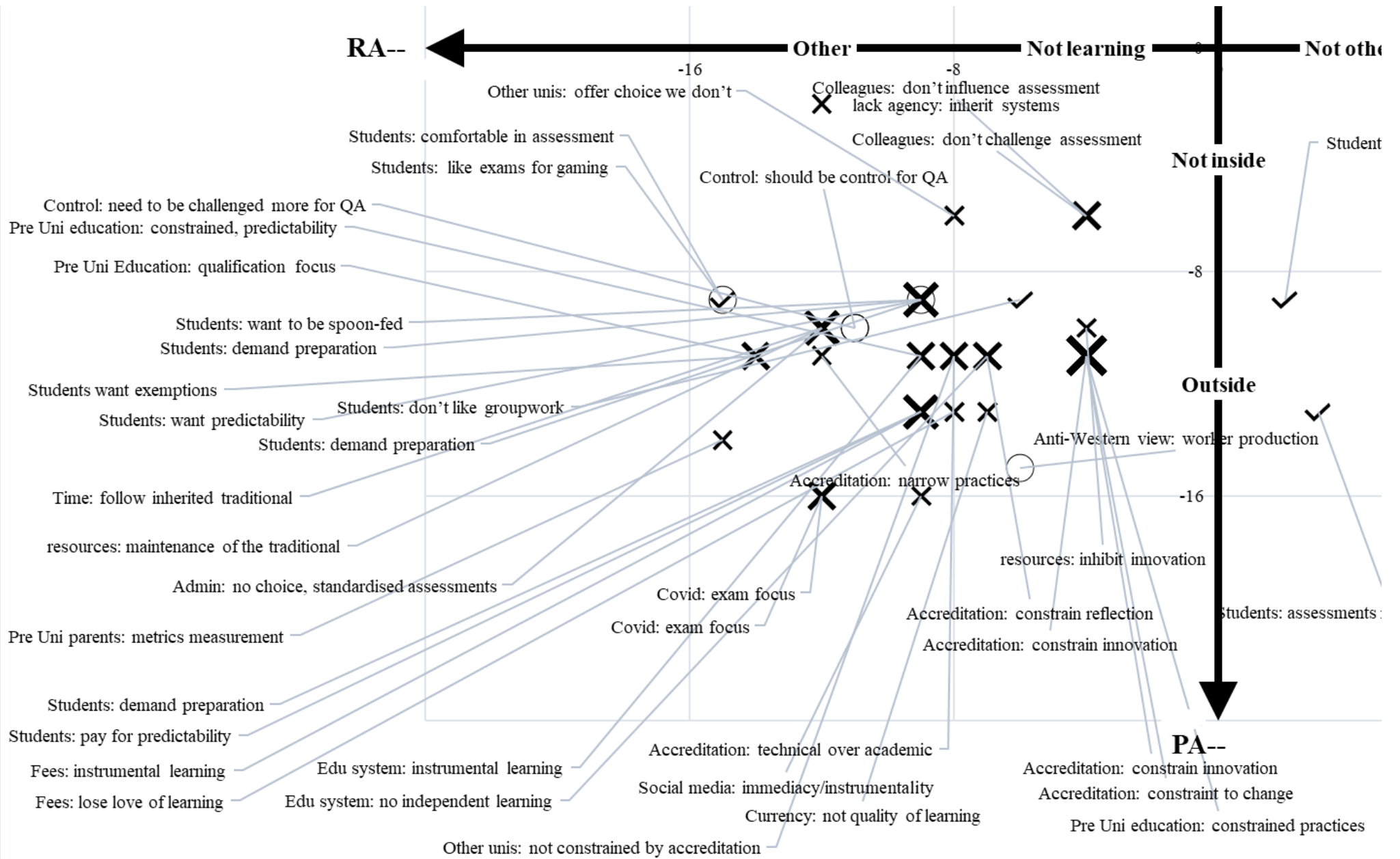


Figure 5.6: Angharad-AF: individual detailed profile extract for exotic code (PA-RA-)

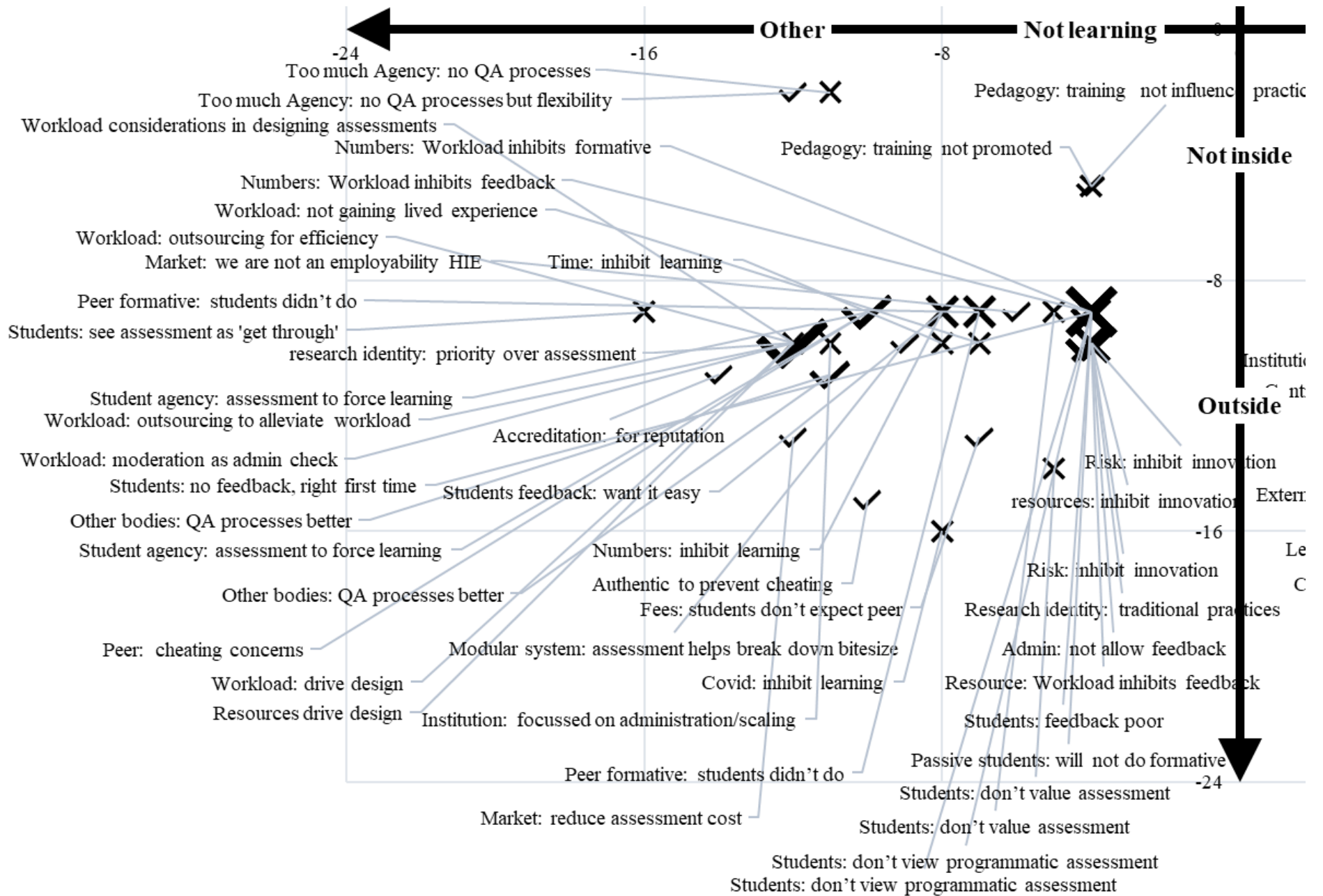


Figure 5.7: Dave-BM: individual detailed profile extract for exotic code (PA-RA-)

Both utilised traditional assessment methods (exams and essay). The profile for Angharad-AF signals outside influence from accreditation bodies (PA--) and oppositional to educational principles (RA-), particularly critical academic liberal conceptions of learning:

frustrated, narrow minded I've had battles with [PSRBs](PA--), real battles ... everything is about a set of technologies and testing your knowledge about the technologies (RA-) ... the professional bodies they don't even have subscriptions to journals (RA-)

(Angharad-AF: Exotic code example)

'Technologies' here were presented as inhibiting critical thinking thus the counterfactual to 'educational/learning' orientations. PSRB constraints were not a feature for Dave-BM, rather their frustrations stemmed from students, risk aversion and workload influences. Thus, whilst profiles across the two individuals (differing disciplines) appear similar, the sources of weakening positional autonomy and threats to academic agency from 'outside' (PA--) that weaken relational autonomy (RA--) can be discipline specific. In this case PSRB control was unique to Accounting.

LCT distinguishes between these sources of influence through strengths, however LCT unites these constraints through viewing practices and principles in terms of basis; i.e., insulation and heteronomy. Here, weakly insulated positions and heteronomous principles are deleterious to assessment innovation across both disciplines. For accounting, the dominance of summative traditional practices (Harrison et al. 2017) regulated by PSRBs (Neumann 2001; Arbaugh 2013), is apparent.

The RTA theme of 'Students are Customers' is particularly emphasised in the Exotic code. Angharad-AF expressed concerns of instrumental consumerism deriving from marketisation and student fees (PA--) leading to a preoccupation with spoon-feeding and satisfaction based on assessment predictability (RA--). Criteria compliance (Torrance 2017) and a 'service provider' orientation (Wong and Chiu 2019) was not considered an autonomous principle of HE (RA--).

Dave-BM also drew on student influence (PA--) as undervaluing both formative assessment and feedback (RA-) driving exotic codes of legitimation (PA--RA-). Conversations about formative assessment, feedback and students inevitably dovetailed to student numbers (PA--)

culminating in institutional workload resource concerns (PA--) and non-educational assessment practice (RA-):

Interviewer: So is there an absence of formative assessment?

Dave-BM: yes, from a practical perspective, is really hard to put any meaningful formative assessment into a module (RA-) unless you can automate the feedback, i.e. a multiple choice test, where computer tells you the answer, the idea that a student will submit a paper to me at week three and I'll give them some feedback on it, formative ideas and they develop the ideas, and that turns into a subsequent summative assessment, that just cant happen (RA-), we don't have enough time (PA--) for summative assessment, formative wise it is the first thing to go isn't it.

(Dave-BM: Exotic code example)

Workload (an institutional mechanism) unanimously attracted negative sentiment significantly influencing assessment, pervading exotic codes. Support for workload legitimatising assessment design decisions (non-educational purpose) was absent with exception of Dave-BM whom evidenced the power of institutional structures and 'workload allocation' systems with pragmatic agreement that resource constraints were legitimate principles upon which to determine assessment design (RA--); specifically marking structures in RGUK and the 20 working day turnaround:

I think we design around the constraints (RA--), I think you have to design with that in mind ... the marking constraint is the big one can you physically turn this around in the amount of time that we have to do it? (PA--)

(Dave-BM: Exotic code example)

As above, institutional influence (PA--) can be detrimental yet attract 'support', however visually one can determine the majority of negative sentiment being associated with weaker relational autonomy (RA/--).

When presented from a person-centred perspective (see Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9) one can zoom out of the exotic code perspectives to interpret relative equity of perspectives across all other quadrants. Despite contentious exotic code perspectives associated with student wants, needs and demands, the introjected code (PA--,RA++) for Angharad-AF emphasised how a

weakening of positional autonomy is not always pejorative. Normatively, despite consumerist concerns, Angharad-AF felt students should influence assessment (PA--) via exercising agency for choice and co-creation in assessment (RA++), thus enhancing student agency through co-creation (Doyle et al. 2019); albeit this did not materialise in actual practice. The nature of the student and their influence in assessment was also strongly reported by Dave-BM, however Dave-BM's occupation in the introjected code was supplemented by a focus on 'authentic assessment' (Villarroel et al. 2018). Despite both participants occupying spaces across the sovereign and projected codes with some shared perspectives (e.g. the burden of agency in the projected code (PA++, RA--)), the basis of legitimacy elsewhere differs, for example Dave-BM rests much emphasis on colleague influence for both educational (RA++) and non-educational (RA--) purposes.

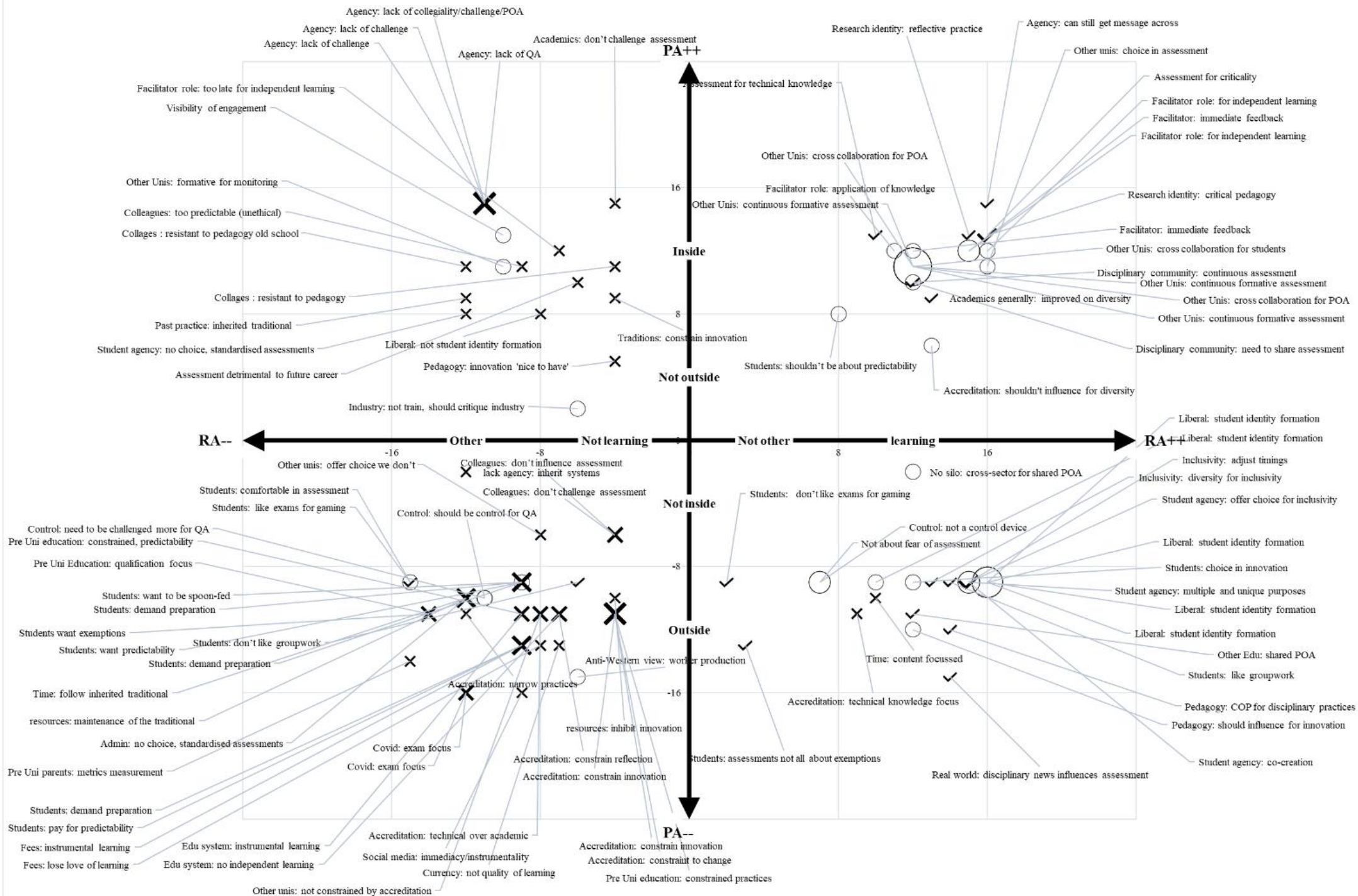


Figure 5.8: Angharad-AF individual profile emphasising exotic code (PA-RA-)

In conjunction with a flawed or detrimental institutional influence, the notable *absence* of institutional influence, the counterfactual (PA+) can also inhibit assessment scholarship and good practice (RA-) leading to projected codes (PA+,RA-). Likewise, absences of institutional support structures for academics may exasperate and amplify ‘unsupported’ agency of individuals (PA++), leaving academics isolated with depleted assessment capital, oppressed. Karl-AF and Tao-BM are provided as examples below of projected codes.

5.2.4 Projected code as a basis of legitimation: Karl-AF (Accounting) and Tao-BM (Business Management)

As depicted in Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11, the projected legitimation code (PA+,RA-) quadrant of the plane was heavily populated despite frequently representing adverse, negative unsupported perceptions.

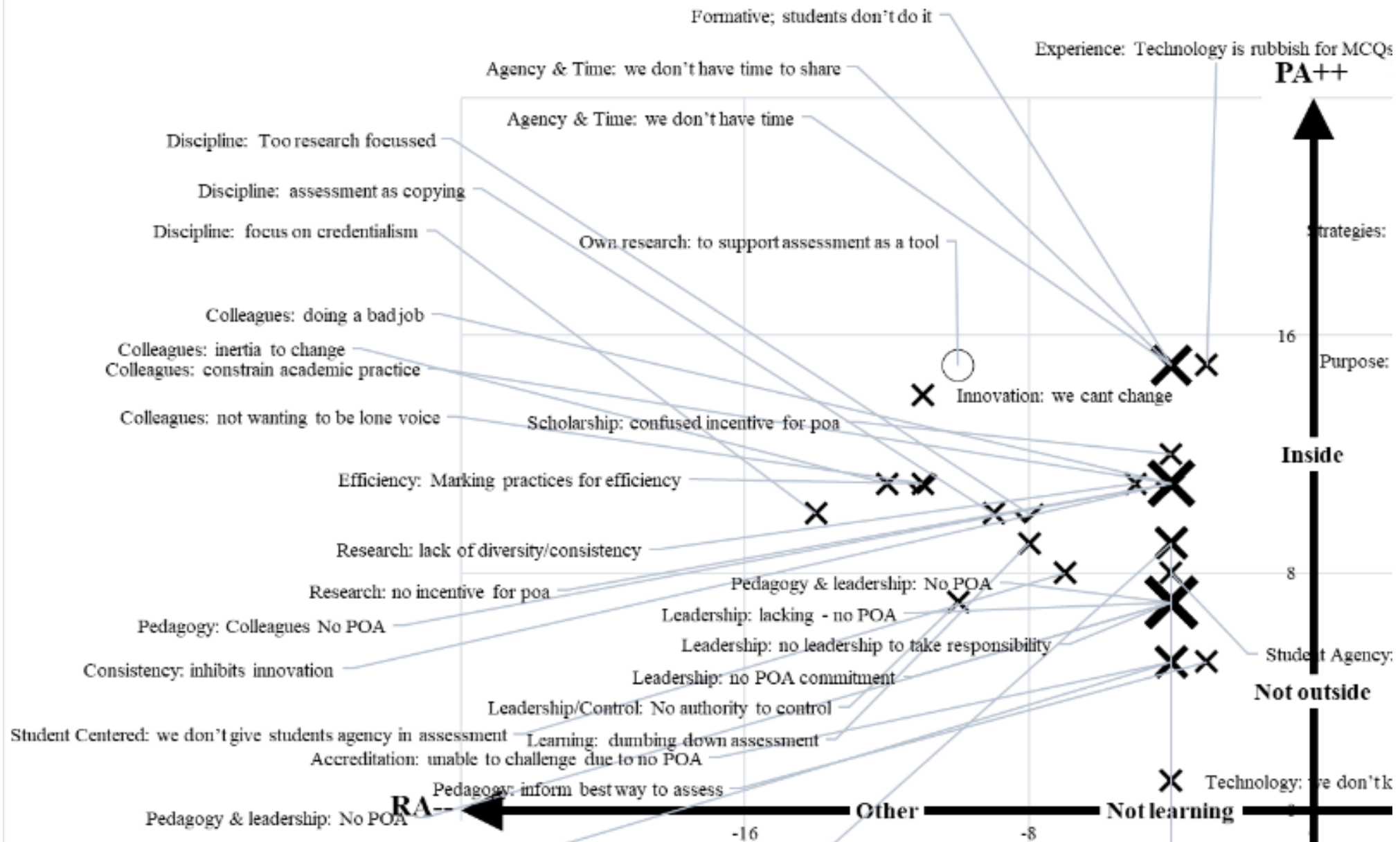


Figure 5.10: Karl-AF: individual detailed profile extract of projected code (PA++RA-)

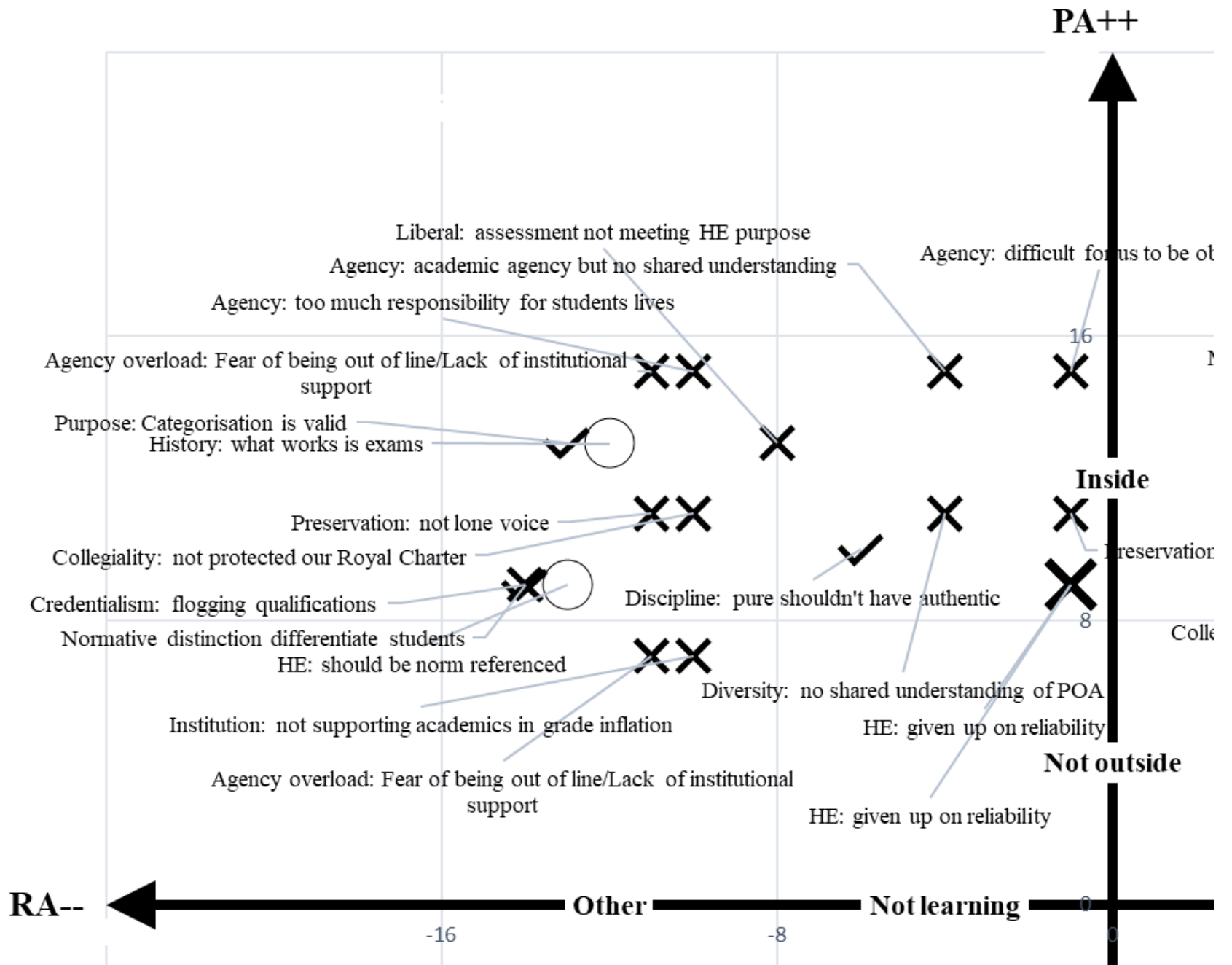


Figure 5.11: Tao-BF: individual profile extract of projected code (PA+RA-)

Karl-AF experienced strong positional autonomy (PA+) yet felt unsupported in their endeavours, attracting negative sentiment, suggestive of non-educational practices (RA-) through an *absence* of educational leadership (outside influence). *'[G]oing it alone'* (Karl-AF) yielded a lack of diversity in design of educational orientated assessments (e.g. online testing and groupwork) (RA-):

I want somebody at the very top, not saying this is what you must do, just saying I can't believe you're not doing this (RA-), ...look at this evidence on group work and that might cause us to change our minds ... I don't think they [management] have any authority or credibility (PA+) to get everybody else to do it, so we're really, we're stuck in a number of ways, really trapped.

(Karl-AF: projected code example)

This positioning in the projected code (PA+,RA-) was possible via the unique design of the translation device, as detailed in Chapter 3, allowing both an *absence* of outside influence (the counterfactual to PA--) to be recognised, alongside an *absence* of educational practices (the counterfactual to RA++). Collectively these determine a positioning in the projected code of inferred stronger positional autonomy and inferred weaker relational autonomy. This is synonymous to abdicating responsibility in the guise of academic autonomy, as Karl-AF argued: *'the leaders they're not making any decisions, they're saying, well, you do what you think is best (PA+)'*.

Absence of educational leadership (PA+) was also cited by Tao-BM but directed at 'other' purposes, being assessment as a technology for engineering grade inflation (RA--). Disparity of institutional marking practices, a lack of academic standards for marking and a lack of quality assurance were all perceived as assessment refuting reliability (RA-) and exasperating grade inflation (RA--). This was aggravated by the significance attached to the 'collegiate', to a collective habitus, and 'needing' to stay in line, or 'attuned' (Kligyte 2023) with colleagues (PA++). In consequence Tao-BM experienced what was referred in 'The perils of Academic Agency' theme as 'agency overload', embarking in non-educational practices, regarding *'changing the floor'* (Tao-BM) for marking and *'resolving to soften up'* (Tao-BM).

Out of kilter with the majority, Tao-BM expressed normative accounts within the projected code, in that assessment should fulfil a categorisation function (RA--); that is to legitimately differentiate between learners for academic purposes as opposed to individualised student

learning/educational purposes. Tao-BM alluded to a preference for distinguishing academic achievement via norm-referenced systems, as opposed to criterion-referenced systems that characterised RGUK and UK HE systems broadly, in line with QAA guidance¹¹⁹.

Of interest in the person-centred profiles, as per Figure 5.12 and Figure 5.13 is the degree of projected code dominance. Tao-BM's dispersal pattern suggests a dominance of projected code in conjunction with relatively similar dispersal patterns across the other three codes, however Karl-AF's profile is suggestive of a focus on PA+/++ basis of legitimacy, i.e. projected and sovereign codes. There appears a relatively random and broad dispersal in the sovereign code versus a tighter 'clumped dispersal' in the exotic. Particular themes emphasised in the exotic include a focus on research orientation of the institution and accreditation.

¹¹⁹ The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment and the UK Quality Code adhere to criterion based referencing systems.

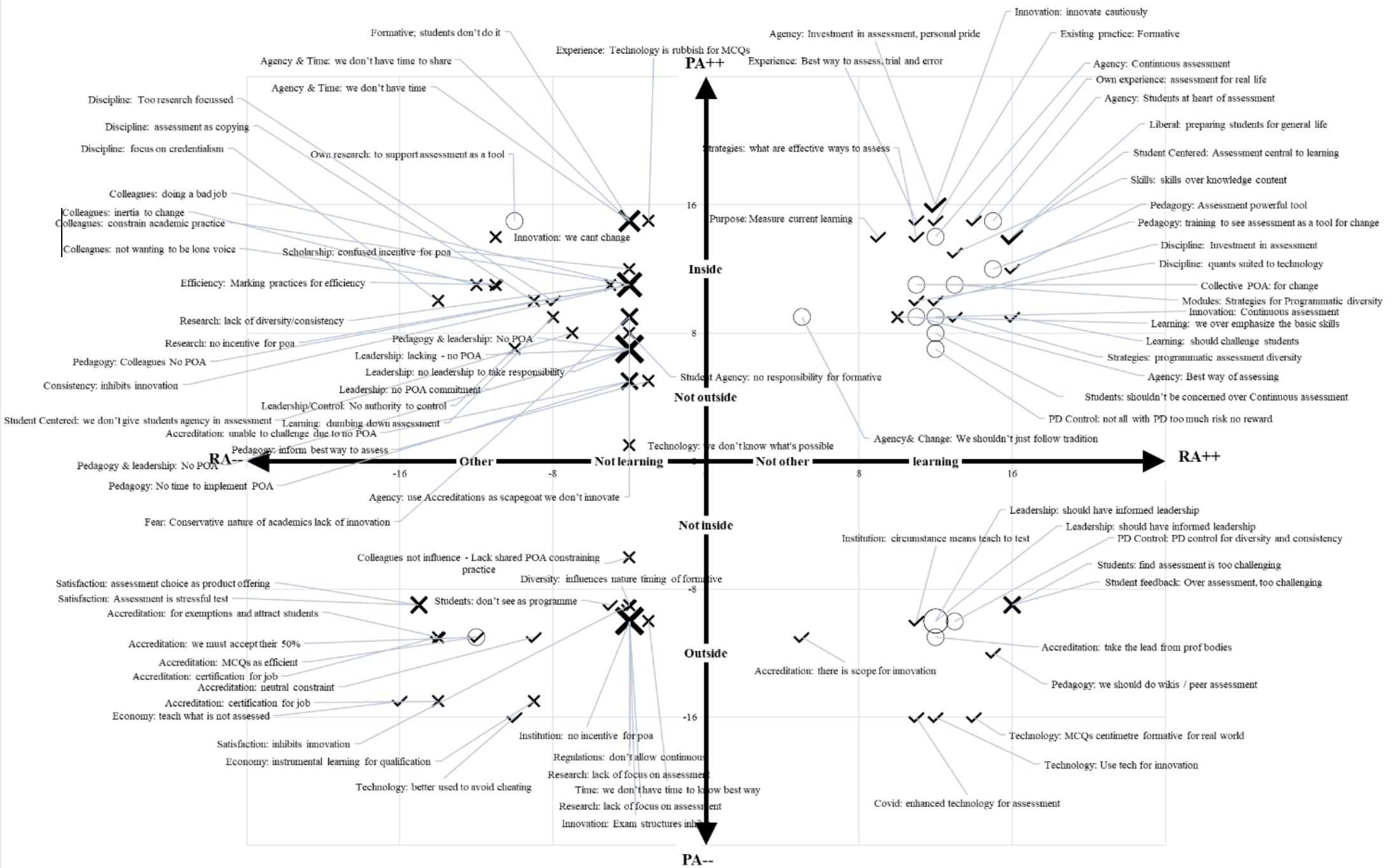


Figure 5.12: Karl-AF individual profile example of projected code (PA+RA-) and sovereign code (PA+,RA+)

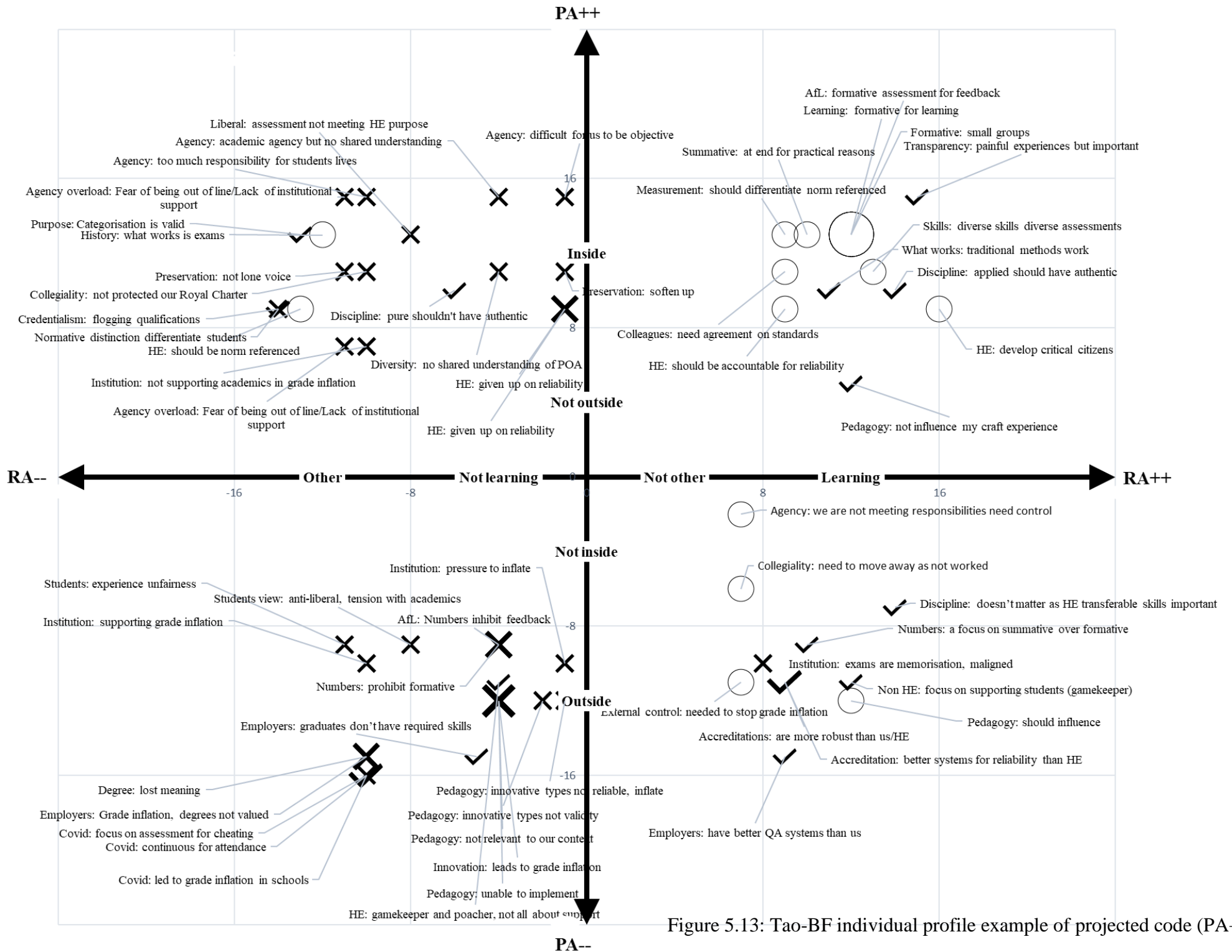


Figure 5.13: Tao-BF individual profile example of projected code (PA+RA-)

A minority of academics failed to evidence strong projected legitimization codes, Eskiva-BM is provided as a case in point (see Figure 5.15), failing to demonstrate significant occupation in the projected and exhibiting stronger sovereign and introjected codes.

5.2.5 *Introjected discussion: Eskiva-BM (Business)*

Across the profiles, the introjected code was the least dominant code per individual, reflective of the consensus of academic agency in assessment (PA++) as denoted in sovereign or projected profiles. However Eskiva-BM as shown below and in full in Figure 5.15, and likewise Owen-BM, as shown in Figure 5.5, demonstrated a strong emphasis both normatively and empirically of pedagogic influence (PA--), coupled with real-life economic influence from the field of practice and industry (PA--) giving rise to authentic, non-traditional assessments utilising assessment modes of presentation, reflective work, essays and collaborative groupwork (RA++). Eskiva-BM particularly discussed embedding pedagogic research into their practice (PA--):

I've certainly tried to attend more training, and I read more (PA--) ... just trying to think why we're assessing and how we can do that in more innovative, creative ways that suit students, more diverse students with different needs (RA++). ... just giving students from all abilities, a chance to be able to express their learning in an in a different way (RA++)

Despite not explicitly referencing inclusivity in learning and teaching (Hockings 2010), the work of Universal Design for Learning (Rose 2000; Hitchcock et al. 2002) or related pedagogic advancements of assessment for social justice (McArthur 2016), Eskiva-BM was evidencing inclusive assessment thinking (RA++); this was rare in the interviews with possible exception of Angharad -AF placing firm emphasis on student identity in the sovereign code..

However, across the interviews there was scant, to no, discussion of differential award gaps and the BAME attainment gap (MacDonnell and Bisel 2021) despite HE sector advances in this field and introduction of the Advance HE Race Equality Charter in 2014 (Campion and Clark 2022). This is symbolic of the lack of assessment scholarship and literacy across participants (Price et al. 2012; Forsyth et al. 2015; Medland 2019). However, the timing of the interviews in 2021 were prior to considerable momentum in this field with the 'Assessment for inclusion' agenda (Tai et al. 2021; Nieminen 2022a,b).

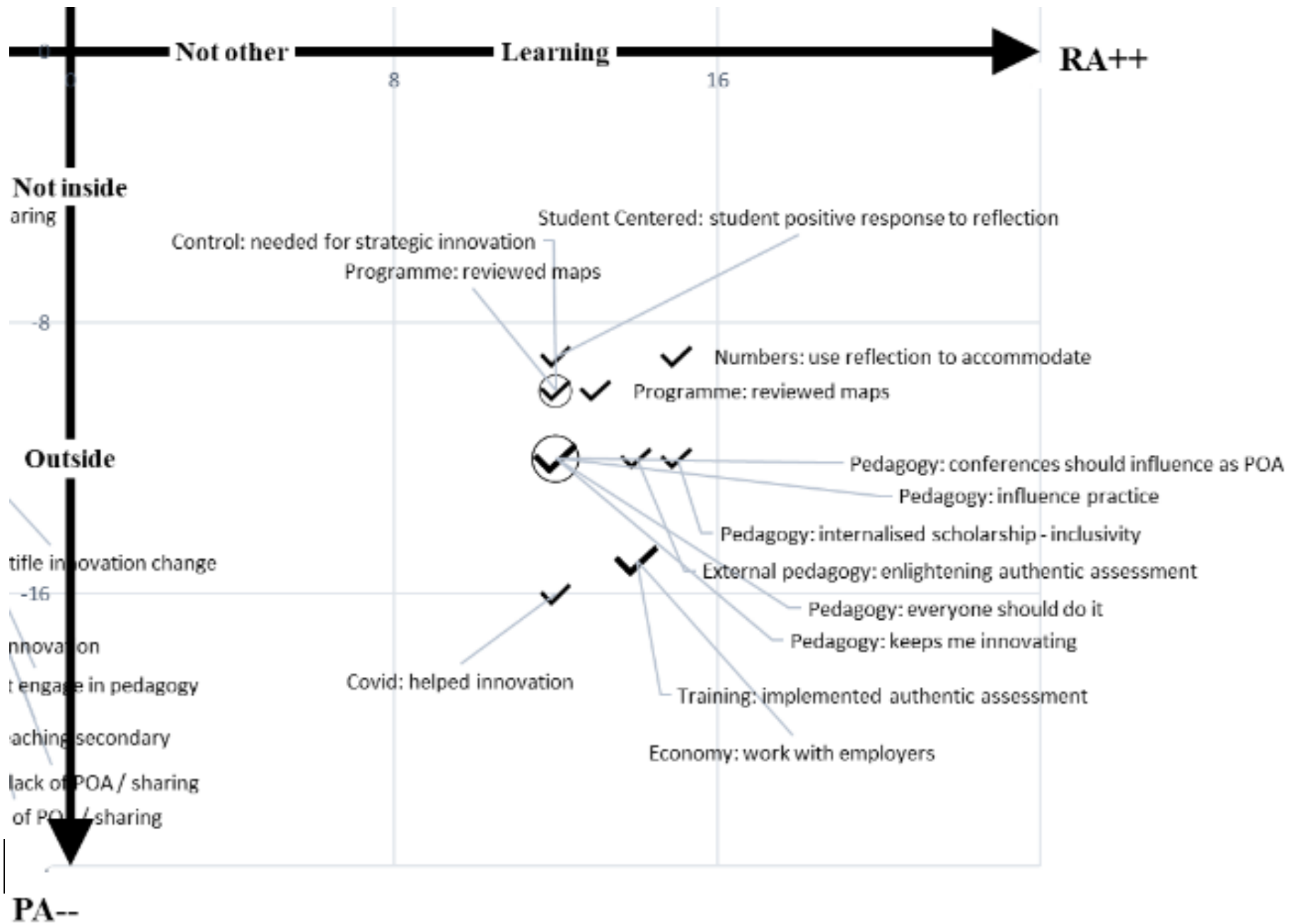


Figure 5.14: Eskiva-BM: individual detailed profile extract for introjected code (PA+,RA+)

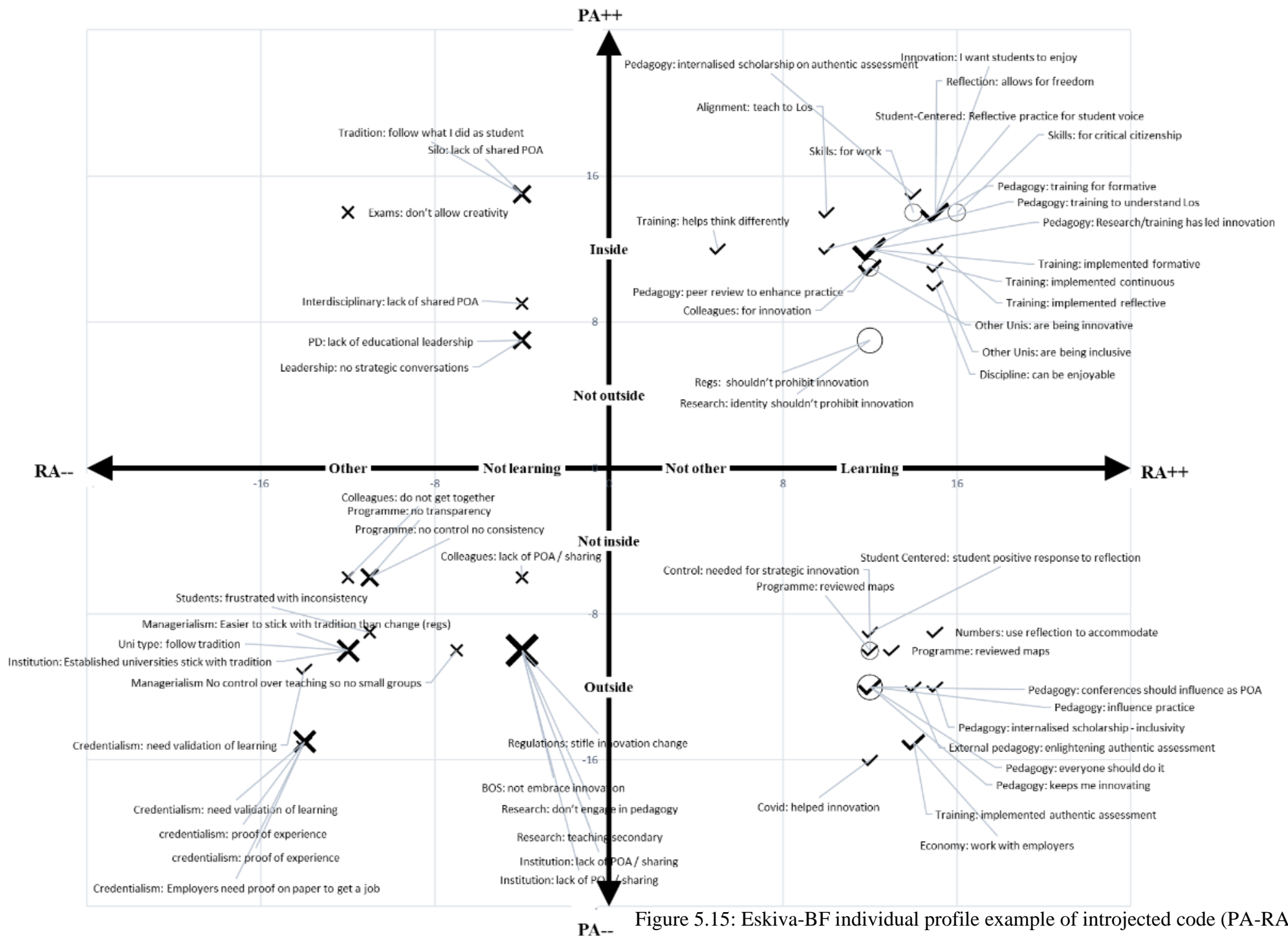


Figure 5.15: Eskiva-BF individual profile example of introjected code (PA-RA+)

5.2.6 Staged Analysis 2: Individual LCT Summary Profiles

Given the detailed profiles, analysis to understand potential patterns or clusters of legitimization codes was undertaken via the second layer of extrapolation and the development of Individual LCT Summary Profiles (n=11). Two profiles are shown below for illustration those of Angela-AF (see Figure 5.16) and Xinyi-BM (see Figure 5.17). The further nine summary profiles are shown in Appendix J- Individual LCT Summary Profile.

The unit of analysis was the paragraph or interview question response, as determined by the researcher given engagement with the data and translation device. The summary profiles enabled a ‘zooming out’ from the detail and the ability to summarise pertinent arguments in visual form. This coarser level of granularity enables high-level comparisons to be made, for example Angela-AF occupies much space in both the exotic and projected codes, whereas Xinyi-BM evidences alternative perspectives, occupying sovereign and introjected positions.

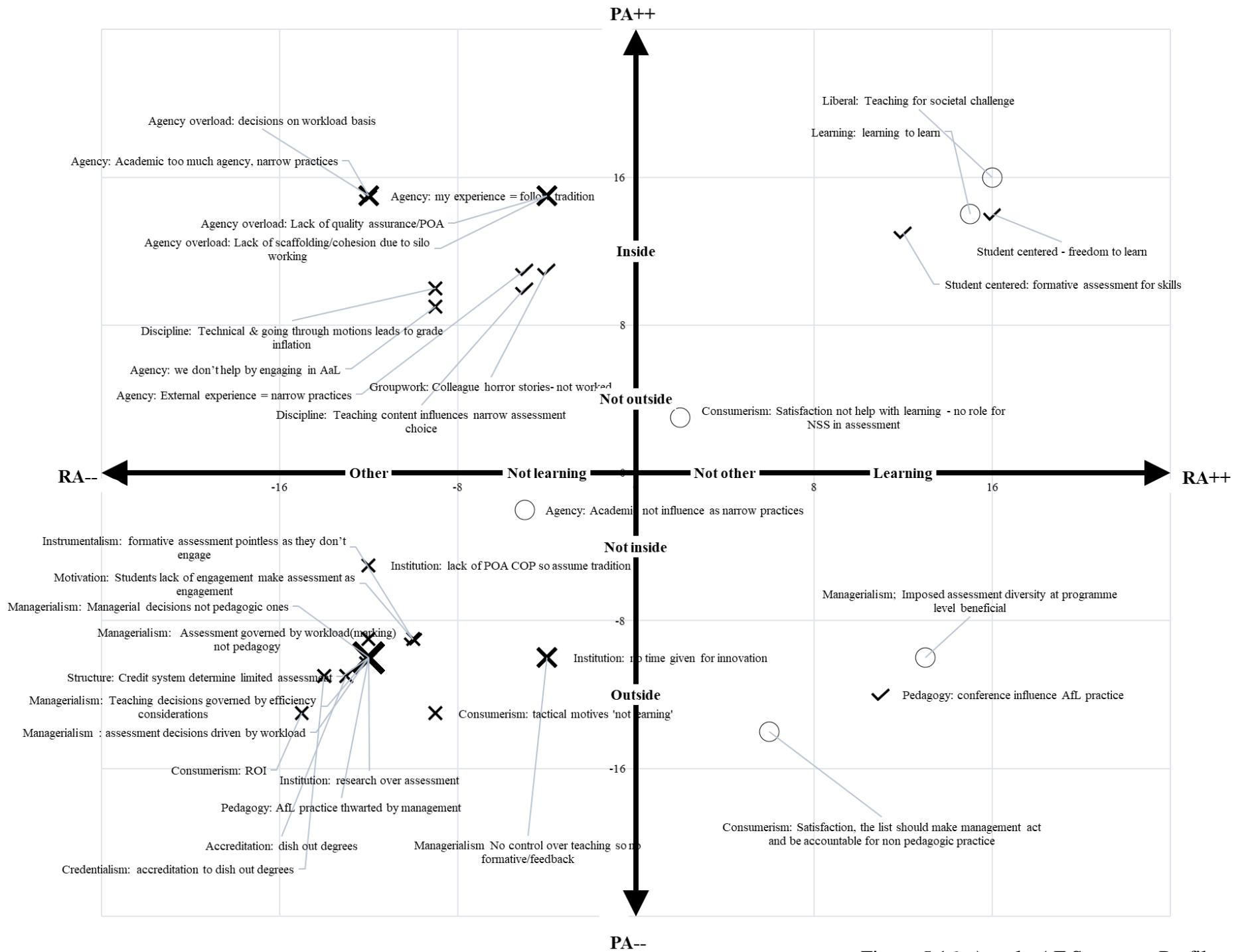


Figure 5.16: Angela-AF Summary Profile

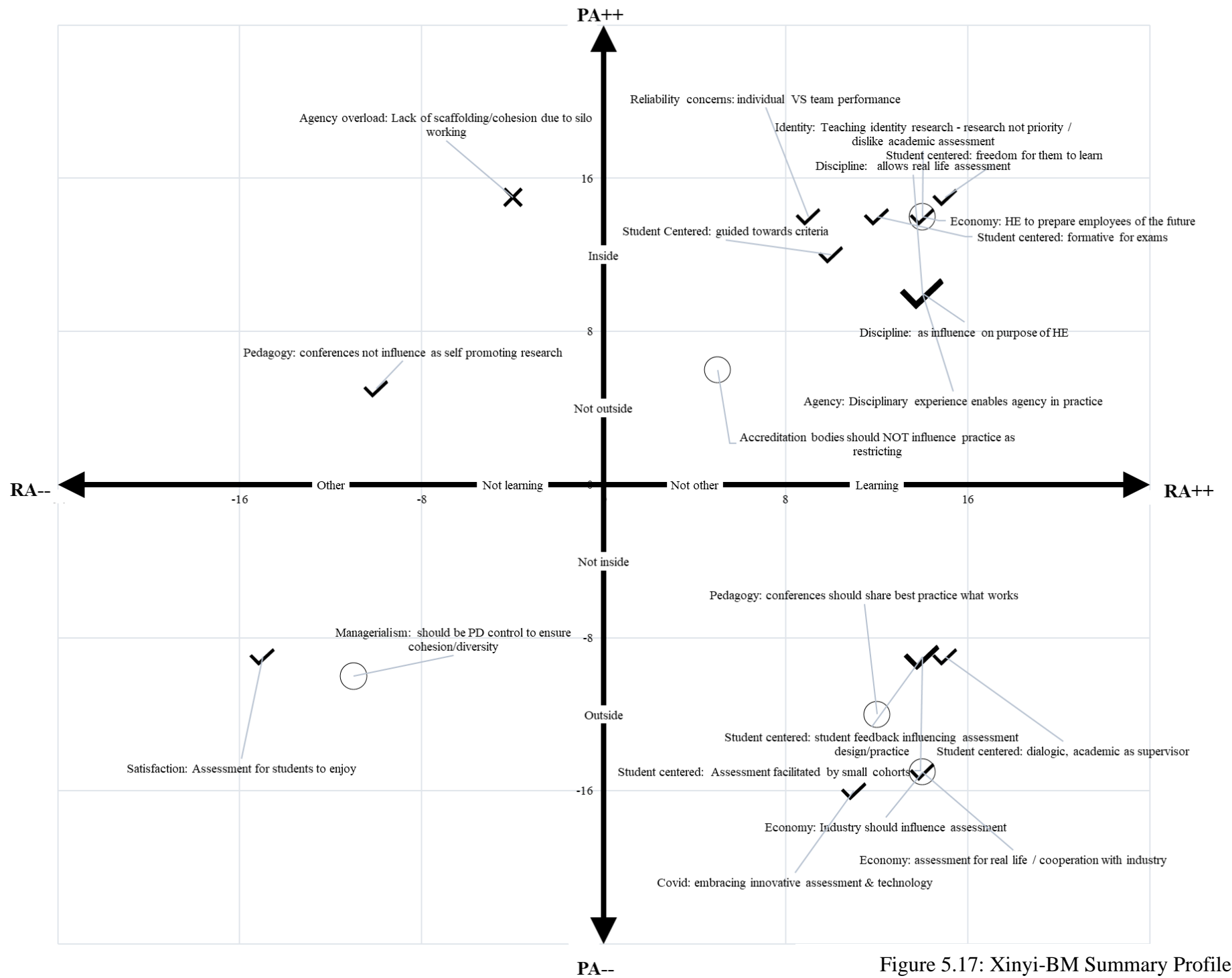


Figure 5.17: Xinyi-BM Summary Profile

These counter-perspectives as exhibited between Angela-AF and Xinyi-BM were not typical in the data. Participants generally demonstrated multiple languages of legitimation; with several individuals demonstrating practices and perspectives mapped across all four quadrants (Will-AF, Oakley-AF, Mahir-BM, Tamara-BM). This signified variation in the legitimation of practices. Rather, here Angela-AF and Xinyi-BM provide evidence of bifurcation, or polarisation of perspectives. Person specific profiles are therefore usefully considered in understanding assessment types, here Angela-AF felt constrained (PA--) to the use of examinations and assessment driven by ‘other’ purposes (RA--) whilst Xinyi-BM felt strongly that their discipline (PA++) and real-life orientation (PA--) enabled more authentic forms of assessment (RA++) to be used in conjunction with a traditional examination.

Some profiles demonstrated a clear deficit in terms of introjected codes (PA-, RA+) (Harry, Joanne, Radyr) lacking any evidence for outside influence (PA-) where assessment perceptions and practices could enhance student learning (RA+). Other profiles significantly emphasised exotic codes (PA-,RA-) (Dorain, Angela), highlighting non-educational (RA-) or pragmatic purposes (RA--). Two cases failed to significantly occupy the exotic code (PA-,RA-) one taking up sovereign codes (PA+,RA+) (Xinyi-BM) whilst another emphasised the projected code (PA+,RA-) (Garfield-BM).

The variations of positioning are representations of the diversity of individual academics themselves, their capital, their habitus and thus their *positions* and *position takings* in the field. These legitimation codes uncover diversity in languages of legitimation despite academics working in the same institutional environment, exposed to similar institutional structures and conditions (albeit to differing extents), and diversity within academic communities of Accounting or Business departments. This diversity acknowledges how “assessment capital and assessment habitus of individuals, programs and disciplines varies deeply” (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 181) and how academics embody the structures around them (James 2014).

The profiles demonstrate a plethora of complex perspectives, or *position takings* that are relational to influences or *positions* in the field. Through LCT we understand autonomy within the field, and the extent to which the *position takings* ‘mirror’, or not, those related positions occupied (Maton, 2005). The findings enable moves away from dichotomised thinking to identify ‘contradictory modalities of autonomy’ (Maton, 2005) i.e. introjected and projected codes where PA and RA move independently; to explain “tensions within the practices and

identities of institutions and actors within higher education” (ibid, p700). These contradictory modalities reach beyond Bourdieu’s principles of hierarchisation and the two ‘poles’ of a field, addressing the espoused limitations of a Bourdieusian approach, i.e. social reductionism (Maton 2005).

Whilst profiles afforded insight into ‘spacial occupations’ within legitimation codes, these profiles do not in isolation allude to patterns possessing inferential properties, that is to say to apply simplistic stratification on the basis of gender, contract type, discipline or other means would fall foul of essentialism and segmentalism (Maton and Howard 2018) and overlook the complexities of assessment as a social practice (Filer 2000) deeply rooted in academic identity (Bearman et al. 2017); individual and collective habitus (Bourdieu 1993); and moderated by varying forms of capital (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023). Rather one needs to zoom-out, to undertake a sociocultural perspective, to recognise how under virtually identical circumstances individuals will have different experiences due to different positioning within the culture (James and Biesta 2007). That is a learning cultures approach:

learning cultures exist through the actions, dispositions and interpretations of the participants. They exist through interaction and communication and are (re)produced by individuals just as much as individuals are (re)produced by learning cultures

(James and Biesta 2007, p. 4)

Given that people make cultures (James and Biesta 2007), this thesis proposes that profiles allow for ‘layering’ of person-centred approaches to identify cultural patterns or tendencies. A cultural approach considers how beliefs, principles, and practices ‘cluster together’ by virtue of both structure and agency (Ashwin 2008), in this case by clustering of legitimation code spacial occupations affording generalisability. Identifying commonality or clusters of perspectives and the relative basis for their legitimation marks the next section of the thesis and is oriented to addressing Research Question 3 of the study, that is to understand the interactions between *perceptions* and *influences* on assessment in a theoretically informed way .

5.3 Cultural understandings

5.3.1 Staged Analysis 3: Assessment Cultures and zooming out

The literature review presented assessment cultures as posited in the literature. It claimed work in this field was scarce with a small number of (contested)¹²⁰ contributions (Birenbaum 2016; Fuller et al. 2016; James 2017; Skidmore et al. 2018; Ylonen et al. 2018; Winstone and Boud 2019; Nieminen and Atjonen 2023). Recently Simper et al. (2022) utilised the term however, Chapter 2 proposed a unique definition for this thesis, as deriving from the work of David James and colleagues. An assessment culture is:

a complex socio-cultural configuration comprising interconnected elements that govern and mediate the practices and perceptions of assessment within higher educational contexts.

(Forde-leaves, forthcoming, adapted from James (2017))

This thesis, and the developed translation device place few restrictions on what may comprise ‘elements’ of culture, recognising micro, meso and macro mechanisms and structures that relationally shape the field. The elements are acknowledged as strengths of positional autonomy (PA) and the practices and perceptions acknowledged as strengths of relational autonomy (RA). In this way LCT enables ‘all possibilities’ to be seen, incorporating a multitude of cultural ‘elements’ (James 2017). LCT achieves this through the axes of the cartesian plane that:

represent continua of organizing principles, which allow data to be located anywhere in the space, generating a potentially infinite number of options

(Maton 2024 forthcoming)

In line with James (2017) these elements are not mere ‘contexts’, they ‘permit, promote, inhibit or prevent’ (p112) activities, in this case assessment activities. Assessment cultures in this study thus represent amalgamations of perspectives and practice that are clustered by beliefs, perceptions, ‘sayings and doings’ (Boud et al. 2018b) (RA), and understood in terms of ‘causality’ and recognition of their underlying influences, or generative mechanisms (Bhaskar

¹²⁰ This refers to the US versus UK nature of the term ‘assessment cultures’.

2008) to understand ‘what makes it happen’ (Sayer 1992) (PA). The positioning of practices and their relative strength or weaknesses in terms of positional and relational autonomy enables the basis of legitimacy to be known and cultures/subcultures to be defined.

To undertake a cultural approach, amalgamation of all occupations/coordinates across PA and RA is necessary. A consolidation of all detailed and summary mappings is therefore shown below drawn from the sub-sample of 18 interviews.

In total 1052 data points were analysed across both detailed and summary profiles as shown in Figure 5.18: Consolidated Data - total data observations (n=1052). As an illustration, in this clustering by number of data observations, a mapping at point (PA=-10,RA=-4) aligning to ‘Institution identity’ (PA-10) and an absence of a shared professionalisation of assessment (RA-4) was occupied or mapped by 40 observations (n=40), arising from participants including Bob-AF (7 observations); Dave-BM (3 observations); Eskiva-BM (6 observations); Karl (5 observations). Given that one individual may express several observations and not to over-emphasise quantity, i.e. number of observations recorded by individuals, a further analysis was conducted plotting the number of individuals (n=18) that expressed perspectives at those relative coordinates, shown in Figure 5.19: Consolidated Data - total participants (n=18). To continue the example of the coordinates (PA=-10,RA=-4), in adopting this approach it was reported that 13 of the 18 participants raised this observation and thus the position would be mapped as n=13. This latter approach was deemed the less biased of the two. It is this person-centred positioning that is used for the basis of determining cultures as not to over-emphasise individual emphasis on one mapping point¹²¹.

¹²¹ Essentially one individual’s data may be coded at a specific set of coordinates 5 times, whereas another participant may cite this only once. The former approach using data observations would class the coordinates as being inhabited 6 times, whereas a person-centered positioning would class this as being inhabited by two individuals.

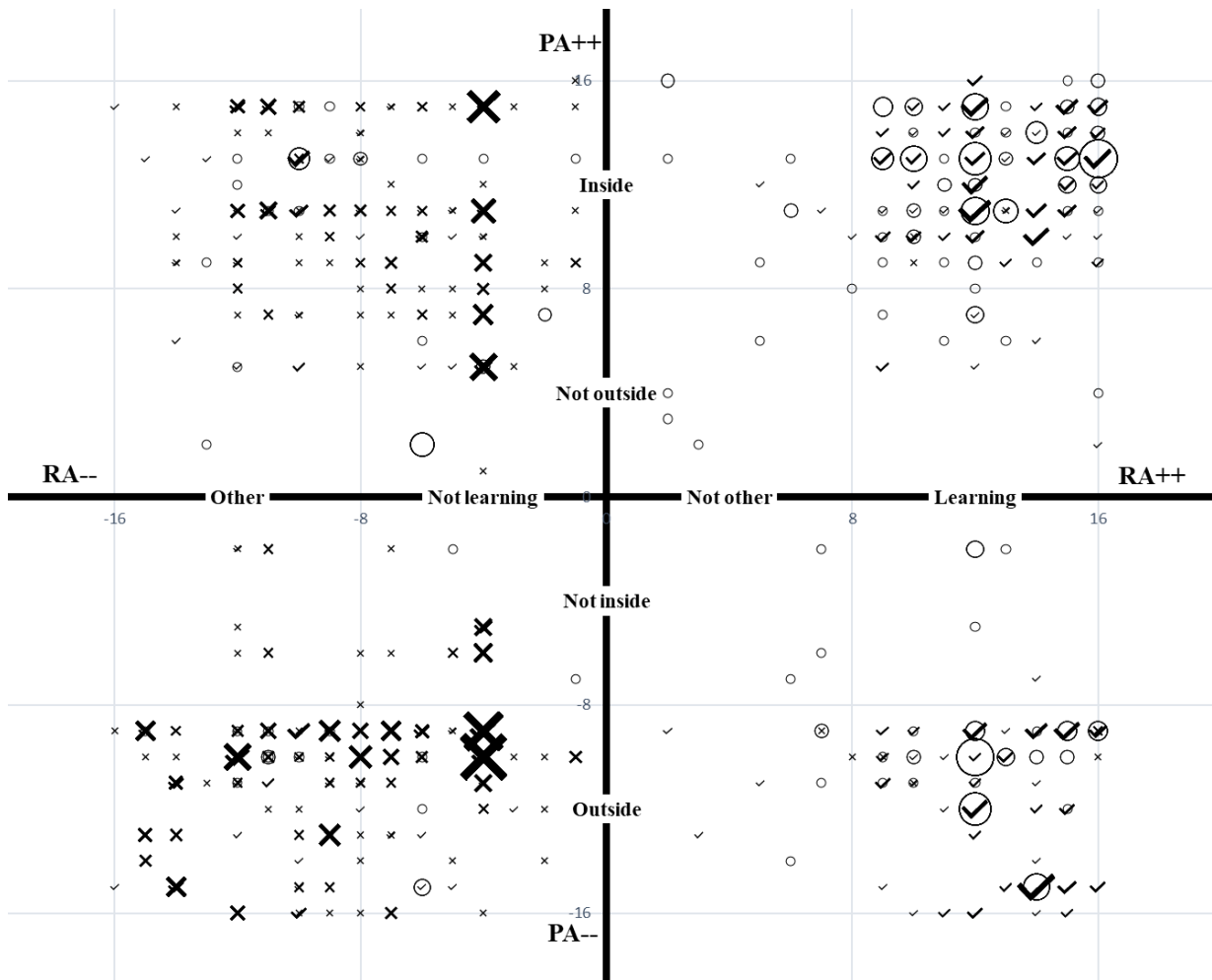


Figure 5.18: Consolidated Data - total data observations (n=1052)

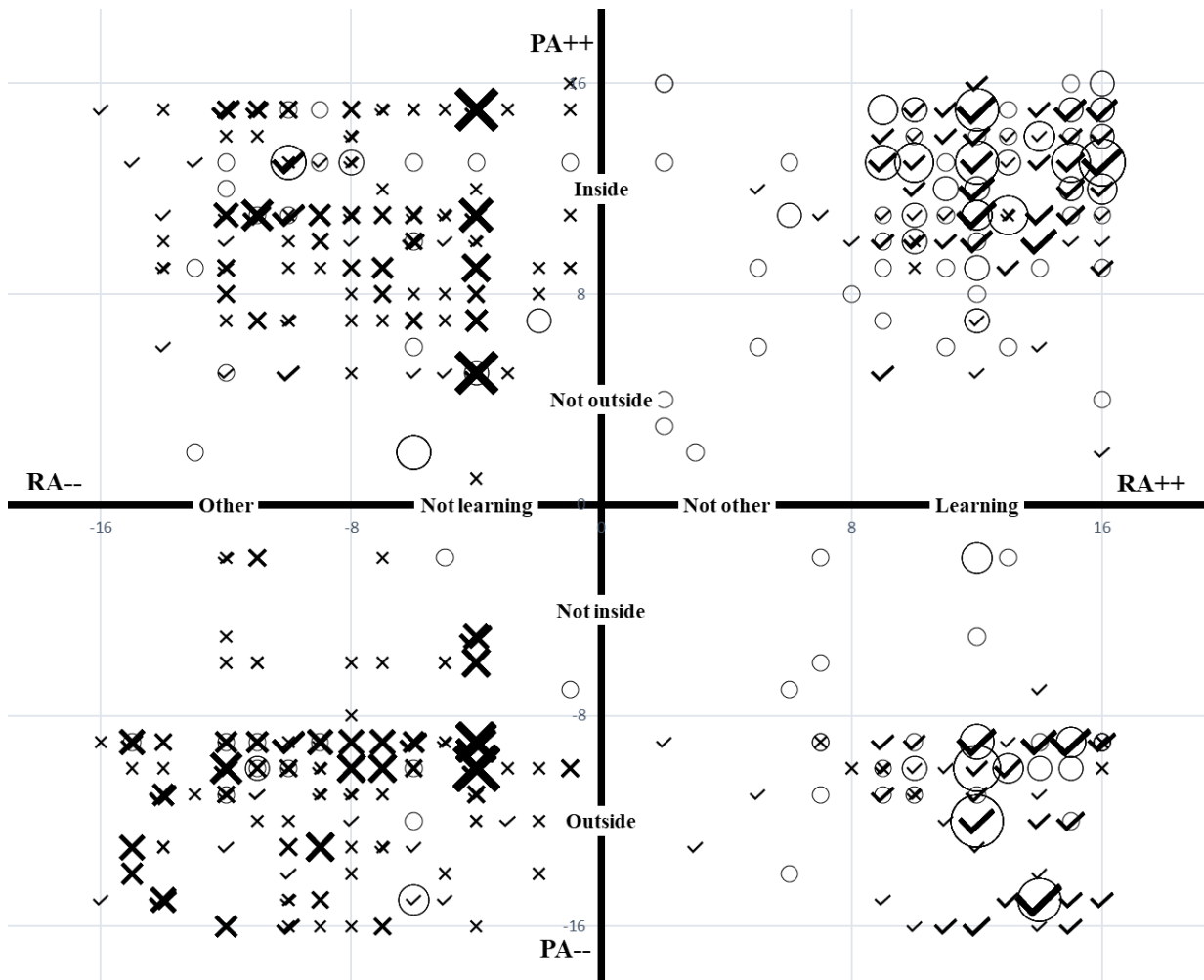


Figure 5.19: Consolidated Data - total participants (n=18)

As depicted above, there was little variation in either analysis yet frequency of discrete individuals occupying coordinates, was deemed more representative across the sample (n=18).

Each legitimation code comprises a space of possibilities and ‘intra-code’ spaces exist, essentially depicted by four inner quadrants, due to absences and counterfactuals. As the consolidated data shows the projected and exotic codes demonstrate more occupation of these ‘counterfactual’ spaces (as opposed to their sovereign and introjected counterparts) denoted by a lack of both inside (PA-) and outside influence (PA+) giving rise to the counterfactual of educational purposes (RA-). An absence of influence informs cultural traits, in equal measure to the presence of influence, enabling researchers to ‘see’ the ‘unseen’. These previously uninhabited spaces, along with those that remain uninhabited in the accumulated data above tell a story:

The analytics of LCT demonstrate how relational thinking can radically expand the space of possible phenomena ... planes and profiles encourage researchers to think generatively by imagining what else could occur that embodies different strengths of organizing principles than those found in the data at hand. What are the codes not taken?

(Maton 2024 forthcoming)

A second value of the consolidated perspective is the ‘zooming out’ to acknowledge axiology or sentiment. Broadly educational purposes of assessment (RA+/++) were supported, i.e. positive sentiment, whilst non-educational (RA-) or pragmatic purposes (RA--) were unsupported, or negative sentiment. A caveat to reiterate here is that whilst the supported (✓) / unsupported (X) markers may suggest axiological ‘value’ the use of LCT codes generally in themselves does not ascribe axiological value (e.g. practices in an exotic code can be deemed equally as ‘moral’ as sovereign code). However, given the ‘target’ (Maton and Howard 2018) is educational purposes (RA+/++) this is likely to attract positive axiological charging.

5.4 The cultural types

Each of the four legitimation codes offer their own cultural typology based on the modality of the PA and RA interactions. Cultures are determined on the basis of legitimation, the insulation and boundaries around constituents and relations, akin to “a set of affordances and constraints” (James 2014, p. 160). However, LCT is not constrained to four types alone, this would negate and conflate the complex array of influences and perspectives and disregard the clustering as extrapolated from the data analysis. Maton (2024 forthcoming) concurs in that in offering only four options:

such a ‘plane’ is a typology masquerading as a topology, it offers four boxes and not infinite positions, it is a cargo cult imitation that fails to bring planes or their benefits

(Maton 2024 forthcoming para.5)

Thus, the four legitimation codes give rise to four high-level cultures, and within these ten sub-cultures are identified from the data analysed. Each sub-culture is characterised within its respective legitimation code by virtue of strengthening or weakening PA and RA:

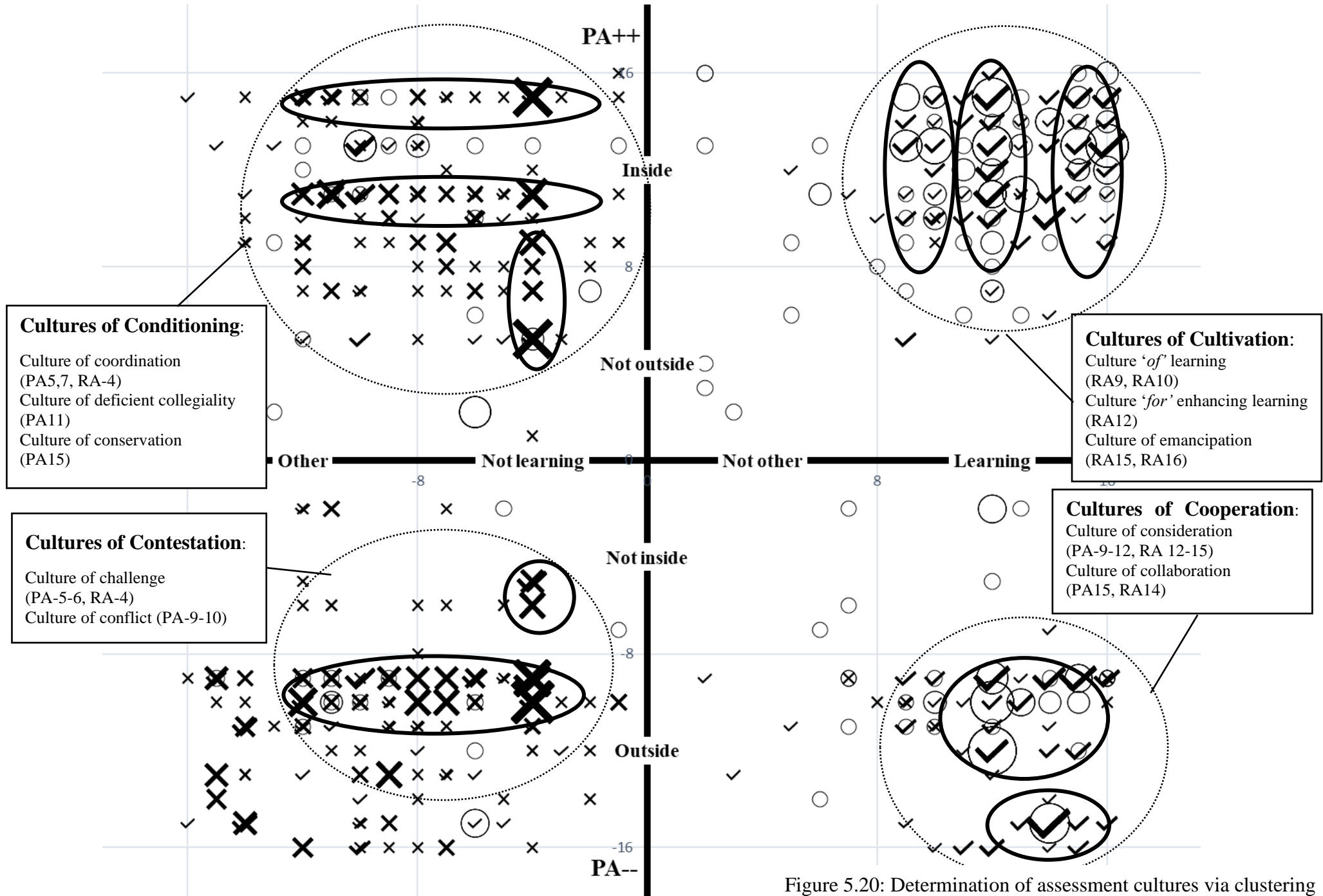


Figure 5.20: Determination of assessment cultures via clustering

The four main cultures are shown below along with ten sub-cultures and a brief synopsis of elements that distinguish such sub-cultures:

Projected code (PA+,RA-) Cultures of Conditioning:		Sovereign code (PA+,RA+) Cultures of Cultivation:	
Coordination	Absence of leadership and scholarship	‘of’ learning	Assessment of learning: measurement for evaluation of educational gains (process over function)
Deficient collegiality	Colleague influence inimical to education	‘for’ enhancing learning	Formative, innovative diverse modes
Conservation	Oppression, lone voice	Emancipation	Liberal learning, agency, freedom
Exotic code (PA-,RA-) Cultures of Contestation:		Introjected code (PA-,RA+) Cultures of Cooperation:	
Conflict	Workload, numbers, institution and students (consumerist undertones)	Consideration	students, management as oversight and pedagogy ‘nice to have’s’
Challenge	Absence of academic collegiality in assessment	Collaboration	Industry, real world engagement

Table 5-2: Four assessment cultures and ten sub-culture topology

The four main cultures represent four basis/bases of legitimation underlying perceptions and practices of assessment. Within these four modalities are sub-cultures defined in terms of their nuanced differences in PA and/or RA. Each culture and sub-cultural type is not mutually exclusive in terms of whom can be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of such a culture. They maintain the definition as per James (2014, p. 160), as “a set of affordances and constraints” however individuals can evidence multiple conceptions of what is deemed legitimate, thus positioning themselves in multiple cultures. The multiple positioning on the plane recognises how assessment is a ‘social space ... defined by the intersection of a range of influences’ (James 2014). What is pertinent here is how the cultures are bounded, and thus identifiable. Cultures have their own properties, their own elements that are intrinsic to particular practices (James 2014, p. 160). Thus cultures, and sub-cultures possess their own intrinsic ‘structuring principles of practice’ (Maton and Howard 2018) or evidence their own ‘basis/bases of legitimation’. Given this an assessment sub-culture can be defined in terms of being a distinct subgroup within an assessment culture characterised by specific underlying structuring principles of practice. These sub-cultures thus differ in their basis of legitimation, varying in terms of both insulation of academics positions in their assessment practice and the degree to which assessment is orientated to autonomous educational principles.

5.5 *Sovereign code Cultures of Cultivation (PA+,RA+)*

Cultures of cultivation reflect the cultivation of knowledge and skills required for assessment *of* learning immediate tasks, assessment *for* future learning/future tasks and assessment *as* lifelong learning beyond HE. This transience and task-specificity aligns somewhat to the three paradigmatic approaches in assessment (Chong 2018). In contrast to cultural references as singular phenomena (Dysthe 2007; Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh 2008) three sub-cultures evidence alignment to educational purpose, positioning assessment as any/all three tranches, acknowledging multiparadimicity. Cultures can be both complimentary and contested given individuals' dispositions. This enables disruption of false either/or dichotomies in assessment.

The three sub-cultures are characterised by strongly insulated positions, thus strong positional autonomy (PA+/++) and autonomous principles, thus strong relational autonomy (RA+/++). At its strongest PA was deeply engrained in the life of the academic, e.g. Madeline-AF influenced by envisioning her own children and assessment. Academics drew from prior teaching and assessment experience, their own disciplinary backgrounds e.g. being a sociologist or economist, their own research or pedagogic identities, e.g. being a critical researcher or a scholar of learning and teaching, their own '*painful*' experiences of prior teaching, or their experiences of the '*assessment machine*' and their international experiences¹²². Causal influence from habitus (Bourdieu 1993) extends the maxim 'teach the way they were taught' as per Oleson and Hora (2014) to 'assess the way I was assessed'. Given strong PA accentuating the personal nature of assessment, a plethora of positive emotions surfaced, e.g. Eskiva-BM and Xinyi-BM, offered accounts of the '*love of teaching*' and how they were '*excited*' at working with new innovative assessment types. Similarly Myyry et al. (2020) found positive emotions of joy, compassion, relief, hope and pride in assessment practice.

In addition, within the cultivation cultures, PA extends beyond the micro level of the academic and includes the collegiate, internalised notions of pedagogic training, and wider academic community of practice originating from both within and beyond the institution (e.g. academics at other institutions). In line with Bearman et al. (2017, p. 63) this study finds emphasis on "the social nature of educators' learning ... the value of colleagues' experiences, corridor conversations". The findings suggest a harmonious collegiate, where collegiality is seen as a

¹²² Specific names of individuals are excluded to protect anonymity.

collective of academic autonomous *position* and *position takings* (c.f. culture of deficient collegiality in the projected code). Bearman et al. (2017) suggests improving assessment through professional development goes beyond the ‘individual burden’ of mandatory training, towards building collegiate relationships, akin to Reimann and Wilson (2012). Like this thesis, they hail James’ (2014) Bourdieusian analysis recognising how assessment reflects the overall complex social structures inherent in academia.

For relational autonomy (RA) the sovereign code saw three delineations, each progressing in terms of proximity to target, namely the culture ‘of’ learning (RA9, RA10), culture ‘for’ enhancing learning (RA12) and culture of emancipation (RA15, RA16).

5.5.1 *Sub-Culture ‘of’ learning*

“summative assessment is the way things are done around here”

(Harrison et al. 2017, p. 13)

Characterised by a focus on summative assessment, measurement and evaluation of learning, this culture is termed a culture *of* learning, coinciding with Assessment *of* learning (AoL) (Schellekens et al. 2021; Yang and Xin 2022). Findings concur there is a prevalence or dominance of summative assessment methods (Boud and Falchikov 2005; Lau 2016; Jessop 2019) as opposed to formative methods. Terminology of AoL was not evident suggesting low assessment literacy. Purposes of certification, selection, and accountability (Falchikov 2013) do not over-shadow this culture, rather the emphasis was measurement of learning; thus needs of ‘other’ stakeholders (grade generation and certification) (Tai et al. 2018) were not the foci. This culture would represent ‘summative good’ (c.f. ‘formative good summative bad’ (Lau 2016)). Despite the demonisation of summative assessment (Taras 2005) the measurement orientation in this culture ‘*of*’ learning recognises and legitimises summative measurement as “a core component of educational evaluation” (Zeng et al. 2018, p. 219). Rather than an educational technology for selecting and certificating individual students (Torrance 2017) this culture perceives of assessment as a process of evaluation of learning.

Chapter 2 evidenced a conflation between assessment ‘process’ (summative assessment processes of judgment) and assessment ‘function’ (assessment for various purposes) exasperating dichotomisation (Taras 2009). This cultural approach in the sovereign quadrant strips apart process and function, recognising function as emanating from academia (PA++) yet processes as being an educational pursuit of making judgements (summative) and/or

providing feedback (formative) (RA++). Interviewees in the culture *of* learning focused on summative process, i.e. the internal, autonomous, academic process of judgment (PA++) as opposed to meeting various functions, orientated outside of academia (PA--). The purpose of assessment being measurement of learning for evaluation of educational gains; often discussed as measurement against learning outcomes (Dave-BM, Karl-AF, Oakley-AF, Robert-BM, Eskiva-BM, Twentyone-AF). Emphasis in this culture was on *'how well the students are learning what we want them to learn'* (Karl-AF). Participants stressed the importance of validity ;

So I (PA++) obviously start with the basics, does this tick the learning outcomes, are we assessing validity, is it fair and reasonable (RA++) those are the sort of academic ingredients

(Dave-BM: Sub-Culture *'of'* learning example)

This cultural type aligns with Lundie (2017); academics placed dominant focus on content-based or syllabus-driven assessment aligned to the learning outcomes on their modules. This modular focus characterised this culture where assessment was discipline, or more specifically, module dependant (PA++), deriving from the hard (Becher 1989) nature of quantifiable, impersonal knowledge forms (Jessop and Maleckar 2016) or complex, open to interpretation (Jessop and Maleckar 2016) softer qualitative focus of the module.

A contentment with *'what works'* (Oakley-AF, Owen-BM) for measurement was also evidenced; favouring traditional methods: the essay as *'the right way to go because that's a formal way of getting them to articulate their understanding'* (Karl-AF) or whether through examinations to measure *'essential technical knowledge that they have, which they must have'* (Angharad-AF). Implications of this was a tacit understanding of what assessment methods were predetermined as *'appropriate'* on the module (Dorian-AF). The generative mechanisms at play here derive from disciplinary and subject orientations, reliant on *'tried and tested'* traditional assessment modes. This pre-disposition to assessment methods and *'product'* over learning *'process'* align with Fernández Ruiz et al. (2022) findings of the *'classic profile'* whereby academics failed to make assessment design decisions prior to selecting the

instrument to be used. Implications include stifled innovation and an overreliance on “practices coherent with the tradition¹²³ in their department” (Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022, p. 616).

The culture ‘*of*’ learning aligns to James (2014) ‘technical perspective’ in part characterised by a focus on fairness, transparency, and coherence between assessment processes and learning outcomes¹²⁴. The culture is open to critique as James (2014) suggests due to the propensity for “codification of learning and knowledge through devices like learning outcomes” (p.157).

A further critique is the over-reliance on summative practices in isolation. This culture acknowledges the value in summative assessment, it does not act to be exclusionary to other cultural traits, nor propagate against or embellish formative assessment. A culture ‘*for*’ learning is predominantly where one would observe a commitment to formative assessment.

Hence the value of this cultural approach is not to conflate an over-emphasis with summative to an under-emphasis of formative; both can be, and should be, held in equilibrium, and not reinforced as diametrically opposed. Sub-cultures enable this. The extent of multiparadigmaticity or the occupation of multiple cultures is however sceptical given Harrison et al. (2017) findings, in that participants whom had only experienced a summative assessment culture, may find it difficult to conceptualise radical change and Fernández Ruiz et al. (2022) concerns that academics lacking reflection on formative assessment may perpetuate summative approaches.

In terms of persistence and magnitude, the number of individuals inhabiting this culture were less than those in the Culture ‘*for*’ enhancing learning and Culture for Emancipation, suggesting both a legitimacy to the process of judgement, but a heightened legitimacy to the perception of, and intentions of, the formative ‘process’ of learning, and the liberal ideals of emancipation.

5.5.2 *Sub-Culture ‘for’ enhancing learning*

By strengthening RA, this culture *for* enhancing learning is characteristic of Assessment *for* learning (AfL) (Schellekens et al. 2021; Yang and Xin 2022) incorporating both formative

¹²³ However if practice was determined by pure ‘tradition’ distinct from discipline in this LCT model this would represent a weakening of positional autonomy (PA-) and thus constitute introjected or exotic code cultures.

¹²⁴ Elements of the technical perspective may represent weaker relational autonomy (RA--) and thus are addressed in projected and exotic code cultures, e.g. assessment for efficiency, the avoidance of student appeals or litigation, reliability and validity in relation to standards.

assessment and calls to move to innovative or non-traditional methods of assessment. As with the three subcultures in the sovereign code, strong positional autonomy (PA++) characterises this culture, with influence originating from within academia, most notably past experience of academics, internalised pedagogic training, and other colleagues.

For relational autonomy (RA), participants placed much normative emphasis on formative assessment, continuous assessment and feedback. Academics recognised the value of feedback and alluded to formative assessment:

a lot of talk at the moment in [accounting] (PA++) is about using more objective tests every week (RA++), something like that, I think it would possibly help them [students] quite a lot.

(Angharad-AF: Sub-Culture for enhancement of learning example)

Academics recognised the need for “interactional pedagogic and formative assessment practices”¹²⁵ (Knoetze 2023, p. 1685), aligning with the ‘competence profile’ of Fernández Ruiz et al. (2022). Similarly to the authors where “in-class assessment and group assessment” were a means of increasing formative assessment efficiency (as per Higgins et al. (2010) principles) (ibid), issues of efficacy and efficiency in formative assessment were apparent. Whilst normative ideals of formative assessment materialised in this sub culture, actual perceptions were bereft (akin to Fernández-Ruiz and Panadero (2020)), occupying space in the exotic and projected codes where actual practices were prohibitive to formative assessment.

Innovative assessment in this culture included ‘groupwork’ cited as an innovative or alternative to traditional methods, suggestive of a departure from an extant individualistic culture of assessment, as alluded by the descriptive statistics in Chapter 4.

For sovereign codes, strong positional autonomy (PA++) places emphasis on academic control of assessment, alluding to Bernstein’s conception of strong framing (+F) (Bernstein 2000). Formative assessment discussions were often posed with the power emphasis still on the academic. They were likened to practise, to enhance student understanding of academic-generated assessment criteria (O’Donovan et al. 2004) as opposed to a self-regulated, inner feedback mechanism (Nicol 2019) or a co-creation partnership approach to develop both staff

¹²⁵ The research also includes the finding that these are ‘time-consuming’ activities, as will be discussed in cultures of contestation.

and student assessment literacy (Deeley and Bovill 2017), as this would invoke a weakening of PA. As Owen-BM suggested, practice is required so students understand what is required of them by the lecturer:

the formative stuff (RA++) for the kind of practise, getting them to write very short essay pieces around concepts, which is really important ... so you have to use that mechanism of those kind of assessments, pre the final assessment, to really help them tease out what it is you're trying to teach them (PA++) ... What are we looking for? (PA++) so that that proprietary work moving towards an exam is really key

(Owen-BM: Sub-Culture for enhancement of learning example)

Assessment here is construed as an act done *to* students as opposed to *with* students (Boud and Soler 2016), the locus of control is with the lecturer and what ‘you’re’ trying to do to ‘them’. Thus, this culture legitimates the primacy of the academic in instigating formative assessment or feedback in the pursuit of learning¹²⁶.

5.5.3 *Sub-Culture of emancipation*

To finalise the sovereign code modalities the Culture of Emancipation differs from the two sub-cultures by virtue of exhibiting the strongest form of RA; combined with strong PA ultimately represents stronger ‘target’ practices. This culture signifies the liberal pursuit of learning for learning’s sake (Barnett 2004; Carr 2009) where assessment serves to facilitate students to become critical autonomous beings, lifelong learners, and critical citizens for societal change. In its most ideological sense this culture would attest to concepts of human flourishing (Kahn 2017) and assessment embraces metacognition, reflectiveness, inclusivity and intellectual engagement and challenge (Zeng et al. 2018; Schellekens et al. 2021; McArthur 2023).

In this culture the academics embraced the liberal orientation of a University where education and thus assessments normatively have a focus on ‘freedom’ for learning:

¹²⁶ Had self and peer assessment been conceived of as engaging students as partners in assessment, these would be evident in the culture of co-creation (PA--, RA++) due to a weakening of PA. However self and peer assessment were marginalised in the data (discussed by Karl-AF, Dave-BM. Harry) and predominantly reported in the exotic code Culture of Conflict (PA--, RA-).

about becoming a rounded individual, somebody who can think independently and think critically, ... who can actually make those changes and challenges for society as a whole, you know to call out inequality, racism or whatever (Angela-AF)

(Angela-AF: Sub-Culture of emancipation example)

Characteristic of the strong PA of academic influence in this culture was academic identity, being a critical researcher (PA++) (Joanne-AF, Angharad-AF, Tamara-BM), consequentially challenging assessment and the goal of *'unsettling students allowing them to see different perspectives'* (Tamara-BM) (RA++). This philosophical stance is suggestive of how Tamara-BM, and other academics from both Business (Harry-BM, Mahir-BM, and Owen-BM) and Accounting (Angharad-AF, Madeline-AF, Joanne-AF and Angela-AF) demonstrated a critical, sociologically informed constructivist epistemology. This aligns with the findings of Moore (2000) in that philosophy and epistemology deeply influences assessment practice.

Within this liberal culture assessment was characterised by the traditional Humboldtian view of dialogic exchanges, a sense of compassion for students presides orientated towards not just student welfare but to societal welfare (Myyry et al. 2020). Tamara-BM longed for more *'personal'* relationships with students. Significantly formative assessment was seen a basis for developing such dialogic personal assessment but stronger relational autonomy (RA++) was expressed in terms of the autonomous utilisation of formative assessment for students to broaden their intellectual capacities, e.g. references made to the Oxbridge system of weekly essays that were critiqued in dialogue between professor and (a small group of) students. Claims of an Enlightenment period, and Mode 1 Elite Ivory Tower university categorisation could feasibly characterise such discussions (Matthews 2023).

Regarding assessment methods and strategies, this culture afforded more pontification and abstract normative accounts of what assessment should be, in that assessment should allow for curiosity and exploration, enabling students to *'play'* (Tamara-BM) in an intellectual pursuit of knowledge, and thus development of critical intellectual (academic) skills. Few practical examples were provided beyond inclusive practice, groupwork for global futures, personalised teamworking experiences and reflective practice (Angharad-AF, Joanne-AF, Owen-BM, Bob-AF, Eskiva-BM). This culture placed more emphasis on process over product, on *learning to*

learn' (Angela-AF) over the end game, with tangential allusions to assessment *as learning*¹²⁷ via themes concomitant to 'self-regulation, self-efficacy, metacognition and feedback' (Dann 2014) or akin to assessment as inquiry (Serafini 2000, p. 387). Yet proximity to, or literacy of, these assessment discourses was not expressed in the interviews.

An additional distinguishing feature for this culture was the focus on inclusivity in assessment, from both a perspective of engendering challenge in students e.g., encouraging them to '*think about social justice issues .. who benefits from this, who's marginalised, who's disadvantaged*' (Angharad-AF) to inclusive assessment portrayed as '*diversity*' and '*creativity in assessment*'. Some focus signalled assessment capital (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023) rendering academics as occupying dominant positions in the field, via their pedagogic training (Eskiva-BM, Dave-BM) whom, as a result, designed assessment for a diverse student body.

5.5.4 *To conclude on the Cultures of Cultivation*

The three paradigmatic means of understanding assessment (*offfor/as*) surfaced through the sovereign legitimation code and assimilate to three sub-cultures of assessment. Despite much critique directed towards the liberal orientation, e.g., a mythical 'golden age of academe' (Tight 2010) and demise of HE through supercomplexity (Barnett 2004), the culture of emancipation signalled strong support for liberal ideals of assessment.

The cultures of cultivation paid some, albeit limited, attention to assessment as orientated to development of 'soft' transferable employability skills (RA++) as a direct causal mechanism of personal academic identity. Strong PA supportive of assessment for employability was not significantly recognised in this culture despite being raised by a select few academics. This corroborates Sin et al. (2019) whereby interviews found varying degrees of acceptance of employability. Of those in support, personal industry experience was a significant influence (PA++), or the outward facing nature of the discipline. When discussing authentic assessment, a Business discipline¹²⁸ was identified as being

¹²⁷ AaL used here in resemblance to the idealised reflective, dialogic, self-regulated pursuit of knowledge (Chong 2018) as opposed to the negative spoon-feeding, 'teach to the test' connotations of the term (Torrance 2017). The latter however received much attention in that assessment was considered as being hegemonic to the liberalised pursuit of education.

¹²⁸ Sub-disciplines are intentionally anonymized.

the perfect discipline for this type (PA++), ...we are educating young people in our disciplines, but we're preparing them to work, as employees of the future, so I think the assessment should be much more practical, much more work based (RA++)

(Xinyi-BM: Sub-Culture for enhancing learning)

Other participants had experience of other universities where *'every single module in that university will have an employability aspect to it (Dave-BM) (PA++)*. Personal professional or vocational identity was not sufficient to assert its own sub-culture, contra to findings in FE for example (James 2017) and ostensibly due to the background of many academics entering roles from academic/research career pathways. However, significant normative support for influence from 'outside'; or 'realism' (Villarroel et al. 2018) symbolic of a weakening of PA was reported in the introjected code cultures of cooperation.

5.6 Introjected code Cultures of Cooperation (PA-,RA+)

Cultures inhabiting the introjected legitimation code exhibited weakly insulated positions, i.e. weaker positional autonomy (PA-/--). The introjected primary Culture of Cooperation exists in the PA -- and RA – quadrant only so do not comprise any counterfactuals, similar to the cultures of cultivation. Meso and macro level factors are at play shaping the field of assessment practice here. A variety of actors, stakeholders, structures, or mechanisms influence assessment namely students (PA-9), management (PA-10), external pedagogic communities of practice (PA-12) and employers or the 'real life'¹²⁹ world of work (PA-15). Despite the wide breadth of actors, the basis of legitimation that underlies these practices is that of autonomous principles and practices, i.e. strong relational autonomy (RA) representative of assessment for educational, student-orientated purposes.

Visually Figure 5.20 depicts two separate sub-cultures; a culture of consideration and a culture of collaboration. The two cultures are differentiated in terms of their PA (students and management representing meso level stakeholders within the institution but beyond academia)

¹²⁹ As discussed, authenticity and the 'real world' does not have to be narrowly understood in terms of the world of work (McArthur 2023), but here attention is afforded to 'realism' and fidelity to the workplace (Villarroel et al. 2018)

and macro level influences of employers and the workplace. The influence of externalised pedagogy has been subsumed into the meso level but could feasibly represent a subculture.

5.6.1 *Sub-Culture of consideration*

This culture represents an amalgamation of stakeholders, students (PA-9) and management (PA-10) most prominently, with pedagogy (PA12) also encapsulated. A series of ‘code matches’ (Howard and Maton 2011) suggest both normative and actual perceptions and practices.

5.6.2 *Considering students*

Students’ characteristics, student quality and engagement in assessment were causal influences in assessment practice and design (PA--). Two responses are demonstrative of moving from weaker to stronger relational autonomy across the positional autonomy vector of PA-9 for ‘Student influence’ are shown below:

*So who is your audience and how will they respond to the assessment?
Obviously, I have a lot of international students and we have to take into
mind how they will react (PA--) and how they sometimes have different
learning experiences when it comes to university. So I have to think about
that [in designing assessment] broadly speaking (RA++). (Dave-BM, RA12)*

...

*I would like to be able to offer some choice to students (RA--), that they can
take this or that, I would really like to be able to do that and they would feel,
I think more of a sense of ownership and involvement in how they're assessed
(PA--) (Angharad-AF RA16)*

(Dave-BM & Angharad-AF: Sub-Culture of consideration (Students))

The former alluding to generic assessment diversity, whilst latter indicative of how a culture of consideration could be repositioned or reformulated to enhance student agency in assessment (Nieminen and Tuohilampi 2020; Inouye et al. 2022).

The culture was originally interpreted and branded as a culture of co-creation with an expectation that practices at the strongest range of relational autonomy may evidence clear co-creation in assessment design (Doyle et al. 2019; Matthews et al. 2021), yet much occupation

is at the RA12-15, thus whilst embedding reflective practice, and alluding to inclusivity in assessment practice the data failed to evidence sophisticated evidence of students' active engagement as partners (Deeley and Bovill 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). There was no evidence of staff-student co-creation of essay titles, or co-creation of marking criteria as detailed in the Deeley and Bovill (2017) study, also little peer assessment was used beyond a few select instances. Rather the culture was rebranded as a culture of consideration, to reflect the lack of maturity of RGUK participants proposals of co-creation.

5.6.3 *Weakening framing and a code shift*

Much angst around relinquishing control to students or '*blurring boundaries*' (Harry-BM), commands a weakening of Bernstein's ideas of framing (-F) (Bernstein 2000) and as such a weakening of positional autonomy (PA--). Transitioning primary influence and control away from the individual module leader (PA++) to the student (PA--) entails a 'code-shift' (Maton and Howard 2021) and generates a sense of unease for academics as Karl-AF alluded, academics '*struggle with it*'. However examples were afforded in the interviews including integrating student feedback into assessment design (Xinyi-BM) yet as suggested, more sophisticated co-creation of assessment as promulgated in the literature (Doyle et al. 2019) was lacking.

5.6.4 *Considering management:*

A further source of power in assessment was that of management (PA11), specifically the role of the programme director. Whilst the sovereign code firmly alluded that module leaders should control e.g. '*I think module leaders should have freedom to choose how they're going to be assessing the material*' (Twentyfour-BM) (PA++) several academics also acknowledged the need for oversight, e.g. '*but also have some general guidance, there has to be someone that overviews everything*' (Twentyfour-BM) (PA--). This represents a weakening of positional autonomy. This culture therefore includes cooperative working with management, and the normative emphasis on educational leadership for educational purposes:

I think there does need to be somebody at the top that is pulling a few strings (PA--) and that is for two reasons for consistency, but also for the range of assessments. (RA++) But I think that only works with the pedagogy behind it, with the research behind it (PA--)

(Karl-AF: Example of Sub-Culture of cooperation (Management))

This longing for a form of ‘academic oversight’ may represent a form of ‘soft’ managerialism (Deem 1998) emphasising collegial democratic voting; professional consensus and diffuse control derived from Liberal models of governance as opposed to the managerial modes of governance underpinned by Neoliberalism (Kolsaker 2008). The positive sentiment respondents attached to the role of the programme director (PD) aligned with the findings in the Fernandes and Flores (2022) study in that PDs emphasised respect for academics autonomy and recognised challenges in assessment change, they coordinated courses but only took action in problematic assessment situations.

The oversight role however negates recognition of strong educational leadership towards a scholarship of assessment. Respondents in this thesis were not celebrating assessment transformation via institutional leadership hence normative perceptions characterise this cultural space; there was little evidence of academics in communities of practice guided with educational leadership at institutional or programme director levels. Consequently, deliberations of cooperation with management in assessment code-shifted into the exotic and projected codes by virtue of an absence of management (PA+) or where management were seen exert influence (PA--) these were often construed as inimical to educational practice (RA--). ‘Management’ in this cultural sense is a nebulous concept due to the dual positioning of academics within programme director and colleague roles. This may inculcate trust:

denoting the confidence one has in the likelihood of others (management, administration, colleagues, students) acting responsibly in respect of sound principles, practices or behaviours in assessment

(Carless 2009, p. 81)

To build competence trust, senior management require assessment literacy, and /or assessment professional development, amidst a distributed leadership model of assessment (ibid); contrary to findings in this data.

5.6.5 Considering pedagogy

A further element of the culture of consideration is the consideration of pedagogy (PA12), characterised by engagement with assessment research. The terms ‘consideration’ is apt here as RGUK suffered from a lack of maturity in this domain, whereby scholarship was often

perceived as a ‘nice to have’ (Dave-BM) or the ‘Cinderella’ of academia (Marinetto 2013; Cotton et al. 2018)¹³⁰. Engagement with external¹³¹ contemporary assessment discourse was relatively marginalised in the interviews; suggestive of disciplinary research presiding over pedagogic research, and research presiding over teaching. The RTA theme of ‘Pedagogy? What Pedagogy?’ alluded to this in Chapter 4. However, a small number of academics did demonstrate engagement with pedagogic research and events (albeit localised instances e.g. RGUK Learning & Teaching conference), e.g. Eskiva-BM, Tamara-BM, Will-AF, Joanne-AF, Angharad-AF, Mahir-BM, and Dave-BM whilst Mahir-BM particularly drew on assessment discourse:

there's lots of research on different types of assessment on how assessment impacts on learning, Yeah, I mentioned, the research about using extrinsic rewards and grades and that sort of thing. That that's a huge body of research out there. So I think it should have a role in trying to inform our practise and inform the sort of the structures, the sort of infrastructure we set up in order to promote learning and to guide our assessment

(Mahir-BM: Example of sub-culture of consideration (Pedagogy))

Evidence of this assessment capital (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023) was however rare, reinforcing pertinent concerns regarding a lack of ‘distinction between pedagogic research and ‘scholarship of teaching and learning’ (SoTL) (Cotton et al. 2018, p. 1625) and the general lack of a scholarship in assessment (Rust 2003; Murphy 2006; Elton 2010; Norton et al. 2019).

The RTA and LCT analysis is demonstrative of a disconnect between perceptions aligned to the core to the academic role (PA++) and what I term here as what is demonstrable as externally informed (PA--) professional, critical, informed reflective, evidence-based practice in the context of assessment, or what I infer as a Professionalisation of Assessment (PoA). The use of this terminology to describe a pedagogically-driven approach to assessment is akin to the ideas of, and informed by the work of, Murphy (2006), Norton et al. (2019) and Raaper (2016)

¹³⁰ By virtue of the lack of value ascribed from the ‘ugly sisters’ of the Quality Assurance Agency and the Research Assessment Exercise (Jenkins 2002 cited in Cotton et al. (2018)).

¹³¹ Where participants demonstrated an internal affinity to assessment discourse (research and scholarship) through own research or own training this is reflected as habitus and academic identity with stronger positional autonomy (PA++). This culture represents engagement with external assessment research.

yet a systematic means of understanding what is meant by ‘Professionalisation of Assessment’ is lacking in the literature.¹³² Ultimately the relative small occupation of the introjected code is testament that:

Universities need to become more professional in their use of assessment techniques ... higher education can no longer hide behind its elite status

(Murphy 2006, p. 42)

Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) contend that assessment capital and training in assessment ‘language games’ (ultimately understanding the structuring principles of assessment as a social practice) is crucial for institutional assessment change, acknowledging that assessment habitus and assessment capital are not quickly or easily changed (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023). Thus ‘training’ in this context is a far deeper construct than being akin to a ‘*fire safety video*’ as interpreted by Radyr-AF in the interviews and demands ‘getting beyond the individual and the technical’ (James, 2008) and moving to more cultural understandings. To unveil academic conceptions of their own legitimisation codes in assessment will afford institutions and academic developers’ knowledge to enable them to move away from decontextualised, generic formal assessment training and embrace the perceived legitimacy of craft knowledge for example as a foundation for development:

the existing skill sets, craft knowledge, and instructional challenges facing faculty in specific situations should be the foundation upon which professional development activities are built (Putnam and Borko 2000), instead of adopting the not uncommon view that teachers are half-full vessels that need to be filled with the knowledge of outside experts (Darling-Hammond 1999; Halpern and Hakel 2003).

(Oleson and Hora 2014, p. 43)

Thus in gaining insight into academics’ assessment capital (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023) and habitus, externalised assessment training and professional development initiatives can secure some legitimacy in their attempts to ‘code shift’ from sovereign to more introjected positions.

¹³² An overview of similar terms was provided in Chapter 2

5.6.6 *Sub-Culture of collaboration*

The literature review discussed the economic objective and drive for authentic workplace related assessment (Wiggins 1990; Villarroel et al. 2018) and assessment of ‘real world’ tasks (McArthur 2023), as reflected here in the culture of collaboration. This culture differs from the cultures of cultivation as the weakening of positional autonomy (PA--) moves the boundaries and insulation around the field of assessment practice in HE beyond the academic and institution and into the workplace. This looking outwards to practice constitutes a weakening of positional autonomy, a weakening of Bernstein’s classification (-C), as Will-AF alluded, they looked to the workplace for ‘*forecasting future career skills*’ and embedding these within their assessment approaches. In this culture assessment is influenced by and incorporates ‘real world’ tasks, problems and contexts:

I always have teamwork and individual work because I think we're preparing young people to go out into a workplace (RA++) where that's exactly what they'll do, ..., so my students do case study work, they actually work with real problems (RA++)... I would say assessments linked to real life (PA--),all of my modules are highly applicable to real life (PA--)

(Xinyi-BM: Example of Sub-Culture of Collaboration)

Here ‘real life’ and ‘real problems’ is a source of influence in maintaining connectivity with industry /practice. Authentic assessment here is reflective of the problem-based, case-based and project-based pedagogies, offering students real-life examples of the working practices suggested by Maton (2009). In agreement with Knight and Yorke (2003) interviewees attested to employability entailing complex learning, particularly Owen-BM and the emphasis on balancing employability and criticality and how they complement one another. This culture signifies an alignment with ‘learning for employability’ (Speight et al. 2013; Sin et al. 2019) through external collaboration.

5.6.7 *To conclude on the Cultures of Cooperation:*

Perspectives and practices in this culture symbolised an openness of academics to the proliferation of assessment influences and purposes beyond those of academia and the academic liberal pursuit of intellectual capability and evaluation.

A weakening of positional autonomy entails significant power issues, reinforcing how “[s]tudents’ and teachers’ uses of, and responses to, assessment are influenced by sociocultural aspects ...and issues of power, motivation and control in assessment interactions themselves” (Ecclestone 2000). In response the notion of collective responsibility put forth by Torrance (2017) could take us to enhancing the culture of consideration with particular emphasis on power balances with students and staff:

on the collective responsibility of teachers, students and their peers to understand that educational encounters are a collaborative endeavour which should produce outcomes that benefit communities as well as individuals.

(Torrance 2017, p. 94)

Collective responsibility would then act a means of addressing the individualised responsabilisation that ensues from neoliberalism.

5.7 Exotic code Cultures of Contestation (PA-,RA-)

The exotic code is characterised by outside influence (PA-/--) and assessment that detracts from learning or is orientated to pragmatic purposes (RA-/--), a Culture of Contestation is recognised in this quadrant. This culture symbolises a collation of largely neoliberal concerns that together constitute “a recurring moral panic about University students’ (Macfarlane 2020, p. 534) and about the University more generally. Macfarlane (2020) summarises three main myths giving rise to this panic, such ‘myths’ are seen in the exotic code:

expansion of the participation rate lowers academic standards (‘more means worse’), students in the past were more intrinsically motivated (‘loss of love for learning’), and learners apply market-based assumptions in engaging with higher education as a commodity (‘student-as-consumer’).

(Macfarlane 2020, p. 534)

Much focus in the data rests on meso level challenges, i.e. significant conflict posed by both students (student engagement, student numbers/massification and RGUK student satisfaction), institutional orientation and managerialism (research focus, assessment regulations, resource and workload). As reflected in the RTA themes of the (Neo)liberal pursuit, But we are Research University and Students as Customers?

There are two sub-cultures in this culture and two distinct profiles of *influence* (positional autonomy) characterise the two subcultures, the culture of conflict being most dominant, clustered around students and institution; and the culture of challenge being orientated to the absence of influence of colleagues. The mappings suggest a significant unease with all position takings via a myriad of ‘unsupported’ (labelled ‘X’) perspectives. Taken together both sub-cultures form the exotic legitimisation code Culture of Contestation, representative of wider claims of the neoliberalised business school being characterised by “commercialisation, management hierarchies, customers, ‘cut-throat careerism’ and a myopic focus on ‘outputs’ and KPIs” (Fleming 2019, p. 2).

5.7.1 *Sub-Culture of conflict*

The most significant observations in the culture of conflict were mapped to (PA-9,RA-4) and (PA-10,RA-4). The former representing conflict with students, and the latter conflict with the institution.

The third of Macfarlane (2020) myths and a significant theme in this study is that of consumerism. Whilst consumerist concerns were evident in the exotic code they were widely dispersed, spread across general macro assertions of ‘students-as-consumers (Bunce et al. 2017), e.g. *‘I also think that because they pay now (PA--), ...they've become much more tactical I think in terms of passing exams or assessments and that sort of thing, rather than wanting to be engaged in learning (RA-)’ (Angela-AF)* and more internalised meso (module) level or individual student satisfaction perspectives, e.g. in the context of innovative assessment: *‘I think that students are quite resistant to them (PA--) I even found a few things like reflections ... and they were like, what is the point of this (RA-)’ (Bob-AF)*.

Ultimately due to the dispersion the primary theme of consumerism was not explicitly reported as frequently as those at the meso inter-institution concerns raised, thus comparatively consumerism did not constitute its own sub-culture in the visual clustering¹³³. However, manifestations of students as customers (e.g. an emphasis on predictability, desires for spoon-

¹³³ This could potentially be a limitation of the study given the significance many participants ascribed to this theme, and its emergence via the RTA. The amalgamation of time, workload and student numbers has overshadowed what was qualitatively deemed a significant influence on assessment practice in the RTA. Likewise the categorization of ‘student expectations’ in regards to predictability and instrumentality and ‘internal modular satisfaction’ at PA-9 could feasibly be recoded as ‘consumerism’ at PA-13 to bolster the consumerist culture that is relatively obfuscated in the exotic code in the current mapping.

feeding and ‘criteria compliance’ (Torrance 2017)) were found in the culture classified as ‘student expectations’ and ‘internal student satisfaction’ (PA-9). Hence, whilst apparent in much literature (Molesworth et al. 2010; Naidoo and Williams 2015; Bunce et al. 2017; Jabbar et al. 2018; Nixon et al. 2018) and heavily emphasised across circa 50% of interviews (Harry-BM, Mahir-BM, Dorian-AF, Will-AF, Angharad-AF, Leni-AF, Angela-AF) this deeply concerning theme for academics was secondary to issues of institutional identity, regulations, workload, time and student factors such as student characteristics, expectations, and student numbers. As such this theme did not manifest in a sub-culture of its own from the visual clustering at (PA-13). This is recognised as a limitation in the conclusion of this thesis, however, consumerist notions characterise the more general ‘Culture of Contestation’ and were recognised as a source of underlying conflict with students at the meso level.

5.7.2 *Student conflict - massification*

Within the culture of conflict was the student emphasis, predominantly discourses of massification (Dhanani and Baylis 2023). This culture gave rise to a broad spectrum of heteronomous practice and principles, thus weak relational autonomy. Both non-educational practices as the counterfactual (e.g. a lack of innovative assessment) and practices that were deemed to be pragmatic (e.g. assessment orientated at minimising cheating) are symbolic of this culture. For example, Mahir-BM exhibited conflict in the inability to implement formative assessment due to student numbers, i.e. a weak positional autonomy relative to target:

You're constrained by marketisation and high student numbers (PA--), its hard to do formative assessments (RA-) ... with the high student numbers ... So you do have constraints in terms of what you can do, to practise and what you believe in when it comes to assessment

(Mahir-BM: Example of Sub-Culture of conflict)

A further weakening of relational autonomy (RA--) ensues when assessment practices are not the counterfactual, but they are actively based on ‘other’ purposes of assessment, e.g., efficiency. For example, Angela-AF emphasised how student numbers drove assessment design decision making and limited assessment innovation, citing traditional examinations as being most feasible. This is illustrative of assessment decisions orientated to heteronomous assessment purposes of efficiency (e.g. marking workload decisions) dominating educational pedagogic assessment design decisions:

the really big one is student numbers (PA--), that really determines what we do, certainly at the business school ... I had an assignment, but there was one year when I marked 203 and I thought I will never ever do this ever again ... it was just a killer just to mark ... [another] lecturer had changed to two exams so I thought that's the way to go down ... it was nothing to do with pedagogy, nothing to do with philosophy, it was purely practical (RA--).

(Angela-AF: Example of Sub-Culture of conflict)

Generally, there is an acceptance that large cohorts inhibit AfL and AaL with their focus on metacognition and dialogic approaches. Increasing student numbers and reduced university academics pose obstacles to the implementation of learner-centred assessment practices, as one participant in the Fernandes and Flores (2022) study claimed:

Students aren't encouraged to be autonomous. The teacher commands and the students obey ... with the classical teaching process designed to large groups, the autonomy of learning cannot be realised.

(Fernandes and Flores 2022, p. 9)

The authors call for “an integrated and interdisciplinary approach” in response (ibid, p1) however in practice and reflected in this culture assessment tends to prioritise standardisation, reliability and efficiency over validity, focussing on traditional practices, leading to a circular, self-fulfilling prophecy of conditioning students’ instrumentality through individualised, narrowly defined (strongly classified and strongly framed) assessment tasks that serve to de-humanise students as opposed to cultivating the autonomy of learning.

Whilst much emphasis in this culture was on student numbers; student characteristics and expectations were also reported derogatively e.g. Owen-BM cited how colleagues would report of being unable to innovate (RA-) ... because *there's discontent about the quality of students (PA--) coming in on or there is discontent because of too many students coming in (PA--) (Owen-BM).*

Students’ attitudes demanding predictability and spoon-feeding were also dominant in this culture: *'I've learnt this I regurgitate it and I get the award' (Angharad-AF).* Nixon et al. (2018) argue how spoon-feeding is expected by students (as consumers) and challenging tasks were

deemed unacceptable; predictability is a forerunner to the pre-occupation of ‘grade focus’ (Bunce et al. 2017) symptomatic of a marketized, neoliberalised HE system.

5.7.3 *Institutional conflict*

As positional autonomy weakens further (PA-10), the culture of conflict extends from students to the institution. This positioning was the most contested with 13 of the 18 participants expressing 40 instances of significant negative sentiment. Institutional factors of research identity, Imposed managerial decision making and the assessment regulatory environment were found to be inimical to learning and thus reported as (RA-), and extending to assessment practices and principles for ‘efficiency’ and workload concerns (RA--).

An inter-related aspect to the former conflict with students was that of *time scarcity in academia* (Harry-BM). Institutional resources and constraints are common impediments to enhancements of assessment practice; restricting assessment opportunities (Postareff et al. 2012; Norton et al. 2013; Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022) and assessment design (Bearman et al. 2017). From a neoliberal accountability perspective, time and resource are quantified through managerially controlled systems such as the ‘Workload Allocation Model’ at RGUK. This model (WAM) attracted its own sociomaterial status and agency, becoming a structural mechanism through which assessment possibilities could be determined. Zukas and Malcolm (2019) claimed workload models were “powerful technologies which change work, as well as ‘measure’ it” (P.260), representing managerial attempts to ‘objectify, categorise, regulate and record academic activity’ (ibid, p.261) to legitimate activities. For example, Dave-BM explained:

the workload model, how you square the circle of making things add up ...our normal target is 1500 ... one point I hit [well above the] mark and so I spoke my manager (PA--) and the most obvious way of relieving the strain was to take the assessment and move that externally, outsource it (RA--)

Systems and practices of efficiency, i.e., ‘outsourcing’ the marking and buying out of assessment (Raaper 2016) correlate to unbundling academic work (Macfarlane 2011) or controlling academic work (see also Angela-AF, Eskiva-BM), creating an internalised market within RGUK, symbolic academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000; Slaughter and Leslie 2001), with assessment acting as a form of currency.

In the culture of conflict managerialism marginalised academic agency. Jing-AF explained how retention of a traditional mode of assessment was *imposed* and Angela-AF relayed the prohibition of innovative programmatic assessment practices (thus a counterfactual) due to capacity constraints:

the assessment would have been to pull all of that together and to be examined in terms of a case study (RA--) ... I was going to say that these are, academic decisions, but they're not they're managerialist decisions aren't they, they're not pedagogical decisions... it's not relying on your professionalism that's reached that decision ... it's more managerial (PA--)

(Angela-AF: Example of a Sub-culture of conflict)

Introductions of capstone and synoptic assessments, and wider advances in programmatic assessment (van der Vleuten et al. 2012; Torre et al. 2022), stretch beyond academic agency, being institutional decisions rooted in anything but pedagogy. For institutional change and reform, professional development or assessment reform initiatives are required to understand such cultural context prior to assumptions of academic agency in innovation.

Institutional identity has been discussed in the RTA theme of 'But we are a Research University'. Its recognition here as a source of contestation is testament to findings that for a research-focused institution such as RGUK, research was considered secondary to teaching (Bath and Smith 2004; Elton 2010) and a deleterious assessment practice (Norton et al. 2013; Raaper 2016). There was a reluctant acceptance of the research status as a limitation for advancement of assessment:

I don't think we do enough to [enhance and] talk about assessment strategy (RA-) I know we try, but certainly in our institution, I think research is still a main focus (PA--). Teaching is still a secondary (Eskiva-BM)

(Eskiva-BM: Example of Sub-culture of conflict)

This general lack of professionalisation in assessment is testament to much of the literature demanding scholarship in assessment (Rust 2007), assessment professionalisation and centrality to the role of the academic (Holroyd 2000).

The institutional element of the culture of conflict was also symptomatic of neoliberal, managerialist systems of bureaucracy and administration. Much of this cultural space was

afforded to administrative and bureaucracy concerns surrounding assessment policy and change (Raaper 2017), for example Eskiva-BM attributed a lack of innovative assessment due to *systems for change are bureaucratic*. This is supported in the literature (James 2014). Assessment regulations, standards and policy concerns for plagiarism (Norton et al. 2019) have been claimed to constrain assessment (Bryan and Clegg 2019) and inhibit change (Bearman et al. 2017). Specific regulations detailing anonymous marking policy were cited as a constraint by Tamara-BM in engaging in personalised dialogic feedback.

A further source of institutional conflict in this culture were the underlying structures and mechanisms of academic programmes themselves giving rise to heteronomous practices. Mahir-BM vehemently cited modularisation as an underlying generative mechanism inhibiting learning, encouraging a teach to the test mentality, akin to Torrance (2017) notion of AaL, ultimately encouraging silo approaches to assessment.

As a remedy to the modular ills, contemporary assessment discourse is suggestive of advanced programmatic assessment approaches (van der Vleuten et al. 2012), yet moving to programmatic assessment requires significant changes in the ‘assessment culture’ (Torre et al. 2022). Undertaking such change requires an approach to understanding assessment beliefs and values (ibid); hence the LCT Assessment Tool may provide such an approach.

A further element to the culture of institutional conflict was the metric-driven performativity agenda and the potential for ‘dumbing down’. Grade inflation concerns emanated from within academics (PA++), across colleagues and disciplines (PA++), and for the exotic code concerns were raised against institutional governance (PA--) and in the macro context by reference to employers and the GLM (PA--). However, these were reported across few participants in the sample (Angela-AF, Tamara-BM, Tao-BM and Garfield-BM). Nevertheless, marking standards and assessment criteria and the disparity of marking approaches were indicative of heteronomous principles attracting negative sentiment in this culture.

Ultimately, the findings in the culture of conflict support Knoetze (2023) as neoliberalism, (here managerialism, a preoccupation with research outputs, burdensome regulative policies and commercialisation/consumerism) inhibit assessment development. Whilst Knoetze (2023) paid special attention to development of formative opportunities, this study finds neoliberalism to be deleterious across a range of spaces across the relational autonomy plane, including

inhibiting continuous assessment, student choice and feedback via administrative burdens (Bob-AF, Dave-BM, Angharad-AF),

Akin to consumerism, the credentialism discourse and concerns of certification without learning were deeply entrenched, as per the 'It's all about the GLM' RTA theme. Here, in the culture of conflict, these claims were recognised across a number of participants (Dorian-AF, Mahir-BM, Tao-BM, Will-AF, Eskiva-BM and Tamara-BM, Angharad-AF) but were not deemed significant in terms of visual clustering (e.g., occupying spaces such as PA-15,RA-14) to warrant their own separate recognition. Further profiling could be undertaken based on 'frequency' of data observations as opposed to 'number of individual observations'¹³⁴ – this may enhance the rigour of the tool and strengthen the basis of cultural types with additional quantitative reasoning. The thesis recommends further empirical work to test the LCT Assessment Tool on the basis of frequency or significance of interview comments in addition to 'no of participants'.

5.7.4 *Sub-Culture of challenge*

One small region of the exotic code Culture of Contestation was a grouping at PA-6. Whilst comparable in size to discourses of consumerism and credentialism that were not recognised, this small subculture was highlighted as occupying a quadrant reflecting the counterfactual or absence of strong positional autonomy, interpreted as an absence of 'inside' or academic influence (PA-) and aligned to counterfactual non-educational principles (RA-). As such this represents one of two 'double negative' sub-cultures in the exotic and projected codes respectively.

This culture of challenge sets out the positions of academics who feel an absence of both internalised formal pedagogic identity through lacking training, lacking formal qualifications and/or an absence of collegiate support in assessment practice. Essentially this is inferred PA- due to a diminution or a weakening of positional autonomy through absence of PA++. Literature supports the proposition that enhanced formal professional development enhances scholarship of assessment (Norton et al. 2019).

¹³⁴ This was discussed in section 5.3 Cultural understandings Staged Analysis 3: Assessment Cultures and zooming out and is revisited here as a further recommendation.

A lack of collegiate community of assessment practice (Jawitz 2009; Reimann and Wilson 2012) was repeatedly recognised in the interviews, leading to assessment practices that lacked a shared professionalisation of assessment (POA):

I think there's a constraint on us in that we don't really talk about these things (PA-) .. and I think where we're missing a trick (RA-)

(Karl-AF: Example of Sub-culture of challenge)

Myyry et al. (2020) also reported a lack of discussion of assessment within the close teacher community causing negative emotions of frustration, and “big differences between teachers” (ibid, p7).

Ultimately, both perspectives result in assessment practices that lack diversity, innovation, and a sense of scholarship in assessment (RA-):

I think people [colleagues] don't want to change their modules (PA-), maybe people don't see it [assessment diversity] as being as important (RA-). Not everybody thinks that those kind of things are important or that it should be shoehorned into their module. It's really hard.

(Bob-AF: Example of Sub-culture of challenge)

This culture particularly is a siren for support from both the institution in terms of training and development needs and for collegiality. Taken in conjunction with the projected legitimisation code culture of conditioning, the interviews suggested the dark underbelly of assessment practice was not merely targeted at neoliberal regimes outside of academia (PA-/PA--) but tensions exist within and between the collegiate and espouse grave concerns for a fracturing of the academic community (Becher 1989; Trowler 2014a).

5.7.5 *To conclude on the culture of contestation:*

A cultural sociological approach enables the structuring principles of practice to be seen. This in turn opens up academic conversations about assessment. These ‘corridor whispers’ offer a form of “moral resistance that is emerging through informal critical academic leadership” (Jameson 2018). But to what extent are we aware of academic perceptions of neoliberal regimes and their impact on learning teaching and assessment? Academic voices and empirical perspectives on ‘controversial’ discourses in education such as neoliberalism, managerialism,

consumerism and massification and their manifestations in pedagogic practice are relatively rare (albeit see Jabbar et al. (2018); Raaper (2016); Dhanani and Baylis (2023)). The LCT Assessment Tool, particularly this culture of contestation enables an open, balanced, contextual analysis of controversial views.

5.8 Projected code Cultures of Conditioning

The projected code Culture of Conditioning is akin to the exotic code in reporting significant negative sentiment; however, this was targeted internally, towards the field of academia. In the projected code legitimacy resides with strong positional autonomy (PA+/++), i.e., insulated positions within academia but heteronomous principles, i.e., both non-educational and ‘other’ purposes and practices (RA-/--). The reference to Conditioning is illustrative of academic conditioning in that academics take up dominant positions in the field in response to structural forces shaping such a field (via Bourdieu (1993) notion of refraction) and take up similar dominant *position takings* that materialise in suboptimal assessment practices. That is, academics internalise the pressures of the neoliberal landscape of HE and act in ways deleterious to the autonomous principles of the field. Ultimately academics are conditioned and perpetuate these practices as a means of both survival and [contrived] success.¹³⁵ This culture aligns with notions of agency overload and oppression as cited in the RTA theme The Perils of Academic Agency.

A concerning characteristic of this culture is how the enactment of suboptimal assessment practices ultimately condition students detrimentally. Hence, projected code practices can be precursory to, or causal mechanism themselves of, critiques of students being ‘instrumental’ exhibited in the exotic legitimisation code culture of conflict.

Within this overarching culture, three sub-cultures were identified; the sub-culture of coordination (PA5, PA7, RA-4) the sub-culture of deficient collegiality (PA11) and the sub-culture of conservation (PA15).

¹³⁵ Where *success* here is defined in neoliberal terms of operating within parameters of managerialism and achieving performativity metrics imposed by market-orientated systems and forces.

5.8.1 *Sub-Culture of coordination*

The culture of coordination recognises a need for leadership and scholarship, longing for a source of coordination in assessment activities. It is akin to the culture of challenge in the exotic code, in that it represents a ‘double negative’; here being an absence of ‘outside’ or non-academic influence (PA+) whilst the counterfactual to educational principles (RA-). Themes in this culture are aligned to culture of challenge in that they link to the RTA theme of ‘Pedagogy, What Pedagogy?’ focussing on a lack of POA. The absence of two key influences of POA are detrimental to the progression of assessment practice rendering it non-educational, being the absence of external pedagogic scholarship and research in assessment (PA5) and the lack of educational leadership in assessment (PA7).

For the former, externalised training and the wider scholarship arena of assessment failed to influence academics (PA5) and failed to enhance assessment practice:

I think there is a lot of encouragement for module leaders to follow these guidance on formative and summative assessment. But you know, there is no real enforcement for Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) workshops (PA-) where they talk about the importance of having summative and formative assessments (RA-)

(Joanne-AF: Example of Sub-culture of community)

Given the recognised need for formalised pedagogic training (Norton et al. 2019), “professional development activities are an obvious starting point” for enhancing staff assessment literacy (Carless 2017). Yet, professional development must be rooted in a cultural understanding, Holroyd (2000) suggests building on ‘assessment craft knowledge’ gained through experience of assessment and ‘assessment scholarship’ of the research and literature, as assessment craft knowledge alone is *no longer sufficient*

The second influence in this culture was a lack of educational/ assessment leadership (PA7). In discussion on assessment diversity and innovation, Karl-AF felt decision making was abdicated to academics, accountability was delegated without support, authority or resources (time) to enact that decision making:

It really does frustrate me because these are usually professors, they get paid a lot of money, they’re in leadership roles and they’re not showing any leadership (PA-) sometimes I go through periods where I sit there I think,

well I'll do it myself [assessment decision making]. You can shove it up your arse, I'll do it myself. But then you quickly realise I can't. I just can't, there's just no time and it's frustrating.

(Karl-AF: Example of Sub-culture of coordination)

As Carless (2017) suggests, leadership (Deans, Associate Deans, Heads of Department and Programme leaders) are potential levers for assessment change, thus he claims commitment to enhancing assessment may support the 'scaling up' of AfL.

5.8.2 *Sub-Culture of deficient collegiality*

This culture represents one of the most concerning for the study in that the study recognised autonomy resting with the academic community as being 'target' (Maton and Howard 2018) (i.e., colleague influence PA11) yet this culture signifies a corresponding weakening of relational autonomy, being heteronomous, non-educational and pragmatic principles.

For the academic community or the collegiate, as McNay (1995) suggests, the key word for the collegium is 'freedom', thus academics are imbued with autonomy and agency, inhabiting strongly insulated, dominant positions in the field by virtue of their academic capital. As a collective academics have traditionally operated traditional liberal collegial models of governance (Kolsaker 2008; Raaper and Olssen 2015) and comprise a collegial culture (McNay 1995).¹³⁶ However here the collegiate, characterised by 'colleague influence', attracts negative sentiment due to poor assessment practice inimical to educational purpose. This culture signifies a fragmenting or fracturing of the academic community, or the collegiate:

I get very frustrated by this, and I have to work very, very hard not to look at other people and what they're doing.... but there are some colleagues that just don't engage and they're not even hiding it very well. ... it really bothers me when somebody else turns up and does a really shitty job (PA++) ... It's really not good enough (RA-).

(Karl-AF: Example of Sub-culture of deficient collegiate)

¹³⁶ One of the four cultures of the academy, i.e., collegium, bureaucracy, enterprise, corporation (McNay, 1995)

Particularly in this culture specific attention was paid to contract type, thus ramifications and interrelations with ‘culture of conflict’ in the exotic code due to institutional research orientation. Colleagues on research-oriented contracts whom *apply minimum effort* (Karl-AF) in response to the research incentives of the institution, colleagues targeted as *less engaged in developing individual students* (Dave-BM), some *terribly resistant* (Angharad-AF) to pedagogic enhancements culminate in an environment where colleagues compete to make ‘*the most digestible standardised resources*’ (Harry-BM). Much of the critique is intertwined with issues of time and workload and deriving from the RTA theme of ‘But we are a Research University’.

This culture signifies attributions of blame across academics, and a culture of mistrust generated from the perceived lack of professionalism of colleagues. The findings attest to those of Carless (2009) in that distrust constrained the use of innovative assessment methods. Carless (2009) conceptualised trust as the confidence in others¹³⁷ (here colleagues) to act responsibly in respect of “sound principles, practices or behaviours in assessment” (p.81). He highlighted issues of confidence, integrity, and competence, asking “to what extent is trust exhibited between lecturers and students; lecturers and their colleagues; students and their classmates; or management and teaching staff?” (ibid, p.81). This LCT analysis attempts to answer this in that much distrust in colleagues is expressed, e.g. Garfield-BM’s direct claim that ‘*some academics are not capable at assessing students*’ (Garfield-BM), arising from stereotypes of contract type, underlying individualised incentive mechanisms of the research university and the silo modular system that imbues trust at the individual level with little penalty for poor pedagogical performance. James (2014) critiqued Carless (2009) work on trust by questioning how this mistrust is generated, sustained, or increased; it is anticipated the data coded within the culture of deficient collegiality can contribute and further these discussions.

There were also undertones of ‘free riding’ in colleagues’ sentiment, as Karl-AF expressed in relation to the above quote regarding colleague lack of engagement. Thus, akin to the *self-harm* viewpoint of Harry-BM, there is almost a disincentive to invest in pedagogy. Pursuit of a POA would ultimately be going against the grain of the collegiate. This runs counterproductive to literature that acknowledges how enhanced assessment practice requires an institutional environment that encourages collegiality and communication (Holroyd 2000).

¹³⁷ Carless (2009) cites “management, administration, colleagues, students” in his definition

This culture evidences how there is not always harmonious collegiate ‘attunement’ (Kligyte 2019) how academics are ‘dumped’ with teaching or assessment tasks and their attempts to engage in evaluation and enhancement of other colleague’s teaching and assessment activities were seen not as a ‘collegial conversation’ but “taken ‘like it was a professional affront’” (ibid, p. 1676). Hence not all academics share what might be considered as collegiate norms that guide academic work or a unified understanding of what it means to teach or assess. This has deep-rooted implications for what might be considered as shared expectations and understandings of assessment practice across the collegiate.

5.8.3 *Sub-Culture of conservation*

This final subculture in the Culture of Conditioning represents individual academics as the primary source of influence in assessment practice, occupying strongly insulated positions. In this culture these positions are viewed as silos, isolated from a community of assessment scholars: *We all just get on and do our own modules (PA++); we don't think about the big picture (RA-) (Xinyi-BM)*. This sub-culture is characterised by an assemblage of principles and practices characterised as heteronomous, i.e., weak relational autonomy at the coordinate of RA-4, the counterfactual to assessment of/for/as learning principles (as explicated in the cultures of cultivation). Most frequently this was understood as a poor assessment design. Some 11 of the 18 participants took up this positioning:

We left really independent of pretty much get on with our modules (PA++) and marking and assessment and whatever and I think there are times when there should be some questioning and I think we kind of just shy away from it. That sounds really bad. Sometimes things happen and you think that shouldn't have happened (RA-) (Angharad-AF)

Practices in this culture may be representative of a lack of self-reflection or self-awareness, in that Angharad-AF commented how academics *are not very good at questioning themselves* and how operating in insulated silos is *much more comfortable*. Academics in this sense may exhibit ‘defensive routines’ (Argyris and Schon 1974), i.e., not engaging in self-reflection, inhibiting ‘double-loop learning’ due to trying to protect themselves from addressing incongruences between their espoused theories and their theories in action (Argyris and Schon 1974; Argyris 1979; Dick and Dalmau 2000).

This culture acknowledges how strong autonomy and agency are detrimental if unsupported by resource and assessment knowledge/ POA, resulting in a lack of evidence base for assessment decision making:

I don't mind the autonomy for decision making (PA++), but what I don't like is that we don't have enough time to really think about our [assessment] decisions and talk about decisions across modules.

(Karl-AF: Example of Sub-culture of conservation)

As relational autonomy weakens further in this culture practices and perspectives move from the counterfactual (RA-) to assessment orientated to 'other' purposes (RA--). The frequency of individuals occupying these latter positions was less than RA- nevertheless worthy of note, as grade inflation was clearly a concern. A minority of academics spoke of suboptimal strategies used e.g., *resolving to soften up and adding 5 to marks*¹³⁸ (RA--) in attempts to 'fit in' with colleagues and tackle oppressive neoliberal systems (e.g., grade inflation and institutional pressures for progression), to tackle agency overload, and the need to not feel like 'a lone voice'. These practices hark to claims of a wide disparity of marking standards (Garfield-BM) and the devaluation of the degree on both national and international scales (Lisa-BM, Jacob-BM, Tao-BM, Tamara-BM, Angela-AF), critique not unique to RGUK. As Ylonen et al. (2018) concluded "practices behind the award of marks are not consistent, even though they are all working within university policies and procedures". Macfarlane (2020) however posits an alternative, suggesting 'more benign explanations' for the phenomenon, acknowledging:

considerable press attention on so-called 'grade inflation' as indicative of pressures on University staff to award higher grades ... By contrast, more benign explanations such as the rising quality of the student intake, more motivated learners, improved quality assurance mechanisms and greater use of criterion-referenced assessment rarely get the same level of attention

Macfarlane (2020, p. 538)

Generally, the Culture of Conservation would contest the above signalling to poor quality assurance mechanisms. Setting aside the avenues of causality in the grade inflation debate, a

¹³⁸ As explained in Chapter 4 regarding this example, pseudonyms not disclosed to protect anonymity

more salient concern is that of academics' emotive responses to such practices, being those of self-preservation and oppression, hence the term of the culture being [self] 'conservation':

It's like you want somebody to intervene to take the pain away of having this argument in your head, ... so how many people should I fail? How many people should I give a first? (RA--) No external body, not my university, not even my colleagues (PA-) are helping me with this is a debate, it's all on my shoulders ... Assessing is an incredible weight to put on our shoulders (PA++) (Tao-BM)

Deleterious practices symbolic of 'defensive routines' (Argyris and Schon 1974) fuel *position takings* to 'fit in' to be 'safe' and not draw attention to oneself for fears of confronting incongruences between espoused and in-use theories (Argyris and Schon 1974). This debate reaches far beyond mere rubrics and grade profiles.

Tao-BM continued to explain how *in higher education where you are the gamekeeper and the poacher*, thus gatekeeper of academic standards decisions that may encroach on the academic as a student-centred facilitator role (Myyry et al. 2020) balancing impartial judgement and mentorship, or as Simper (2020) alludes "like being both coach and referee".

Tao-BM is not alone, academics in this study were notably "pulled in different directions by assessment purposes other than facilitating student learning" (James 2014, p. 158) . Thus the competing 'purposes' of assessment, as discussed in the RTA introduction of 'So What About Assessment', cause conflict within academic professional identities and within academic communities. Carless (2015b) notes this as a 'fundamental challenge' for management of assessment. The levels of oppression and emotion displayed by the RGUK interviewees are suggestive of significant unease about assessment purpose dualities, with little affordance as how to overcome such 'fundamental challenge'. This is notable given the lack of literature addressing emotion in assessment¹³⁹ and the interplays between academic agency in assessment and academic frailty. This cultural type thus accentuates the human perils of assessment and

¹³⁹ With a few notable exceptions e.g., see Myyry et al. (2020)

the activities academics engage in in order to protect themselves from *harm* (Harry-BM) and to not *kill* themselves (Angela-AF) in undertaking such roles.¹⁴⁰

A means of overcoming academic or pedagogic frailty is retention of ‘traditional’ inherited disciplinary assessment methods in a state of “arrested professional development” (Kinchin et al. 2016, p. 2) whereby the cumulative pressures of academia ultimately inhibit academics ability to change practice, leading them to adopt these ‘safe’ pedagogic approaches, i.e. pedagogic frailty (Kinchin et al. 2016). Conservatism in assessment thus acts as a form of self-preservation in a climate of competing complexities. Risk of ‘self-harm’ in terms of workload overload or practices that challenge academics’ ethical stances were unearthed in the data and would feature in this projected code being inherently individualised with strong positional autonomy. Harrison et al. (2017) contends that successful organisation assessment change would require extensive consideration of the consequences for the individual. They claim a “climate of ‘psychological safety’ needs to be created” (p.2) whereby individuals evaluate the beliefs and values of the new culture, and examine the consequences for themselves as individuals.

5.8.4 *To conclude on the Cultures of Conditioning:*

A consequence of the significant presence of non-educational assessment practices in the projected code (RA-4) by virtue of individual academics, colleagues, and absences of training and pedagogy, is the phenomenon of conditioning. In this quadrant academic practices are complicit in the persistence of assessment that is deemed as non-educational. Simply put, academics are complicit in the practices they critique, ultimately conditioning through assessment, as Madeline-AF commented:

We’ve conditioned them to behave in a particular way and then sort of critique them for behaving in the way that we’ve conditioned them to do
(Madeline-AF)

This somewhat aligns to James (2014) concerns whereby “contradictory models of the person, or contradictory expectations of learners, are thrown together in pedagogic arrangements”

¹⁴⁰ Whilst these references may be hyperbolic and the use of ‘scare’ quotes may be strong this is not to be underestimated given the suicide rates of both staff and students in Russell Group universities that have been associated with assessment (see <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/lecturers-suicide-wake-call-overworking-academia>)

(p.157). These arrangements pose as juxtapositions between assessment strategies intended to promote critical thinking/deep learning, and between structures facilitating adoption of ‘narrowly defined’ assessment tasks. These tasks create the environments within which surface learning can flourish at the expense of human flourishing (Kahn 2017). In debunking the myths of surface learning, Macfarlane (2020) notes how it is conventional to ‘blame students’ for instrumentality over scholarly curiosity, yet:

the responsibility for creating the conditions that reward surface learning needs to be placed with academics who produce assessments that demand recall of knowledge rather than its critical evaluation.

(Macfarlane 2020, p. 542)

In this culture academics are unintendedly instrumental in conditioning students to behave in undesirable ways, i.e., negative backwash effects of assessment (Boud 2012; Lau 2016). Given that “[w]hat we choose to assess and how shows quite starkly what we value” (Knight 1995, p. 12), academics in this study emphasised the predisposition towards liberal conceptions of critical thinking and academic communication skills, the power to construct an argument (Tamara-BM, Harry-BM), the research demonstrates disparities between these normative *position takings* and actual *position takings*, resultant of varying positions of influence in assessment.

5.9 Disciplines and cultures?

The four cultures of assessment were derived from data collected from 18 interviewee participants across both Accounting and Business disciplines. Discipline is cited as the primary cultural unit (Winstone and Boud 2019) however the data suggests disciplines represent just one component in considering causality from a sociocultural context, i.e. point PA10 in the translation device mapping corresponds to disciplinary influence as identified in the data driving module specific assessment practices. This corroborates disciplinary discourse that suggests disciplines do impact assessment patterns by virtue of the nature of knowledge (e.g. qualitative and quantitative were deemed pertinent in this study) and influence the *appropriate* assessment (Dorian-AF, Owen-BM). The literature review also attested to how different assessment methods (one element of assessment practice) were utilised across disciplines and Table 4-1 in Chapter 4 evidenced enhanced diversity in the softer discipline of Business Management.

However, through the RTA and LCT analysis innovation and diversity both emanated from, and was constrained by, a plethora of cultural factors including research orientation, level of POA, past assessment and teaching experience, discipline, perception of students as consumers, and predispositions to liberal or employability agendas. These were experienced across both disciplines to greater or weaker strengths of both PA and RA thus disciplines do not explicate all sociocultural factors that shape the field of assessment practice and thus shape assessment practice itself.

It is proposed here, in adapting the words of James (2014) using ‘assessment culture’ as opposed to ‘learning culture’; that an assessment culture¹⁴¹ is not, then, “just another way of talking about disciplinary differences” (p.160). An assessment culture ‘is a set of affordances and constraints’ (adapted from James 2014). Thus, the *basis* of legitimation is symbolic of such affordances and constraints, and underlies assessment practices collectively, being the product of varied empirical accounts of both events and mechanisms at the micro, meso and macro levels.

Given the development of cross-disciplinary assessment cultures and understanding how the person-centred profiles confirmed how individuals emphasise different legitimation codes underlying their practices; it is suggested there is value in ‘zooming in’ to analyse assessment cultures across traditional ‘discipline’ boundaries. This may afford a further contextualised understanding. This is warranted as the original research problem emanated from the claim that assessment research is limited in affording sociocultural context beyond analysis at the discipline level. Thus, the data is now re-presented ‘zooming in’ from a traditional disciplinary perspective to address the persistence of assessment cultures by discipline. This is achieved by consolidating and grouping the analysis at the discipline level as per Figure 5.21 and Figure 5.22 below:

¹⁴¹ James's (2014) original term references ‘learning culture’

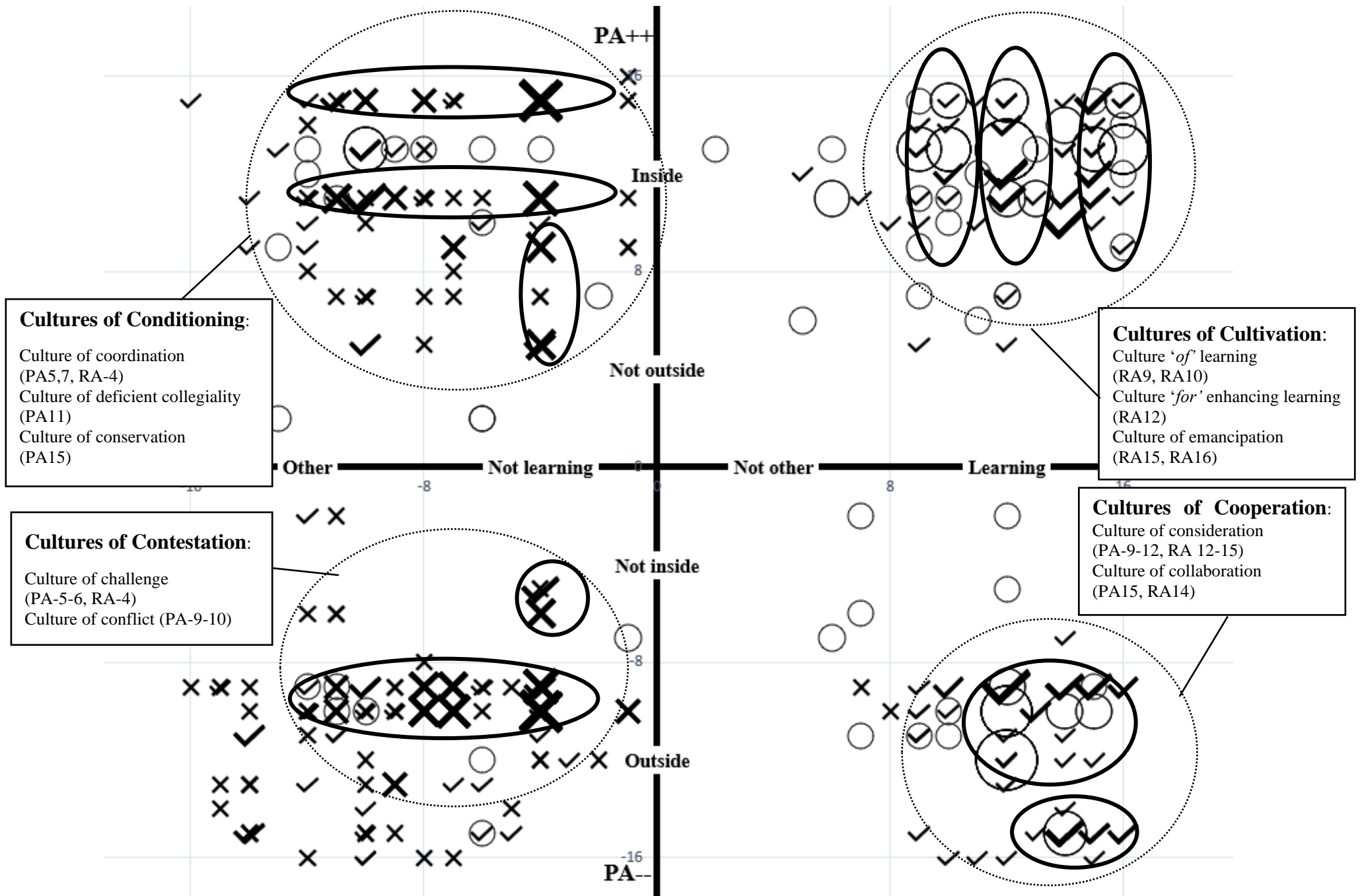


Figure 5.21: Business Management LCT profile

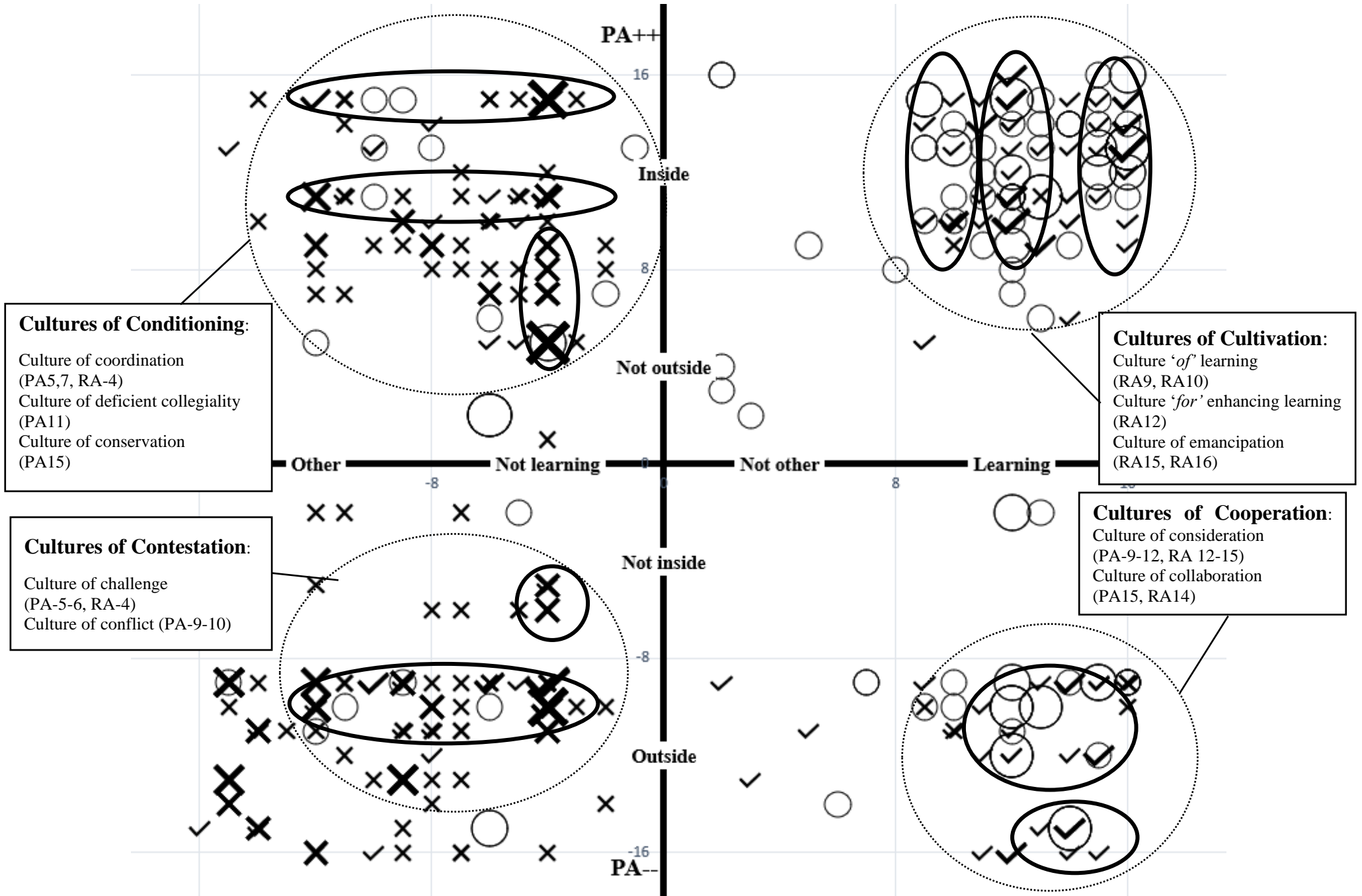


Figure 5.22: Accounting & Finance LCT profile

The findings visually depict little difference by discipline in terms of *perceptions* and *influences* on assessment practice and their respective *basis* of legitimation. The four primary cultures and their respective sub-cultures were present to a large extent across both disciplines.

The profile for Accounting academics was however suggestive of less emphasis in the introjected code Cultures of Cooperation, specifically the subculture of consideration. In comparison to Business, there was less presence of both student influence (PA-9) and managerial influence (PA-10), in respect of formative assessment and innovation for the former and a pedagogically informed assessment design orientation for the latter (RA12). Accounting also occupied less space in the projected code Culture of Conservation, potentially as much of the grade inflation discussion dominated this culture for Business. These differences are however negligible differences owing to a small number of individuals.

The disciplinary findings presented here do not rebut the findings that highlight disciplinary differences in assessment methods (Neumann 2001; Jessop and Maleckar 2016) nor the discourses on signature pedagogies (Shulman 2005; Pitt and Quinlan 2021; Quinlan and Pitt 2021) as discipline was evidenced to influence assessment type (PA10). This was evidenced and is subsumed within the Cultures of Cultivation and Conservation. The descriptive statistics in Chapter 4 also attested to differences in assessment methods across the two disciplines of this study, thus corroborate much of the disciplinary literature that focuses on assessment methods.

This thesis however proposes that there are few discernible differences in the *basis* of legitimation underpinning assessment practice across discipline. That is, at the consolidated level both disciplines provide evidence of the existence of the four main assessment cultures.

To explicate differences in assessment types specifically however is to consider the *focus* of legitimation as addressed in the RTA chapter, e.g. discussions of examinations, essays or presentations do not per se occupy their own unique positions. However, assessment cultures may support inferences as to assessment methods that may be characteristic of that culture; for example, sovereign code cultures of ‘for’ learning and emancipation, and introjected code cultures, both assimilate to ‘innovative’ assessment at RA12, authentic assessment practices at RA14 and practices enhancing student agency through self or peer assessment at RA15.

Academics occupying such assessment cultures may be empowered to enact assessment perceptions into assessment practice (Postareff et al. 2012) if these assessment cultures are not

overshadowed by strong assessment cultures of Contestation (exotic) or Conditioning (projected). That is, through understandings of the significant differences across individuals own personal legitimisation profiles and the extents to which individuals may occupy these ‘cultural spaces’ could infer assessment methods. For example, the LCT Assessment Tool suggests individuals align to one/many cultural types, thus sovereign and introjected code emphasis by Owen-BM and Eskiva-BM in Business Management may be demonstrative of an impetus for innovative assessment methods that are realised through the marginalisation of constraining cultures of conflict and conditioning. Thus, individuals may have differing agentic powers to enact their perspectives given the level of emphasis or de-emphasis in each of the legitimisation codes.

In Accounting, Bob-AF also emphasised the sovereign code, however the negative sentiment attached to student influence in the exotic code may overbear such perceptions of innovation. Consequently, the balance of cultural emphasis may explain how Eskiva-BM and Owen-BM were able to implement innovative assessment types¹⁴² whilst Bob-AF less so, as the cultural emphasis rested with constraints in the culture of conflict through student numbers and attitudes.

Ultimately whilst the thesis set out to understand causality regarding ‘why’ academics perceive assessment the way they do, the thesis did not set about to narrowly focus on causality pertaining to choice of assessment method in a positivistic manner. Assessment practice was conceptualised more broadly than this.

Ultimately academics may share similar LCT cultural profiles, or they may be highly polarised or bifurcated within disciplines. Nevertheless, the cultural profiles themselves are not differentiated by epistemological discipline, rather they represent a sociocultural perspective that extends beyond disciplinary essentialism and considers micro, meso and macro factors influencing assessment practice. The ability to understand cross-sectional persistence of assessment cultures may be key to institutional reform initiatives.

5.10 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter evidenced a cultural approach to understanding the *basis* of legitimisation underlying assessment as a social practice. It reported how four central cultures of assessment

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were evidenced in the data: Sovereign code (PA+,RA+) Cultures of Cultivation, Introjected code (PA-,RA+) Cultures of Cooperation, Exotic code (PA-,RA-) Cultures of Contestation and Projected code (PA+,RA-) Cultures of Conditioning. Within these main four cultural types, ten subcultures were also identified given varying strengths of PA and RA, indicating *influence* and *perceptions* or purpose of assessment respectively.

Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) set out on a similar journey of discovery, to gain a realist sociocultural understanding of *why* academics practice assessment the way they do. This chapter contributes to this discussion; a deep investigation into beliefs, attitudes, agency and structures that together shape the field of assessment practice; providing an analytical, cultural means of ‘seeing’ *why* we assess the way do. Liberal and vocational educational ideologies (Fanghanel 2009b) were evidenced in the sovereign code cultures whilst a ‘dark underbelly’ of assessment discourse, often suppressed to ‘teacher talk’ (Biesta et al. 2019) was evidenced within the legitimation codes of the exotic and the projected codes (discourses of consumerism, managerialism, credentialism). Understanding the spacial occupations of academics within and across these cultures enables the research questions to be addressed from a sociocultural perspective.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

To make a difference, assessment research needs to live in the real world; a world which, at least as far as practitioners' assessment decisions are concerned, we do not yet sufficiently understand.

(Buckley 2023, p. 1)

This thesis would extend this above quote to suggest: ‘...only once a holistic sociological understanding of this ‘*real world*’ is achieved, and the multiple *basis*’s for legitimisation of assessment practices is understood, can we collectively then utilise research to inform, consider, appraise and, if appropriate, make such a ‘*difference*’ to assessment practice.’ .

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter consolidates the research by appraising this journey of discovery, that is the journey of this thesis from early conceptualisations of the research problem and research questions to development of a sociocultural approach to enable the underlying structuring principles of assessment practice to be conceptualised in term of assessment cultures.

The chapter begins by revisiting and responding to the initial problem statement of the research, that of dichotomies and context. It then addresses the gaps in the literature being the lack of sociocultural approaches to assessment as a social practice and a corresponding lack of theoretical frameworks in the field of assessment research. The research questions are re-presented with corresponding findings to evidence how these research questions have been answered. The chapter includes an evaluation of how both RTA and LCT were utilised as frameworks to address the research questions, with critical realism proving an underlabourer in the background. Contributions to the field, both conceptually and methodologically, are presented in conjunction with limitations of the study and avenues of future research. The chapter concludes with closing remarks, reflecting on this journey of discovery.

6.2 Answering the problems, gaps, and questions

The thesis opened recognising two problems, one, the ‘dichotomy problem’: an oversimplification and often [false] dichotomisation of assessment practice into three paradigms (assessment *of* learning (AoL), assessment *for* learning (AfL) and assessment *as* learning (AaL)). Calls to move or paradigm shift, in conjunction with conflation of process and

purpose (Taras 2005), exacerbated the phenomenon of axiological ‘charging’, rendering poles of AoL and AfL as vilified or valorised respectively (Lau 2016).

In response the thesis posed the concept of multiparadigmaticity, that is how multiple assessment paradigms can coexist and interconnect within a particular context or domain. Whilst sovereign code Cultures of Cultivation may appear synonymous with AoL, AfL and AaL respectively, they are not exclusionary or mutually exclusive. One can support summative assessment and measurement of educational gains and appreciate the value of formative assessment and feedback, they are not false binaries, however extreme positions in the data were also found in that pursuing strategies of human flourishing contended the role of assessment should be marginalised.

The use of LCT is intentional in disrupting (false) assessment dichotomies by allowing for a multitude of spacial possibilities across the Autonomy plane. LCT can break apart dichotomies of knowledge practices and power and thus avoid conflation of ‘knowledge’ (what is being perceived) and ‘knowing (who is perceiving it)’. Thus overcoming ‘knowledge blindness’ (Maton, 2014):

‘autonomy codes’ can be enacted to analyse not only actors’ knowledge practices but also their mental dispositions and their social contexts, enabling knowledge to be both brought into the picture and systematically related to knowing and to power

Maton and Howard (2018, p. 8)

The LCT Assessment tool strips apart process and function of assessment, recognising function as an orientation of purpose to any number of stakeholder groups (PA) and process as being an educational pursuit (e.g. of making judgements) (RA). This recognises the generative mechanisms (neoliberalism, marketisation of HE, performativity and accountability mechanisms) that give rise to competing functions or roles in assessment (certification, accreditation, institutional or programme award metrics), and the structures that facilitate or impede such functions (e.g. feedback turnaround policies).

Thus AoL, AfL and AaL as relational ways of working or purposes of assessment (RA) are not pre-conceptualised as inhabiting sovereign only or exotic only codes, they can be represented across all four quadrants given their respective counterfactuals and influences (PA). The LCT Assessment tool also enabled sentiment to be expressed directly through data analysis.

A second problem posed was the ‘context problem’, that of the over-generalisation of disciplinary assessment practices in the field and corresponding marginalisation of sociocultural understandings of assessment. This was suggested as segmentalism or a form of epistemic essentialism (Maton and Howard 2018).

This thesis claimed rather than narrow conceptions of disciplinary influence focus should rest with identifying a set of organising principles that underly complex social practices. In this thesis disciplines were found to influence assessment practice given the extent to which they look outward (Shay 2016) e.g. to the world of work, or are quantitative by nature aligned with a technical knowledge focus (e.g. Accounting) or have a more liberal foci. ‘Appropriate’ assessment types were implicitly acknowledged dependent upon module and subject content, opposed to wider discipline. Traditional methods (exams and essays) were attributed to quantitative and qualitative subject types respectively. However discipline was found to be just one meso level influence that co-existed and coalesced with micro and macro influences.

6.3 Gaps

The two research problems were both the product of, and exacerbated by, gaps in the field of assessment research. Somewhat related to the ‘context problem’, an initial gap was a ‘conceptual’ one, a lack of both a person-centred or socio-cultural approach to understanding assessment (James 2014), one acknowledging interplays between structure, agency and power (Ashwin 2008). A deep and meaningful engagement with the constructs of context was absent from the literature. The thesis addressed this conceptual gap via the utilisation of Bourdieusian theory and the concept of the structuring principles of the *field* of assessment practice. Acknowledging both *positions* (influences) within the field and the relative *position takings* (*perspectives* and strategies employed) undertaken by actors within the field in their pursuit of capital.

A second gap was a ‘methodological’ one, entailing a philosophical or theoretical gap, one of ontology and epistemology and the relative guiding theoretical frameworks they (should) instil. As per Nieminen et al. (2023) and Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) a lack of engagement with critical theory and consideration of philosophical meaning in researching assessment practice was apparent. To respond, the thesis evidenced clear engagement and immersion with theory in the use of critical realism as an underlabourer (Vincent and O'Mahoney 2018) and Legitimation Code Theory as an explanatory framework for the research. Resultant assessment

cultures were proposed through use of LCT Autonomy and theoretical constructs of ‘positional’ and ‘relational’ autonomy as informed by Bourdieu’s (1996) ‘autonomous’ and ‘heteronomous’ principles of hierarchisation and Bernstein’s (1990) ‘external classification’ and ‘external framing’.

6.4 Research questions

In addressing the research problem and gaps, the thesis set out to uncover the structuring principles of assessment practice through a critical realist, contextualised, cultural approach using Legitimation Code Theory, this enabled responses to the three research questions, restated below:

- 1) What are the *perceptions* of academics in relation to assessment practice, their *position takings*. That is, how do academics perceive assessment practice in terms of what it should be and what it is?
- 2) What *influences* academic’s assessment practice, their *positions*? That is, how do academics perceive their autonomy in assessment practice?
- 3) How can we best understand the interactions between these *perspectives* on assessment and *influences* on assessment?

Methodologically, to answer the research questions interview data collected at RGUK was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (n=28); gaining understanding of *perceptions* (RQ1) and *influences* (RQ2) in assessment practice. The six themes constructed from the RTA were: The (Neo)Liberal Pursuit; It’s all about the GLM (Graduate Labour Market); Students are Customers?; But we are a Research University...; Pedagogy, what Pedagogy?; and The Perils of Academic Agency.

Data from the RTA informed development of a translation device (Maton and Tsai-Hung Chen 2016) that articulated the variety of perceptions and influences upon practices in the field, these were conceived of in LCT terms as positional autonomy (RQ2: *influences* or *positions* in the field) and relational autonomy (RQ1; *perceptions* or *position takings*). Specifically, to answer RQ3 the LCT Assessment Tool was developed to visually depict the interactionality between both *perceptions* and *influences*. As a proof of concept for development of a methodological tool a sample of individual detailed personal profiles were developed (n=7), this was extended to individual summary profiles (n=11) and amalgamated to form cultural profiles (n=18).

6.5 Key findings

Regarding research question 1, *perceptions* of assessment, Chapter 4 and the ‘So What about Assessment?’ introduction presented data that aligned with a focus on measurement and summative assessment where emphasis across both disciplines rested on assessment as measurable evidence of knowledge and skills. Skills were foremost ‘academic’, e.g. critical thinking, argument, evaluation and written communication skills, in addition, Accounting referenced the value of technical quantitative skills. The RTA theme of the (Neo) liberal pursuit demonstrated how academic, liberal, ideologies governed assessment perspectives for several named academics and how ‘essays’ instilled a sense of ‘academic assessment’ (Forde-Leaves et al. 2023). Conversely a separate cluster of academics were aligned to ‘learning for employability’ (Sin et al. 2019), here generic transferable skills were reflected in their perspectives of assessment. The constructive alignment between skills and assessment fuelled discussions of ‘what are we assessing’ often having ramifications for innovative assessment and diversity of assessment practices, e.g. assessment for employability was commensurate with authentic assessment, commanding a broader repertoire of assessment types to appropriately match the required skills, e.g. communicative, reflective or collaborative assessments.

A lack of formative assessment and feedback was evidenced in the RTA analysis, mirrored in the LCT Analysis as per the counterfactuals evidenced in the exotic and projected Cultures of Contestation and Conditioning respectively. However, a strong assessment culture ‘for’ learning evidenced acknowledgement and beliefs that formative assessment and feedback were primarily educational. These perspectives aligned with liberal conceptions of personal, dialogic assessment practices. Inherent in the sovereign code was normative support for critical autonomous learners yet little evidence of AaL approaches in the data to nurture metacognition self-regulated learning. Autonomous learning for assessment was conceptualised as ‘individual reading’ and ‘going away’ or ‘doing something on their own’ as opposed to developing evaluative judgement in assessment as *process* (Simm 2005), much emphasis resting on the *product* of assessment. Hence despite perceptions of assessment suggesting strong consensus for formative assessment and feedback rarely was this reported as materialising in enacted practice.

The assessment cultures occupying weaker relational autonomy spaces in exotic and projected codes were evidential of negative sentiment regarding assessment perceptions. The thesis

reported clear concerns with grade inflation, sub-optimal marking practices and absences of innovative, diverse and formative assessment.

Research question 2 addressed *influences* and affords insight into causality of the key findings above. Gipps (1999, p. 355) claims “we can understand it [assessment] only by taking account of the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which it operates”. The thesis found generally academics across both disciplines were bestowed much autonomy in assessment practice yet PSRBs specifically represented a constraint for Accounting academics. Much agency derived from academic habitus (Bourdieu 1993); academic backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and dispositions. Academic identity inculcated corresponding assessment practices, ‘assessing how I was assessed’ led to a recycling, perpetuating and sustaining of traditional disciplinary practices. Critical researcher perspectives derived from the strong research identity of RGUK served to reinforce liberal Humboldtian ideals of assessment, whilst professional identities drove authentic assessment practices, yet not all practices were educational.

The Perils of Academic agency theme and the assessment Cultures of Conditioning evidenced how whilst academics were empowered, significant agency in assessment was often deleterious, resultant of a lack of institutional or collegiate leadership or a lack of professionalisation of assessment (POA). Academics occupying positions of power and control often engaged in position takings of self-preservation or conservatism in practice for fear of being ‘lone actors’. Dominant positions in the field also emerged as academics demonstrated resistance to outside influence, e.g. managerialism and accreditation bodies. Clear negative sentiment was evidenced in the exotic code cultures of contestation as academics succumbed to institutional mechanisms and structures of governance (Raaper 2019) in a neoliberalised university (Knoetze 2023).

The final research question addressed interactions between *perspectives* and *influences*. The RTA themes corresponded to a several primary influences and their subsequent stances. However, LCT analysis was pivotal in visualising the interactions, suggesting that individuals exhibit various ‘profiles’ in terms of a) how they perceive their *position* or the positions of others in the field and b) the related strategies, stances or ‘*position takings*’. These profiles vary by individual but do not vary significantly by discipline. Rather, individual profiles can be amalgamated to identify ‘clusters’ of beliefs that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Thus ‘assessment cultures’ as developed using the LCT Assessment tool were the response specifically orchestrated to answer RQ3, a means of seeing and understanding assessment

practice. Hence four dominant non-mutually exclusive cultures of assessment were evidenced from the empirical data. The multi-mapping of individuals perspectives across the cultures allow for interactionality between levels of influence, to accommodate for agency in structure and structure in agency.

A key finding here were the interplays between micro level of identity and liberal and vocational educational ideologies (Fanghanel 2009b) that in themselves are fuelled by meso and macro level influences of institutional type (research-intensive) and economic orientation, i.e. the extent to which the university looks outward to the world of industry and employment. The RTA themes of ‘The (Neo)liberal pursuit’ and ‘Its all about the GLM’ essentially distil into suggesting generalised stances of traditional and authentic assessment practices. Whilst both practices were reflected in the Sovereign code assessment Cultures of Cultivation they were often reported by two distinct groups of academics in line with the ‘academic learning’ versus ‘learning for employability’ findings of Speight et al. (2013) and Sin et al. (2019), thus held in dichotomous contestation.

Neoliberalised discourses were voiced most strongly in the exotic code with generative mechanisms and structures most evident at the institutional level via workload and associated time constraints and research orientation. The sub-culture of student conflict was also a representation of neoliberal discourses of massification and consumerism whereby students’ attitudes demanding predictability and spoon-feeding were dominant, however whilst credentialism and consumerist discourses featured heavily across all RTA themes (bar Pedagogy what Pedagogy?), these causal mechanisms were more tacit and dispersed and failed to give rise to a assessment subcultures of credentialism and consumerism in and of itself. Constrained assessment practices, adoption of low-risk, safe, reliable, tried and tested assessment strategies reflecting little investment in assessment literacy or scholarship were cited in response, for example the adoption of examinations in Accounting for purely economically driven efficiency means.

Related concerns of devalued degrees and grade inflation in response to the marketisation of HE were also evident in the exotic and projected codes. Notably the assessment sub-culture of conservation in the projected code drew on collegiate and individual academic responsibilities for grading and highlighted non-educational practices whereby grading was dominated by a focus on performance metrics. The proximity and internalisation of assessment practice and the academic self was explicit in this sub-culture. Academic oppression and fragility is exposed

through this unmasking of agency-overload and concerns of being a lone voice. The sub-culture of deficient collegiality also revealed contempt for academic colleagues, fuelling a race to the bottom as a self-protectivist defensive mechanism.

Ostensibly influences of the micro liberal identity, the meso research-intensive Russell Group status, and constraining macro influences emanating from neoliberalised, marketized HE landscapes resulted in significant occupations of positions and position takings in three of the four quadrants, with the Cultures of Conditioning and Contestation being deleterious to assessment practice. The introjected code assessment Culture of Cooperation was the weakest reported culture, signalling a lack of collaborative efforts between academics and industry or the field of assessment research and pedagogic research to enhance assessment practice. However, academics whom inhabited positions in the field that were open to external influence, working collaboratively with non-academic actors tended to adopt stances of more innovative outward-oriented and informed practices.

Essentially the mapping of assessment cultures derived from individual person-centred level understandings emphasise the complexity of the myriad of influences on, and perceptions of assessment practice.

6.6 Contributions

The thesis responds to calls for future research to explore values and beliefs that underpin the assessment culture of an organization (Torre et al. 2022) and for an “investigation of institutional culture as it relates to assessment” (Simper 2020, p. 1027).

The thesis makes two central contributions: one conceptual and one methodological. The former conceptual contribution is the extension of the provocation of the sociocultural approach to assessment through a learning cultures perspective by James (2014). This thesis was inspired by the ‘learning cultures’ theorisation and extends this discourse to that of ‘assessment cultures’. It ascribes a definition to the term ‘assessment culture’ being ‘a complex socio-cultural configuration comprising interconnected elements that govern and mediate the practices and perceptions of assessment within higher educational contexts’. Likewise the work proposes the concept of assessment sub-cultures, defined in terms of being ‘a distinct subgroup within an assessment culture characterised by specific underlying structuring principles of practice’. Taken together assessment practice at any level, be that of the individual, department, discipline, institution or geographical boundary can be understood in terms of the basis of

legitimation of such practice. Thus practices are understood by their positioning in, and occupations of, multiple assessment cultures and sub-cultures; thus the thesis advocates for assessment practice to be understood in terms of its plurality, as individuals and groups may navigate and engage with multiple assessment cultures simultaneously. The ability to visualise and understand these occupations within, across and between assessment cultures and sub-cultures is the unique contribution of this thesis.

The conceptualisation of assessment cultures was informed by undertaking an ecological or sociocultural, contextualised, critical realist perspective to consider macro, meso and micro level context and conceptions of structure, agency, power and control in assessment practice. This ensured that generative mechanisms (the real), events (the actual) and perceptions (the empirical) (Bhaskar 2008) were afforded sufficient recognition as to their manifestations in assessment practice. A deep engagement with theory as evidenced through a critical realist and LCT approach, also contributes to calls by Nieminen et al. (2023) for a more reflective theoretical positioning in assessment research.

This contribution also extends assessment discourse from disciplinary or signature focussed perspectives of assessment (Pitt and Quinlan 2021; Quinlan and Pitt 2021) to those that focus more broadly on issues of structure and agency in assessment (Ashwin 2008). It also further extends the work of Bearman et al. (2016) and the segregations of environmental and professional influences by bringing these together in an analytical framework. The key findings allude to how cross-disciplinary groups of individuals may occupy similar *positions* and *position takings* given their educational ideologies (for example liberal ideals of assessment and assessment for employability). Hence providing valuable insight into how the organising principles of assessment practice are founded on the relevant (multiple) bases of legitimation that cut across individuals and disciplines.

The second contribution is a methodological contribution to assessment discourse. The LCT Assessment Tool is a structured means of analysing the ‘underlying organising principles’ of practice. It is an excel tool that incorporates a translation device and a mapping tool to visually present dispersal patterns and map observations or individuals onto the LCT Autonomy plane in real time. These dispersal patterns across the various cultures and sub-cultures can be filtered and arranged by groupings of individual(s), discipline(s), or theme(s). The LCT Assessment Tool is also adaptive, researchers can re-imagine the coding, re-locate influences or perceptions and data can be automatically re-presented. The translation device and the integrated mapping

tool is deemed useful for assessment research as an ‘analytic framework’ or coding mechanism to further build on extant approaches that utilise a disciplinary basis (Neumann et al. 2002) or institutional characteristics (Wu and Jessop 2018) to determine variations in assessment practice; it not only captures these variables but through various gradations of positional autonomy the tool can record facets of identity, backgrounds, and a myriad of stakeholder influences. The model thus offers a proof in concept of a translation device and accompanying excel mapping and visualisation tool as a means of assessing relative strengths of influences as opposed to qualitative thematic models. The utility factor of this model is orientated at not only understanding and modelling extant assessment practice but through this understating researchers and practitioners can model states of change. The combinations of, and dispersal patterns across and within, assessment cultures and sub-cultures can enable and empower agents to change, to redress balances across cultures, to target sub-cultures for strategic action, to minimise or maximise envisaged occupations in certain cultures. For example, institutions may wish to enhance introjected code cultures to further strategies of stakeholder cooperation, whilst minimise projected code cultures through targeted actions addressing educational leadership and support. The tool thus has utility for targeted institutional strategic assessment practice, by firstly ‘seeing’ the underlying or the ‘real’ barriers to assessment change; uncovering the ‘dark underbelly’ of assessment practice. Whilst “change management in higher education is a complex and demanding process” (Deneen 2012), this thesis provides a tool with which we can engage with our academics, our colleagues, our stakeholders and present an unbiased holistic representation of how they perceive assessment, their agency and that of others.

6.7 Implications and recommendations:

A significant implication from the empirical work is assessment reform initiatives. This thesis supports Smith (2011) in her calls for academic development practice to more closely consider contexts of assessment practice. It contends that assessment practitioners, academics, institutional management and the academic development assessment community needs firstly a means of understanding the complexities of assessment practice; only then can we seek to change it. Once dominant assessment cultures are identified in terms of positions and positioning, then assessment reform activities can be targeted specifically in relation to these cultures if warranted, e.g. changes orientated at reductions in assessment workload to relieve constrained innovation. This can avoid technicist de-contextualised roll out of generic

pedagogic best practice (James 2014) and ensure deep consideration of the impact of disciplinary thinking on current practice (Yeo and Boman 2019).

To facilitate such changes, it is imperative to develop enhanced assessment literacies. The thesis identified a deficiency in assessment literacy among academics, thus supports calls from Fernández Ruiz et al. (2022) that educators must have a solid assessment literacy knowledge base, implying teacher education programs include assessment courses, not merely as an accumulation of assessment knowledge, but rather the “development of a sophisticated, contextually appropriate set of inter-related competencies” (Fernández Ruiz et al. 2022).

As part of enhancing assessment literacy, a further recommendation of this work is to open up critical assessment culture conversations; to expose the ‘dark underbelly’ of assessment as evidenced through neoliberalised perspectives. This thesis proposes academics and course teams reflect on context, reflect on influence and begin engaging in conversations of educational ideology, employability, credentialism, consumerism and managerialism in relation to assessment; problematise the roles of students as consumers (Bunce et al. 2023) or students as partners in assessment (Boyle et al. 2024). This may open the door for more compassionate approaches to assessment that might inculcate trust (Carless 2009) and joy in assessment, reconceptualising authentic assessment and embarking on assessment for social justice (McArthur 2022,2023).

6.8 Limitations

The study explored academic perceptions of assessment practice as opposed to enacted practice. From a critical realist perspective, it is vital that these ‘empirical accounts’ are construed as individuals’ experiences and accounts of realities and not empirical observations in their own right. Thus, academic accounts are not ratified as actual accounts, merely academic perceptions of such. Relatedly methods of assessment that dominate disciplinary literature have not clearly been identified or problematised. This is partly to protect anonymity but largely not to myopically debase assessment practice to assessment method. Future work may more comprehensively incorporate assessment methods into such an analysis.

A second limitation or critique of the thesis is in its ignorance as to assessment reform initiatives that may be applied to such an LCT-informed understanding of the basis of legitimation in assessment practice. Little ‘assessment change’ has been promulgated in this research, and as Buckley (2023, p. 1940) contends “If we want research to influence the

decision-making processes of practitioners ... lamenting the lack of innovation and improvement in assessment while failing to engage with the thought-processes that lead to decisions about assessment is unlikely to succeed". Assessment reform was not an original aim of the thesis and thus could contribute to avenue for future work.

Finally methodological limitations include the proof in concept approach. The LCT Assessment Tool was developed as an adjunct to the RTA however it is contended that the sample size drawn on for assertions of cultural type represents a limitation. It may be possible that had the LCT analysis been undertaken across all 28 respondents different frequencies and emphasis on different cultures *may* have emerged, . For example, discourses of consumerism and employability were evident in the RTA (n=28) and to a degree in the cultural analysis however they may be under-represented in the sample for the LCT analysis (n=18).

6.9 Future work

The translation device developed in Chapter 3 enable the exploration of ‘the organizing principles underlying dispositions, practices and contexts’ (Maton et al. 2016, p. 46). As such the LCT tool developed gives the study relevance beyond the specifics of the empirical context, it “provides a means for translating between theory and data that other studies can adopt or adapt – to develop an external language is to extend the framework into a new problem-situation” (Maton 2014c, p. 206). Hence, it is recommended that future work replicates this study across several disciplines and expands and refines, adapts or if relevant adopts the translation device to accommodate for a wide range of diverse individuals, national and international contexts, disciplinary contexts and trends.

Ten sub-cultures were seen prevalent in the data, due to the particular ‘spatial possibilities’ occupied in the data set. Other contexts, institutions, disciplinary communities may occupy other unknown sub-cultures by virtue of perception/influence interconnectivities not emphasized heavily in this sample. Hence the gift of this approach is the flexibility it offers to analyse assessment practice on a systematic basis, accounting for observed empirical experiences in one context but applicable as a tool to analyse the unobserved in other contexts.

Broader suggestions of further avenues of research emerging from the findings and discussion entail further exploration of the major themes in the study:

- How do academics perceive their academic accountability in assessment? e.g. to whom do academics owe a duty of care or a sense of performativity in professionalisation of assessment?
- What balance is there to be had between liberal and professional/vocational pursuits in education; how might authentic assessment address these concepts in different contexts?
- How might academics and institutional management collaborate to enhance building a shared POA and a community practice for assessment scholarship?
- What avenues are there to address pedagogic frailty in the field of assessment practice? How might academics conceptualise and reflect on their personal experiences in assessment practice?
- How might we interpret disciplinary or signature assessment practices in light of assessment cultures across differing contexts, e.g. Russell Group / Non Russell group perspectives?
- How do both academics and students perceive of the concept of consumerism and what impact do these conceptions have for assessment practice?

6.10 A final note

when it comes to assessment, I just think, you know, we're a Russell group University, we are a good university, let's just do a proper job on assessment (Lisa-BM)

As James (2014) suggested, approached collectively and curiously it is possible to investigate and understand any learning culture. The same applies to assessment. He further explicated how doing so “may give those at the ‘chalk face’ a new view of their own practices ... what they value, ... [and] their capacity to act in a complex social setting” (ibid, p167). In this vein the findings and the developed model can act as a mirror to HE, a point of departure for assessment practitioners to deliberate the extent to which they occupy positions in certain assessment cultures, the extent their position takings mirror those of others. This framework also enables the contested field of assessment practice in higher education to be seen, not only as an arena of struggle for academics but for others exposed to the field, our students for example, those who attempt to navigate this field of competing languages of legitimation. Thus, uncovering the structuring principles of assessment practice is not only critical for assessment

enhancement and pedagogical development but crucial for both academics and students alike as both are mutually entangled in such practice.

Appendix A - Conceptualisations

Conceptualising the ‘academic’
This thesis uses the term ‘academic’ to represent individuals employed by universities to fulfil a multitude of roles including development and delivery of teaching and assessment; research; income generation; pastoral support and “often [will] have a managerial role as well as an academic leadership role” (Willmott 1995) ¹⁴³ .
Conceptualising assessment
<p>In HE assessment research the use of term ‘assessment’ is varied. To surmise a universal definition is pious, but can synthesise to “making judgements about students’ learning” (Yan and Boud 2022), albeit judgments for different purposes, by different parties. Boud et al. (2018b) utilise practice theory (Schatzki 1997), extrapolating from judgement to consider context and stakeholders: a set of complex curriculum practices that engage and influence students and staff as well as producing information about students’ work that can be recorded and utilised.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Boud et al. 2018b)</p> <p>The authors suggest this contextualised perspective of assessment explores assessment as a socially situated phenomenon. This conceptualisation informs this thesis however a practice theory perspective is not undertaken and the thesis addresses both assessment theory and assessment practice, both conceptualised separately hereafter. This differs significantly to US conceptions of ‘assessment’; defined as “part of institutional quality assurance and accountability processes” (Fletcher et al. 2012). This is pertinent given the foci of this thesis orientated to ‘assessment cultures’, a construct differing significantly from the term ‘assessment cultures’ in US literature (e.g. see Baas et al. (2016); Birenbaum (2016); Fuller et al. (2016); Skidmore et al. (2018)). Hence much US literature is out of scope. An extensive focus on feedback, despite being an inherent adjunct to assessment, is also out of scope, contributing to Winstone and Boud (2022) calls to ‘disentangle assessment and feedback in higher education’.</p>
Conceptualizing assessment theory
<p>Theory may be drawn on to explain and legitimate assessment practice, yet a specific (or body of) assessment ‘theory’, is implicit in assessment literature. Goldstein (2017) claims such ubiquitous theory as untenable, conversely Reimann and Sadler (2017) suggest assessment is well-theorised, noting Sadler’s ‘theory of formative assessment’ however Nieminen et al. (2023) contends assessment research is under-theorised. This thesis agrees with the former. Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) refer to assessment theory as: seeking a greater theoretical understanding of assessment practices and their accompanying assessment acts by drawing upon general theories of learning and specific theories of assessment practice.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 190)</p> <p>These ‘general theories of learning’, include theories of motivation; identity formation; and social mechanisms and structures of interaction and ‘specific theories of assessment’ cited include assessment-of-learning (AoL), assessment-for-learning (AfL), and assessment-as-learning (AaL); commonly referred as <i>notions</i> (Schellekens et al. 2021), <i>paradigms</i> (Chong 2018) or <i>approaches</i> (Yan and Boud 2021).</p>

¹⁴³ Teaching and research roles are outlined by Shorter (2022) thus apply to the academic conceptualised in this thesis.

Yorke (2003) features of a theory of assessment¹⁴⁴ align with Dobson and Fudiyartanto (2023) to include: theoretical constructs relating to learning; and the epistemological structure of the discipline(s). For the former, wider concepts of ‘educational theory’ afford opportunity to ‘frame’ theories of assessment, e.g. Carless and Boud (2018) cite social constructivist learning theories informing their theoretical positioning and Dann (2014) cites sociocultural theory advocating a Vygotskian perspective. For the latter factor of discipline, large-scale cross disciplinary studies are established in the field (Jessop and Maleckar 2016; Simpson 2016; Bearman et al. 2017), with recent theoretical advances in the domains of signature assessment practices (Pitt and Quinlan 2021; Quinlan and Pitt 2021).

As opposed to reference to fixating on general or specific learning theories, ‘assessment theory’ in this thesis is conceptualised as ‘assessment knowledge’. This, akin to ‘mode 1 knowledge’ (Gibbons et al (1994) (Barnett 2000)), comprising propositional knowledge as disseminated through academic journals. In Bernsteinian terms assessment theory may be propositioned as knowledge created in the ‘field of knowledge production’ (Bernstein 2000), Here new knowledge is generated largely in HE institutions (Singh 2002b) encapsulated in pedagogic discourse through educational research, and scholarly activities¹⁴⁵ and made evident through published peer-reviewed research publications. This assessment knowledge is recontextualised to become pedagogic discourse and ultimately re-enacted or reformulated in the field of re-production (Bernstein 2000). This act of recontextualisation is of significance to this thesis, being to understand to what extent assessment practice is informed by assessment theory¹⁴⁶. A criticism of extant assessment knowledge as theorised is the dominance of ‘operational’ research oriented to ‘practice’ (Chong 2018), or the ‘science’ of assessment as opposed to theory (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023). Nevertheless, assessment theory in this study is conceptualised as attributions of both general and specific theories of assessment promulgated as a body of assessment knowledge.

Conceptualizing assessment practice

Assessment practice is conceptualised as the enactment and synthesis, or interactions between, various components of assessment, e.g., assessment design, assessment strategies and assessment methods to fulfil assessment function(s) and purpose(s). It alludes to the Boud et al. (2018b) approach of appreciating ‘assessment-as-practiced’ as ‘everyday activities’, without normative framing in terms of what assessment espouses one ‘*should* do’ (ibid p.1110). Assessment practice as observed, or on-the-ground, can be considered an outcome of ‘theory-in-use’ (Argyris and Schon 1974). These theories-in-use govern behaviour, but are tacit, or held unconsciously¹⁴⁷ and can be misaligned or incongruent with ‘espoused theory’, being “consciously held beliefs that people express to explain, justify, or

¹⁴⁴ Albeit this work was premised on formative assessment as opposed to a generic holistic notion of assessment.
¹⁴⁵ Scholarly activities align with ‘mode 2’ knowledge (Lubbe 2013) but the modes are not exclusive as much assessment research rests on scholarship.

¹⁴⁶ There is a subversive assumption taken here that practice should be informed by research that is not assumed in practice theory approaches by David Boud and colleagues for example.

¹⁴⁷ Chapter 3 draws some inference of the alignment between concepts of ‘theory-in-use’ (Argyris and Schon 1974), the underlying structuring mechanisms of practice (Maton 2014c) and the concepts of generative mechanisms, structures, and events as per Critical Realism (Bhaskar 2008). Work also suggests that the ‘theory of action’ is a theory and practice that is consonant with critical realism (Rogers 2004). However whilst a deep investigation of these interconnections is outside the scope of this thesis, there is recognition that they focus on understanding the deeper, often hidden, aspects of practice and the mechanisms that drive observable actions, outcomes and thus practice.

predict actions” (ibid). This incongruence is recognised in the wider HE literature, beyond assessment:

the espoused theories of higher education organizations and those who run them are often inconsistent with their theories-in-use.

(Tagg 2010, p. 53)

Put simply “[p]eople don’t always do what they say they should do” (ibid p.53). People and institutions may employ ‘defensive routines’ (Rogers 2004) e.g. not calling attention to one’s own actions and ascribing blame to others or noncontrollable circumstances (Mundet Hiern et al. 2006). This lip-service has been highlighted in assessment, with HEIs operating by the ‘letter’ rather than the ‘spirit’ of ‘assessment *for* learning’ Marshall and Jane Drummond (2006). In terms of assessment as practiced, observable assessment may provide a window to inferring a ‘theory in use.

Boud et al. (2018b) help formulate the conceptualisation of assessment practice with their defining features shown in box below. These features influence and contribute to the aim of this thesis being to understand the underlying structuring principles of assessment practice as perceived by academics:

1. Interconnectedness: e.g., tasks shaped by marking experiences, or student feedback
2. Embodiment: assessment is embodied in teachers (own agency/ownership/identity)
3. Sayings and doings: language of learning outcomes and constructive alignment, hallway conversations, shared language of ‘rubrics, criteria’ etc
4. Relational: level of interaction with others
5. Contextualised: HE landscape, time, location, course and activities (physical contexts/institutional disciplinary context),
6. Material mediation: e.g. rubrics that materially mediate marking practices material artefacts: written requirements, assessment policies and procedures.
7. Prefiguration: inherited materials, assessment conventions common to a discipline or particular context, layering of practice architectures
8. Emergence: Rules, prescribed policy, procedure, assessment language tends to eschew emergence/innovation in favour of control

Features of assessment practice (Boud et al. 2018b)

Much of the above is also encapsulated by Trede and Smith (2014):

Practice comprises knowledge, skills, dispositions, moral values and actions, all connected within a sociocultural practice context that shapes their complex interdependencies ... Social practice shapes individual practice and vice versa.

(Trede and Smith 2014)

Thus assessment practice is conceptualised as a socially situated act or a social practice (Filer 2000; Shay 2008c; Mathieson 2012) where both individual and social interests shape and are shaped by assessment practice. This may in some part inform Knight (1995) assertion that ‘what we choose to assess, and how, shows quite starkly what we value’ (ibid p.13). Bearman et al. (2017) also acknowledges this “complex social nature of interwoven

personal and environmental influences on assessment design” (p.2) and how “assessment exists within a series of pedagogical, administrative and technological legacy practices” (Bearman et al. 2020).

Conceptualising the theory practice nexus

Boud et al. (2018b) critique the field of assessment research for not providing ‘a focus for effective change’. Practice theory allows for “understanding practices as they happen in everyday life and not in terms of what good assessment claims to be” (Fischer et al. 2023, p. 3) it “privileges what occurs rather than what some party believes should occur” (Boud et al. 2018b, p. 1115). However, given the situatedness of assessment practice, Simpson (2018) alludes how, with no explicit theory of assessment (Delandshere 2001), institutions have instigated substantial assessment practice and policy changes in response a myriad of socio-cultural influences; e.g. internal and external pressures; the NSS; increased accountability; external rankings; consumer demands; and quality assurance (Simpson 2018, p. 260). Thus practice has emerged from reactive external influence rather than organic or established ‘theory’.

Given calls for assessment practice to be informed by assessment scholarship and thus assessment theory (Rust 2007) and counter calls for assessment research to acknowledge practice (see Practice Theory) the legitimacy of practice as enacted provides fertile ground for investigation. From a critical realist perspective (Dobson and Fudiyartanto 2023, p. 190) contend the goal is not to evaluate assessment practices “from a principled standpoint” rather to “provide theoretical insight into the generative mechanisms and structures supporting the practice” (ibid,p190); they claim assessment discourse fails to reflect on the philosophical meaning of such assessment as social practice hence propose the concept of ‘language games, deriving from Bourdieu’s concept of ‘the rules of the game’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992b, p. 18) to understand mechanisms and structures that create and support such practice, to query how the field of assessment practice is structured

Conceptualising the term field

Field is defined by Grenfell and James (2004), as a configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions

(Grenfell and James 2004, pp. 509-510)

Ultimately field is understood as a configuration of *positions*¹⁴⁸ comprising agents (e.g. academics) struggling over status and resources (*capital*) to maximise those positions (Maton 2004). *Positions* within the field result from both *capital* and *habitus*, thus agents vie in competition over the dominant capital within the field. Capital can be social, economic or cultural. From a HE perspective, forms of capital in the field of HE can be ‘scholastic’ or ‘academic’, the former representing intellectual renown the latter institutional control (Maton 2005). Bourdieu’s ‘principles of hierarchization’¹⁴⁹ form the basis of struggles between agents for they are representative of competing forms of capital. These principles ultimately create opposing poles of the field (Maton 2005). The struggles, strategies or *position takings* undertaken by actors in the field are essentially competing

¹⁴⁸ Italics will be used throughout the thesis to denote Bourdieusian terms.

¹⁴⁹ To be discussed further in Chapter 3 but essentially “The two main forms of capital circulating in a field represent competing principles of hierarchization: an autonomous principle looking inwards to the ostensibly disinterested activities of the field (such as ‘knowledge for its own sake’) and a heteronomous principle looking beyond the field’s specific activities and towards economic and political success (such as generating research income or wielding administrative power).” (Maton 2005)

claims to legitimacy. Practice in a *field* is hence a function of both *capital* and *habitus* (Maton 2014a, p. 50).

For this thesis the field of assessment practice is conceptualised as comprising various *positions*, and thus concerned with autonomy of academics as agents and various *position-takings* or stances they might employ, for example the extent to which academics valorise and engage in certain assessment practices. The thesis therefore tacitly adopts a socio-cultural framework, as afforded by Bourdieu to aid conceptualisation of these terms. These will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Conceptualising perspectives

Further ontological conceptualisation¹⁵⁰ is warranted given the thesis' use of '*perceptions*' of assessment practice; used here interchangeably with *perspectives*. Lundie (2017) draws on Charon (2001) explaining *perspective* as "an angle on reality. ...whatever is seen can only be part of the real situation". Research has investigated both qualitative academic *perspectives* of assessment (Norton et al. 2012; Bearman et al. 2017; Reimann and Sadler 2017; Norton et al. 2019; Fernández-Ruiz et al. 2021) and quantitative measures of *conceptions* of assessment (Brown and Remesal 2012; Fletcher et al. 2012; Postareff et al. 2012; DiLoreto 2013; Hodgson and Garvey 2019). Many '*conceptions*' studies act to 'measure' perceptions via tools, e.g. the Conceptions of Assessment' questionnaire (CoA) (Brown and Remesal 2012; Hodgson and Garvey 2019), thus conceptions are closely linked to perceptions, defined¹⁵¹ in terms of:

'ways of conceptualizing', 'ways of experiencing', 'ways of seeing', 'ways of apprehending', 'ways of understanding' (Marton & Pong, 2005).

(Sims and Cilliers 2023)

The authors relate these *ways* to assessment; understood as a conflation of dimensions, e.g. purposes, roles, accountability and reflexivity in assessment and assessment literacy (ibid). Conceptions¹⁵² can represent a 'constellation of beliefs, intentions, and actions' (Pratt 1998). however Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) differentiate in that conceptions represent 'possible ways in which a phenomenon can be construed or experienced' whilst *beliefs* about assessment would represent 'the *characteristic* way in which individuals interpret and value that phenomenon'. Conceptions are thus context dependant and an individual may exhibit multiple conceptions (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002). Reimann and Sadler (2017) corroborate that "attributing one single conception to an individual may not do justice to the phenomenon under investigation".

To further the semantic intricacies of terminologies would add little value. Reimann and Sadler (2017) take this stance, using the term '*thinking*' about assessment; "deliberately using broad and generic terms" to avoid such debate, hence his thesis utilises the term *perceptions* as a qualitative counterpart to *conceptions* to capture the various 'ways of seeing' assessment (Sims and Cilliers 2023). or 'thinking' about assessment Reimann and Sadler (2017).

¹⁵⁰ A deep engagement with both ontology and epistemology is afforded in the theoretical framework as adoption of critical realism will support the Charon (2001) 'angles on reality' interpretation in acknowledging how our knowledge of reality is mediated through our perspectives of such reality, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁵¹ The authors define conceptions further in phenomenography terms as "Experiential descriptions, that is, content-orientated and interpretative descriptions of qualitatively different ways people perceive and understand their reality" (Marton, 1981, p. 177)" (p1)

¹⁵² A further definition: "Goodenough (1990) defined conceptions as '... assertions on different aspects of reality that an individual assumes to be true at a given time in their life, without this meaning that they comprise an objective truth'." This subjective account assimilates to that of perceptions.

Appendix B - Credibility of Approach

Publications:

Forde-Leaves, N., Walton, J. and Tann, K., 2023. A framework for understanding assessment practice in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, pp.1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2169659>

Conference Presentations:

- Forde-Leaves, N. (2022) Academic autonomy in assessment practice?. LCT International Roundtable event. Available at:<https://youtu.be/AjOzD1Wy8GQ>
- Forde-Leaves, N. (2022). Disciplines and assessment culture: Academic's perceptions of assessment. Sustainably assessing the unbridled pursuit of truth or 'teach to the test' knowledge factory? #sellingyoursoulfora2:1. International Conference of Assessment in Higher Education 22-24 June
- Forde-Leaves, N. Walton, J. Tann, K. (2022). Operationalizing Shay's (2016) curriculum model as the foundation for a Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) framework for assessment inquiry. Teaching Symposium in Higher Education, Liverpool.
- Forde-Leaves, N. (2021). Autonomy and assessment culture: Students as partners or products of 'teach to the test' knowledge factory? #sellingyoursoulfora2:1 AdvanceHE Assessment and Feedback Symposium 2021. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/Session%20Abstracts%20-%20Assessment%20and%20Feedback%20Symposium%202021.pdf>
- Forde-Leaves, N. (2021) *Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ASFLA) 1/10/2021* (See: Caple, H. and Tian, P., 2021, September. Day 3–Friday, 1 October. In *ASFLA2021 Conference Program* (p. 9). Available at: <https://asfla.business.uq.edu.au/sites/default/files/ASFLA%202021%20Program%20Booklet%20%2820210917%29.pdf#page=9>)
- Forde-leaves, N. (2020) Autonomy and assessment culture. Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Doctoral Conference, Cardiff.

Appendix C – Ethical Approval



School of Social Sciences
Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol
Head of School, Pennaeth yr Ysgol
Dr Tom Hall

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King Edward VII Avenue
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05 December 2017

Our ref: SREC/2410

Natalie Forde-Leaves
PhD Programme
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Dear Natalie,

Your project entitled '*Sustainable Assessment Design: Emancipatory critical thought in a liberalised HE community of practice or 'teach to the test' sweatshop?sellingyoursoulfora2:1'*' has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Emma Renold
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

cc: Prof David James, Prof Sin Yi Cheung, Corinda Perkins



Registered Charity, no. 1136855
Clusen Gofrestredig, rhif 1136855

Appendix D – Consent And Participation Information Sheets

RESEARCH STUDY: PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT AT CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL

Participant Interview Consent Form



Research Lead: Natalie Forde-Leaves

Please read the statements below. If you are happy with all of the statements, please return this form via email to me at forde-leavesn@cardiff.ac.uk. This will be considered to constitute giving your consent to participate in the study.

To supplement this consent form, you will also be provided with a Participant Information Sheet, however if you have any further questions about the research or the statements below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Please tick all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet dated 3 August 2021, (version 1) about this research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation in an interview is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded, transcribed and both the recordings and transcription will be securely stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that I will not be identified in any way in the analysis and reporting of results. I understand that even if I withdraw from the study, information already collected about me may be included in the final study analysis after being anonymised.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand what will happen to my data and that everything I say will be treated confidentially and only used for research purposes, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I give permission for the researcher to quote me directly using a pseudonym/anonymously in any publication of the research findings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I agree for anonymised research data collected in this study to be used in other research studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I agree to take part in the research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant: _____ Date: _____ E-Signature/Initials _____

Name of researcher: Natalie Forde-leaves _____ Date: __3/8/21_____ E-Signature/Initials _____

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - INTERVIEW



RESEARCH STUDY:

PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT AT CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

This research project is undertaken by Natalie Forde-Leaves in her capacity as a Professional Doctorate (EdD) student-researcher. This research project aims to understand assessment perspectives, influences & practices at Cardiff Business School, specifically on two programmes: Accounting & Finance and Business Management.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because it is believed that you are currently involved in the teaching and assessment practices on a module pertaining either the Accounting or Business Management section of Cardiff Business School.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons.

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form.

4. What will taking part involve?

Participation in this project will involve one in-depth interview of approximately one hour length in which questions will be asked of you along with the opportunity for you to share your experiences and views.

The interview will be held over Zoom (or Skype if you prefer) and participants are free to utilise either 'audio only' means of interview via a mobile device/laptop or using 'audio plus video'. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded using a handheld Dictaphone for purposes of accuracy and revisiting the data. Interviews will NOT be recorded via any online applications (Zoom/Skype). You will also be invited to check your own interview transcripts for accuracy. The interviews will be transcribed using the Panopto auto transcription facility available via the researchers protected Panopto account and as agreed by SOCSI Research Ethics. All copies of audio files will be deleted from Panopto once the transcription is complete and audio files will be securely stored on the Researchers One Drive account and analysed via NVivo.

5. Will I be paid for taking part?

No, however I am extremely grateful for the time you dedicate to this research process.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There may be no direct advantages or benefits to you from taking part, but your contribution will help me in understanding assessment perspectives and practice, and it is envisaged that future research outputs will contribute towards current assessment discourse.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no identifiable risks to you for participating in this research, however the concern of confidentiality has been considered and actions will be taken to mitigate against this issue via anonymisation of all interview data and the application of pseudonyms to all participants.

8. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

All information collected from (or about) you during the research project will be kept confidential and any personal information you provide will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation. Please see ‘What will happen to my Personal Data?’ (below) for further information.

Anonymity will be guaranteed. Your real name will not be used at any point of information analysis, or in any subsequent written material; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in your interview will be given pseudonyms. You will not be identifiable in anything arising from the research study.

Anonymised interview transcripts will only be made available to myself and my doctorate supervisors (Prof. David James and Prof. Helen Williams) if requested. All data will be stored securely in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You will also be invited to check your own interview transcripts for accuracy.

Analysis and interpretation of the data will form part of my doctoral research and may be used for future research publications.

9. What will happen to my Personal Data?

Information collected will be transcribed and anonymised and kept in a secure location. Digital and physical files will be retained for no less than 5 years or at least 2 years post-publication and then destroyed. The anonymised information will be used for doctoral and academic research purposes at Cardiff University. The results of the research may be reported in journal publications and conference presentations in a form that does not disclose the identification of any individual.

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection, including:

- your rights
- the legal basis under which Cardiff University processes your personal data for research
- Cardiff University’s Data Protection Policy
- how to contact the Cardiff University Data Protection Officer
- how to contact the Information Commissioner’s Office

may be found at <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>

After interview data collection, and within circa 1 year of the interview taking place, the researcher will anonymise all the personal data it has collected from, or about, you in connection with this research project, with the exception of your consent form and accompanying details (e.g. email address if provided). Your consent form will be retained for no less than 5 years or at least 2 years post-publication and may be accessed by the lead researcher and, where necessary, by members of the University’s governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum of 5 years or at least 2 years post-publication but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes.

Should you wish to withdraw from the project all personal data and information collected up until the point of participant withdrawal from the research project will be destroyed where possible. However, please note that it will not be possible to withdraw any anonymised data that has already been published

or in some cases, where identifiers are irreversibly removed during the course of a research project, from the point at which it has been anonymised.

10. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

As stipulated all personal data (e.g. consent forms) will be retained for no less than 5 years or at least 2 years post-publication and then destroyed. No personal data will be shared during or after the research project.

Anonymised information may be used for future research and may be used both within and outside the University for research purposes. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum of 5 years or at least 2 years post-publication but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes

11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

It is my intention to publish the results of this research project in academic journals and present findings at conferences. Participants will not be identified in any report, publication or presentation. Where verbatim quotes from participants are used in the research these will be in a pseudonym form that does not disclose or enable the identification of any individual based on any identifiable features or supplementary information.

12. What if there is a problem?

If you wish to complain, or have grounds for concerns about any aspect of the manner in which you have been approached or treated during the course of this research, please contact myself the researcher forde-leavesn@cardiff.ac.uk. Or one of my supervisors, Professor David James (JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk) or Professor Helen Williams (Williamsh54@cardiff.ac.uk) If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, please contact socsi-ethics@cardiff.ac.uk.

13. Who is organising and funding this research project?

The research is organised by Natalie Forde-Leaves in Cardiff University

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given approval by SOCSI Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University and Cardiff Business School Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University. The interview questions have been reviewed by the project supervisors.

15. Further information and contact details

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact me during normal working hours:

Natalie Forde-Leaves FCCA, MSc, FAIA (Acad), PGCert, FHEA
Lecturer in Accounting & Finance
Cardiff Business School
College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Cardiff University, Aberconway Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff. CF10 3EU.

Telephone: + 44 (0) 29 20870592

Email: forde-leavesn@cardiff.ac.uk

Thank you for considering to take part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

Appendix E – Invitation To Interview

From: Natalie Forde-Leaves <Forde-LeavesN@cardiff.ac.uk>
Sent: 23 August 2021 17:00
To: XXX

Subject: Could you spare 1 hour of your time please for an interview?

Dear XXXX

As part of my Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) I am undertaking semi structured interviews with all members of staff whom have taught on the UG Accounting and/or **Business Management** Programmes in the last year. I am investigating '**Perceptions of Assessment**' And yes, you may think, that's very broad, and yes it is indeed! I would like to hear all about your views on Assessment; **What** is it for; **How** it should be done and **Why** we do it the way we do it.

I would hugely appreciate it if you were able to help me by participating in an interview for this?

If you were interested then the interview should take about 45-60 mins and interviews will be conducted across Zoom but **not** recorded on Zoom as per Ethics guidance – only a Dictaphone will be used.

I am very flexible throughout the remainder of August and September so can do my best to accommodate you at a date/time you wish. Please do let me know when best for you?

However just for a starting point, I have randomly pre-selected some optional dates to try and help planning the sessions as I will also be contacting other Accounting and Business Management colleagues – I have no idea if any of these dates are good for you but have included just as some options – but as said **please feel free to suggest an alternative that suits you best if any of these are not suitable** – I have lots of space in my diary at the moment!?

Potential Dates:

Day	Date	Potential time?
Friday	10/09/2021	3 pm
Monday	20/09/2021	4pm
Tuesday	21/09/2021	10 am

I would hugely appreciate hearing from you and as with many research projects all data will be anonymised hence all discussions are confidential and data will be purely used for research purposes (for both my thesis and hopefully future publications). I can send you over full details (information sheet etc) if you are interested!

I would love to hear back from you and thank you in advance, but if not please don't worry I appreciate you have many demands on your time!

Kind regards,

Natalie

Natalie Forde-Leaves FCCA, MSc, FAIA (Acad), PGCert, FHEA
Senior Lecturer in Accounting & Finance

Cardiff **Business** School | Ysgol **Fusnes** Caerdydd

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

Cardiff University, Aberconway Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff. CF10 3EU.

☎ + 44 (0) 29 20870592

Appendix F – Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Formalities:

- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed / for signing consent form
- This is for my EdD and other research
- Will be anonymised and you can stop at any time – hopefully take 1 hour or less
- Are you still happy to be interviewed and if so are you happy to be recorded via Dictaphone? RECORD

We will start by firstly finding out a little about you and then discussing 1) perceptions of **assessment in general terms** then 2) how this fits with your views of **HE in general** and 3) **teaching in general** then (4) move onto your specific **discipline** and (5) your personal **assessment practices**.

About you

1. Please could you tell me a bit about **you** - a potted history of how you came to be here in your role at RGUK and how would you now describe your academic identity?

General HE Context:

The following questions are about HE generally

2. Please tell me a little about your perceptions of **assessment in HE generally**, for example what do you feel is the **purpose**/(s) of assessment? You may wish to comment on formative/summative assessment..
3. And do these views of assessment resonate with your perceptions of **HE in general**? Could you tell me a bit about how you perceive HE and the purpose of HE...
4. And your earlier views on assessment- do they resonate with your views about the role of the academic in HE i.e. your role in terms of **lecturing/teaching in general**? **For example** how you perceive teaching and the purpose of teaching...
5. Given your views of assessment/HE/teaching, what do you think have been the main **influences** on the way you think about assessment generally?
6. And how do you feel about **pedagogy** in relation to assessment - do you have any experience of pedagogy influencing your thinking about assessment?
7. And how do you feel about **the world of work** in relation to assessment - do you have any experience of the profession/industry influencing your thinking about assessment?

Specific Examples

We are now going to move onto Business School specific context and your discipline/module

About your discipline/programme

8. About your specific **discipline**, you mentioned X (from Q1), is this the discipline in which you teach? What would success look like in this discipline for a student?

9. Do you think this notion of '**success**' can and should be assessed? E.g. can success in this discipline be made explicit in assessment / which assessment strategies might work best?
10. And how do you feel assessment is/should be done at the **programme** level on which you teach – is this similar to this idea of discipline?? (will be different for Business Management interviewees as interdisciplinary)
11. Regarding **student** perceptions, how do you think Accounting/Bus Man (as relevant) students feel about assessment generally in this discipline and on this programme?

About your practice

12. About your **specific assessment practice**, could you tell me a little about your Accounting/Bus man UG modules please (for example the form of knowledge etc) and how do you assess on your module/s?
13. From your perspective what are the main factors to **consider** when designing assessments for your modules?
14. And are you able to put your **assessment philosophy** into practice on your module? What, do you think helps you to do this or what, if anything, stops you from assessing as you would like?
15. Finally, overall what would you suggest has **influenced** your perceptions of assessment and your personal practices - do you have any experiences/examples you can draw from - perhaps from a professional /disciplinary or pedagogic perspective

Thank you for your time

Appendix G – RTA Stages

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data.

Familiarisation entails the reading and re-reading of the entire dataset in order to become intimately familiar with the data.

(Byrne 2022)

The combination of linking audio files and written transcripts in Nvivo enabled a close proximity to the data as opposed to a socio-material segregation between written transcript and original audio files. As I edited each interview for grammatical and spelling errors I was able to re-listen to each sentence, paragraph or interview response. Following the transcription process, summarised interviewee responses to re-familiarise myself, this entailed listening to each interview and constructing an ‘overall summary of interview responses’ in excel, noting any significant ‘topics’ e.g. demographic information, presence of accreditation bodies, assessment methods used etc and summarising particular stances taken. This was supported by re-reading the initial handwritten notes made at interview and summarised documented vignettes were compiled in a Word file to enable a more consolidated person-centred approach to understanding the data, an example of this is shown below:

Angela – overview
Assessment practices engaged in at RGUK Uni: exams, formative exams

Angela discussed an inner drive associated to her culture where teaching was highly valued and placed emphasis on learning to learn. She felt thwarted by management whom essentially outsources tutorial teaching away from her that disabled much of her ability to enact formative assessment and build dialogic formative assessment relationships with students. A past history of attempts to innovate had led to disappointment and disillusionment. Workload concerns also dominated the conversations with the ultimate consequence of engagement with traditional assessment types for efficiency purposes in dealing with large student numbers.

Figure 0.1: Example of interview overview notes taken during phase one

Phase two: generating initial codes

initially a process of inductive open-coding was conducted (Byrne 2022), this enabled collection of both semantic factual data that were not yet evaluated as to its ‘meaningfulness’ (Byrne 2022) e.g.

assessment methods, time at institution, modules taught, and also coding of both semantic and latent data that were construed as meaningful to the research questions. In addressing RQ1 (*perceptions*) and RQ2 (*influences*) codes were used as superficial segregations to identify ‘topics’ as opposed to deep latent themes. For example if academics mentioned their training or educational background this was semantically coded to nodes of ‘training’ or ‘educational background’ respectively. This stage entailed little reflexivity and undertook some ‘structural coding’ (Saldaña 2021) of responses based on the semi structured interview questions. Having engaged with RTA, latent iterative coding was also undertaken. The continuous back and forth of relistening to interview extracts as I coded the data enabled a deep reflective immersion into both what was said, i.e., the written transcriptions, but also *how* these were said considering inflections and tones, e.g. laughter. In listening to the interviews as a continuous reflective activity throughout the initial two stages of RTA I was able to accommodate for both ‘semantic’ understandings e.g. the words on the page but also latent coding:

attempts to identify hidden meanings or underlying assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data.

(Byrne 2022)

When laughter was used as a satirical cynical mechanism to signal disagreement with a concept, I interpreted its latent properties to capture the meaning in the text, e.g. when discussing pedagogic training:

how's it going to be done?, Is it going to be like these things that we do, we get told that we must get our kind of fire exit awareness up to date and so we watch a video, which we could have probably answered all the questions

(Radyr-AF)

The above quote is initially coded as ‘pedagogic training’ however when contextualised with laughter through re-listening, this insinuates a dismissal or sense of contempt for centralised pedagogic training courses, thus coded in the sub-set of ‘irrelevance of pedagogy’.

Further, this example represents an example of RTA in action, as I drew on my own experiences of ‘fire training’ modules in my own institution and the conceptions of these courses held by academics. I assimilated to undertones of ‘*we get told that we must*’ as having myself been a recipient of a ‘you must complete your mandatory training’ emails. In a reflexive engagement we see both an anti-pedagogy ethos but also a sense of managerialism or a diminution of academic agency through engagement with what may be construed as ‘menial’ administrative HR tasks. Being an insider thus has affordances and constraints – affordances that I draw on my own experiences to interpret the data but constraints in that

I may be overly enthusiastic to interpret what I may want to see from the data given my own preoccupations with more critical assessment discourses. As a result of this mesh of both structural, semantic and latent coding the first phase of initial coding resulted in 778 codes in NVivo as codes were ascribed descriptively.

Phase 3; Generating initial themes.

The focus shifts from the interpretation of individual data items within the dataset, to the interpretation of aggregated meaning and meaningfulness across the dataset.

(Byrne 2022)

The process of deducing aggregated meanings ensued. Initial themes were generated via amalgamating concepts and meanings in relation to the research questions. Due to the inter-relation of the research questions (influences (PA) that inform perspectives (RA) the ability to act reflectively and take an active role in interpreting themes was crucial. For example a central theme of consumerism included several sub-themes: tuition fees, student satisfaction, NSS evaluation metrics, instrumentality, grade focus, predictability and spoon feeding. However, these sub-themes represented intersectionality, i.e. themes where both influences (or positions, PA, in the case of this study) and perceptions (or position takings, RA) collide. As such whilst large dominant themes could be formulated from an RTA perspective, I was attentive to retain codes from a perspectives and influence classification to ensure 1) development of the TD through individual interpretations of PA and RA, and 2) to ensure RQ1 (perceptions) and RQ2 (influences) could be met in isolation. To continue the example of consumerism, of the 7 sub themes above, the first 3 (tuition fees, student satisfaction and NSS evaluation metrics) would be categorised as ‘influences’, whilst the remaining 4 (instrumentality, grade focus, predictability and spoon feeding) would be retained in a ‘perspectives’ theme, both were simultaneously coded under the primary heading of consumerism.

Given this development, 96 sub themes were established and were grouped under 12 main candidate themes as shown:

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement/categorisation/distinguishing function • Summative 	Romanticism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative perspectives of criticality/autonomous learners – yet fail to engage 	Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own experiences/influence of colleagues shaped assessment practice 	Good practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of AfL
Institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research focus/workload allocation models dominate • POA/Sharing best practice 	Oppression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk/singled out / dumbing down 	POA/Sharing best practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silo mentality where assessment is not <u>discussed</u> and pedagogy not embraced generally 	Pragmatism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just go with tradition • ‘what works’ • Implicit notions of ‘best’ methods
Innovative Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIMBY – good but not for me/maybe I could if I had time 	Managerialism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want full control... but...‘we need to be told • A need for oversight control/QA at programme level 	Consumerism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority evidenced student as consumer views – tactical/ instrumental / lacking engagement 	Accreditation/Employability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting – accreditation constraint • Employability contested

Figure 0.2: Stage 3 of RTA – 12 initial themes

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes.

This phase required consideration of what (Byrne 2022) refers to as Patton’s (1990) ‘dual criteria for judging categories’, essentially reviewing for internal homogeneity *within* themes and external heterogeneity *among* themes. This was challenging given how themes of employability, consumerism and managerialism could potentially be construed as neoliberalism, yet neoliberalism was too abstract. Segregating out the myriad of influences pertaining to corresponding and relatively similar ‘perspectives’ or ‘practices’, e.g. grade focus or instrumentality, was a very nuanced person-specific interpretative process.

Phase 5; Refining, defining and naming themes.

Defining themes requires a deep analysis of the underlying data items

(Byrne 2022)

Via extensive consideration and manipulation, 6 themes were defined as presented below. Definitions, boundaries and unique features of the themes were conceptualised and are discussed in the findings chapter 7



Figure 0.3: Stage 5 of RTA – 7 final themes

Phase 6 Producing the report.

The final stage of RTA entails producing the report. As such the findings are presented in Chapter 4; they are discussed with references to the themes and individual vignettes and examples are provided as representations of such themes.

Appendix H –Translation Device

P A	1st level This study	2nd level This study	3rd level This study	4th level This study	Map	Examples	Counter- factual
+ +	target Assessment decisions are primarily influenced by the academic /inside field of academic assessment practice	core Academic: Assessment design influenced from academic self	inner INDIVIDUALS / HABITUS BACKGROUND academic's habitus	engrained in them birth/culture	16	deep beliefs – cultural, own personality traits, family or individual traits, family influence, hope for future generations, conservative characteristic, personal pride	-1
				their experience	15	general teaching/assessment experience, experience as an undergraduate, past experience as I was assessed, own time on module, experience of the assessment machine, own pedagogic research, general teaching experience, existing practice, own practice, external examiner, own disciplinary background, management role, academic selves as silos, individual lecturers, academic freedom, academic agency, own work experience	-2
			outer IDENTITY research/teaching professional	teacher	14	Teacher identity, teacher with industry background, as a lecturer, perfectionist supportive, academic characteristics, teacher identity without background	-3
				researcher	13	Research identity with industry background, researcher, background industry, for me personally, research identity without background, critical researcher	-4
		ancillary pedagogic/research/disciplinary community: Assessment design resultant of academic norms	inner INTERNALISED PEDAGOGY OTHER ACADEMICS academia as a profession	pedagogic / research communities	12	internalised pedagogic scholarship/facilitator role, colleagues at pedagogic conference, pedagogic COP, pedagogic confidence, pedagogic training, recognition of academics as a profession, teaching & scholarship colleagues, academic mentorship/personal tutor, prior module leaders	-5
				other academics/academics at other unis	11	research contract colleagues, colleague influence, other universities, other colleagues, other university colleagues, other universities (Oxford Cambridge), other modules, external assessing, collective approach, outside external examiner	-6
			outer disciplinary norms	discipline	10	discipline determines assessment, discipline influences , HE disciplinary identity, experience of the discipline, discipline influences students, disciplinary assessment practices, disciplinary colleagues, qual/quant type of module determines assessment,	-7
				traditional practices	9	Collective academics as a collective 'we', general interdisciplinary nature, general HE, traditions, historic traditions, inherited practices	-8

-	<i>non-target</i>	Structural influence dominates assessment decisions. Significant influence Outside field of academic assessment practice	<i>Associated</i>	Institution related: Assessment design governed by internal 'structures' or external accreditation	<i>near</i>	students	-9	students engagement, student agency, student feedback influence, student feedback, student parents, student quality, student stress, student choice in module, student expectations, students view, students characteristics, general perceptions of students, student choice, student workload, general internal student satisfaction, student numbers, student diversity	8		
						regs/ institutional structure	-10	Programme, imposed decisions from programme, need for module oversight, Programme Director, oversight at programme level, institutional focus on assessment, institutional support, programme structure, Exam diets, administrative constraints, programme control, school policy or university policy (Uni type), Imposed decisions from regulations, imposed work allocation, general resource issues, Imposed centralised regimes, Modular system, general time factor, Institutional research identity, imposed control, pressure to publish, workload, regs, university type, other uni management, institutional leadership, programme oversight, exam board risk, international comparison, General institution	7		
					<i>remote</i>	linked accreditation bodies	pedagogy general	-11	accreditation bodies, other educational bodies, schooling system, other education bodies	6	
						linked accreditation bodies	pedagogy general	-12	Conferences, external pedagogic conference, pedagogic scholarship, external pedagogy: HEA, external pedagogic community, external courses	5	
					<i>unassociated</i>	<i>near</i>	external market / students/ NSS / league tables	general students as consumers	-13	tuition fees, student preferences, currency, students as consumers, market pressure	4
								NSS league tables student satisfaction	-14	evaluation scores, NSS, satisfaction - the list, satisfaction, module/NSS generally, parent satisfaction	3
						<i>remote</i>	employers/general external environment	industry credentialism	-15	industry cooperation, profession influence, westernised HEI, general industry, industry credentialism, Employers, real world	2
								other - covid etc	-16	Technology, covid, social media	1

R A	1st level This study	2nd level This study	3rd level This study	4th level This study	Map	Examples	Counter- factual
+	target Purpose and practices of assessment are perceived to be pedagogic/educational	core assessment for future learning	inner future learning/ Humboldtian relationship freedom agency for students	self development irrespective of future, value added	16	learning for learning sake emancipatory, assessment for public good, liberal/educational capital, future, create critical citizens self development learning for interest, measurement of 'value added', self improvement, educational capital, open minded (liberal), assessment for independent learning, academic pursuit, brings legitimacy to HE, student identity formation, future life irrespective of job, love of learning, assessment for societal challenge, inclusivity (challenge racism/sexism/power in assessment), higher critical skill, unsettling students, see different perspectives, academic theory in assessment, Research focus/orientation, knowledge for all, choice in assessment, critical pedagogy/critical assessment, think differently	-1
				freedom dialogic exchange	15	freedom/enjoyment, to be their best, freedom to learn for themselves, inclusivity, creativity play, transparent assessment, assessment as a tool for change, multiplicity of purposes unique to student, fun enjoy assessment, reflective practice for student voice, curiosity, guided freedom (mentor) partnership, dialogic exchange, small groups, viva oral exams for dialogue, peer / self assessment, Aal - students as active critical assessors (self and peer) peer formative work, autonomous students responsibility, shared lived experience of assessment, independent learning journey, personal interaction, co-creation in assessment	-2
			outer future work oriented learning	disciplinary authentic assessment	14	to become a member of the discipline, member of profession, as preparation for work/ employees of the future, team working skills / presentations, disciplinary assessment practice, real life assessments, authentic assessment, Assessment for employability, small group assessments for learning for workplace, Skill sets e.g. argument, authentic assessment, transferable skills, assessment links real life	-3
				assessment to learn skills	13	assessment diversity for skill diversity, different challenges, assessments to match the skills you are assessing, assessment diversity, 'rounded' diverse skillset, students engaged in assessment, skills not content, demonstrate current and future abilities, capabilities, measure how applied skills, diversity of assessment practices, value adding activity	-4
			ancillary	inner	formative for evaluative	12	formative assessment for learning, balance of assessment (not over-assess)continuous assessment, feedback help them learn, shared POA, deep learning, small low stakes continuous assessment, Assessment controls

		for current learning and measurement	current measure & student feedback purposes - motivation to learn & engage	judgement , feedback		learning, to try and promote maximise deep learning, high levels of POA through pedagogic evidence, AfL practices linked to learning, POA - being an expert in assessment, innovative assessment practice, helping/supporting students in assessment, integrated assessment, programmatic assessment, short tasks, unconstrained assessment, scaffolding in assessment	
				strategic learning tool past measure of knowledge	11	measure current learning, implicit practice of what works, POA for change, best way to assess, application of knowledge, technology for learning assessment as a goal teaching driven by the assessment	-6
			outer past measurement of 'learning' as valid rationale	past measure achievement , measure performance	10	measure performance, transparent criteria, assumed learning purpose, validity matching Los to assess measurement of LOs, assessment of basic skills, measure success competence, surface learning practices summative practices, summative practices, diverse summative practices, Traditional practices favoured for CT, Technical knowledge based learning, technical knowledge focus	-7
				assessment focussed on reliability measurement	9	testing no feedback, methods to help discriminate performance, methods that they think appropriate their teaching, objective measurement, content focussed, measure current learning terminal activity, robust procedures for reliability, Fair assessment, reliability of individual V team marks, team marking for reliability, robust procedures for reliability, categorise differentiate learning, consistency, strong rigorous fair	-8
-	non-target Purpose and practices of assessment are perceived to be pragmatic/ utilitarian	Associated Purpose and practices that detract from the student are internal facing	near lip service/ supervision motivation to address lack of engagement (as a technology)	student tactics/academic as 'helper'	-9	potential spoon-feeding, instrumental learning, teach to the test, memorisation not learning, using tricks/techniques to match student expectation/ predictability assessment as copying, predictability, preparation/train for assessment, helping through the assessment process, mechanistic process learning, Grade inflation through 'process' learning, going through motions, neutral constraint	8
				To tackle engagement Cheating Surveillance	-10	to make them want to learn, practices not help learning, controlled environment, grade inflation, target timetable for learning, visibility of engagement, incentive to keep up to date, participation/attendance/extrinsic motivation assessment as keeping in contact/engagement to motivate students (in a good way), check on learning, motivate to engage, tool for engagement, tool to force change, to scare students, tool for fear, effort measure differentiate, assessment to find out cheating, tool for control	7
				remote compliance , Quality Assurance	-11	focus on QA, students should do what they are told, practices to 'fit in', feedback on staff performance, compliance with institutional requirements, quality assurance processes, inertia to change, not wanting to be lone,	6

--		compliance institutional purposes/practices - workload pressures	(QA) practices, programme initiatives		perceived as lack of POA standards - not working to standards, lack of quality assurance/training/POA, lack of QA, assessment decision making on other basis, dysfunctional, remark to fit in, marking/exam board administration, restricted marking practices, inconsistent marking/own marking practices	
			Efficiency factors - marking consideration pragmatic assessment practice	-12	assessment for structural purposes, 1 assessment due to credits, module/programme structures/caps/credits, trade offs in assessment (pedagogic pragmatic), follow prior years, narrow restricted assessment practices, flexibility for adaptability, burden of more assessment, moderation - admin clerical check, standardized assessments no choice, reduce cost of assessment, efficiency/easiest to mark, Assessment governed by workload (marking) not pedagogy, efficiency outsourcing, Assessment governed by resource decisions not pedagogy,, student workload considerations (not summer exam)follow traditional practices, technician formulaic repetition approach, design around the constraints	5
	<i>unassociated</i> functional role Practices that align with external requirements & other	<i>near</i> job economy credentialism	for employer needs , employability training	-13	industry led practice not POA, employability skills etc not able to be taught employability narrative rubbish, categorisation norm referenced criteria	4
			certification/ accreditation for employers benefit	-14	certification/accreditation, Not learning just certification, process students through system, Validation of learning = proof, normative measurement, stepping stone for career, reputational advantage (accreditation)credentialism/qualification focus, forced to get job, certification process, for employers benefit/training classification, categorisation of students	3
		<i>remote</i> customer satisfaction	keeping students happy to stop them complaining	-15	keeping students happy to stop them complaining, ROI/a pass mark, make students happy, practices to reward all irrespective of performance, feedback to make students happy, assessment seen as stressful, keep students comfortable, end game- pass mark, satisfaction not help learning, NSS/satisfaction surveys, assessment as product offering, metrics and measurability	2
			assessment not a focus , teaching separate to assessment	-16	get through not learning, teaching separate to assessment, assessment separate to education	1

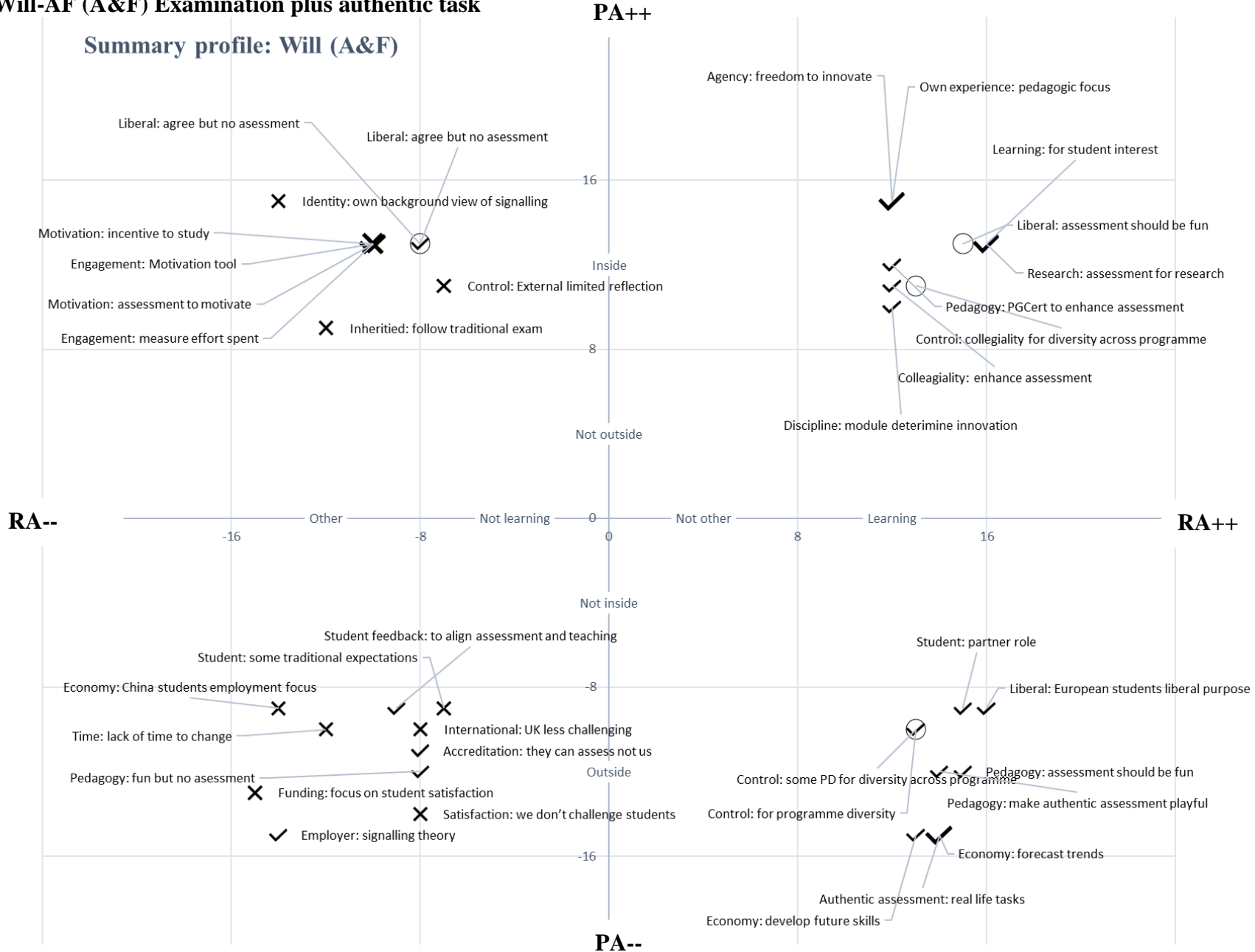
Appendix I - Illustrative extract from the LCT Assessment Tool for fictional interview responses

Practice type	Discourse	Participant	PA	RA	Data label for chart	PA	RA	Actual quote
Normative Positive aspects	Formative Assessment	fictional	academic as silo	formative assessment for learning	Academics should have influence and assessment should be formative	15	12	interview text
Normative Negative aspects	- GLM	fictional	industry cooperation	categorisation	GLM should not influence assessment and assessment should not be for categorisation for employers	2	4	interview text
Normative Negative aspects	- Formative Assessment	fictional	academic as silo	formative assessment for learning	Academics should not have influence, but assessment should be formative	-2	12	interview text
Actual supported	GLM	fictional	academic as silo	categorisation	Academic does influence and assessment is for categorisation, and this is good	15	-13	interview text
Actual supported	Formative Assessment	fictional	academic as silo	formative assessment for learning	Academic does influence and assessment is formative, and this is good	15	12	interview text
Actual supported	Formative Assessment	fictional	student quality	formative assessment for learning	Students do influence assessment and engage in formative assessment which is good	-9	12	interview text
Actual Unsupported	GLM	fictional	industry credentialism	categorisation	GLM does influence and assessment is just categorisation which is bad	-15	-13	interview text
Actual Unsupported	Formative Assessment	fictional	student numbers	formative assessment for learning	Students influence assessment and formative assessment doesn't work, which is bad	-9	-4	interview text

Appendix J- Individual LCT Summary Profiles

Will-AF (A&F) Examination plus authentic task

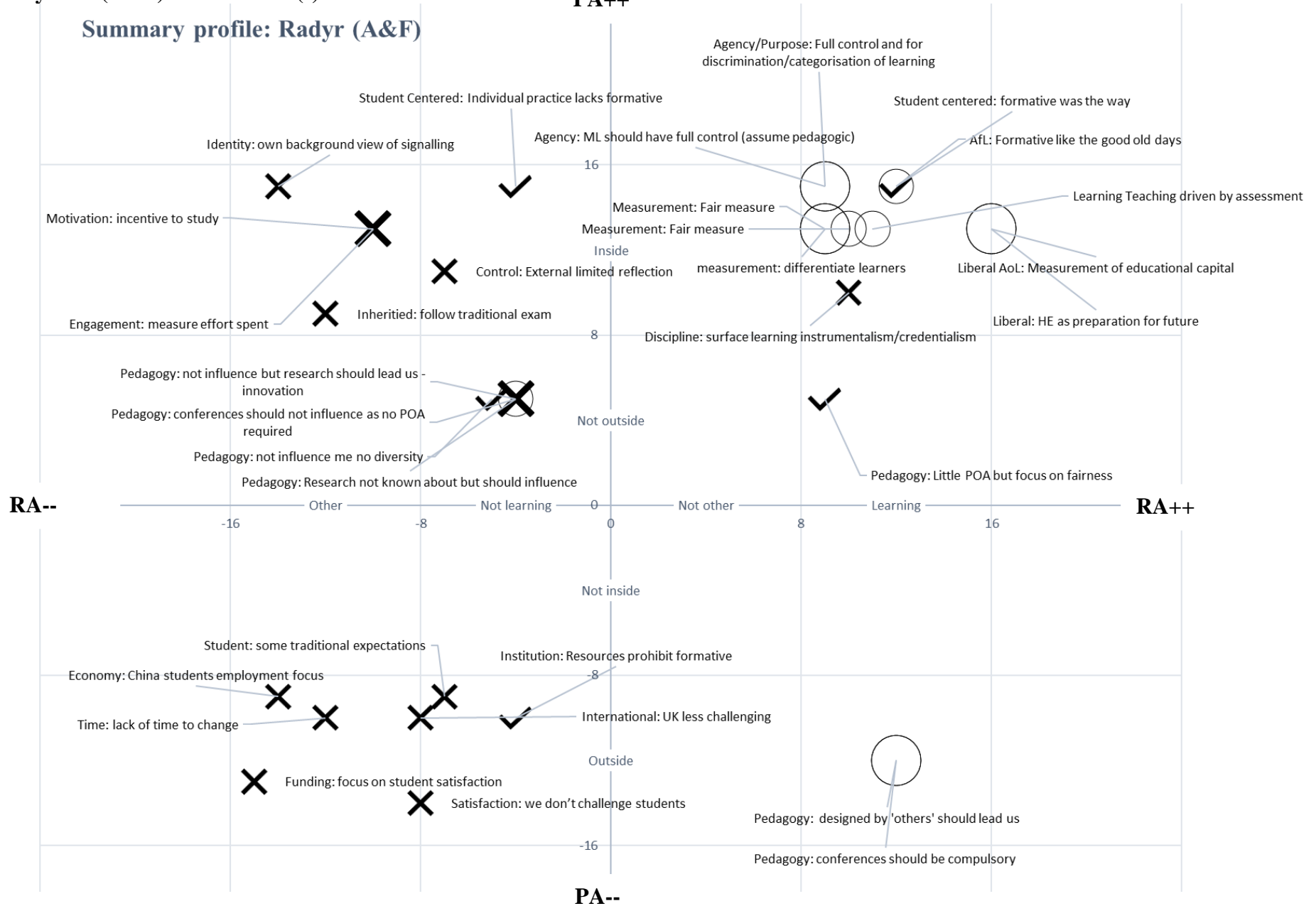
Summary profile: Will (A&F)



Radyr-AF (A&F) Examination(s)

Summary profile: Radyr (A&F)

PA++



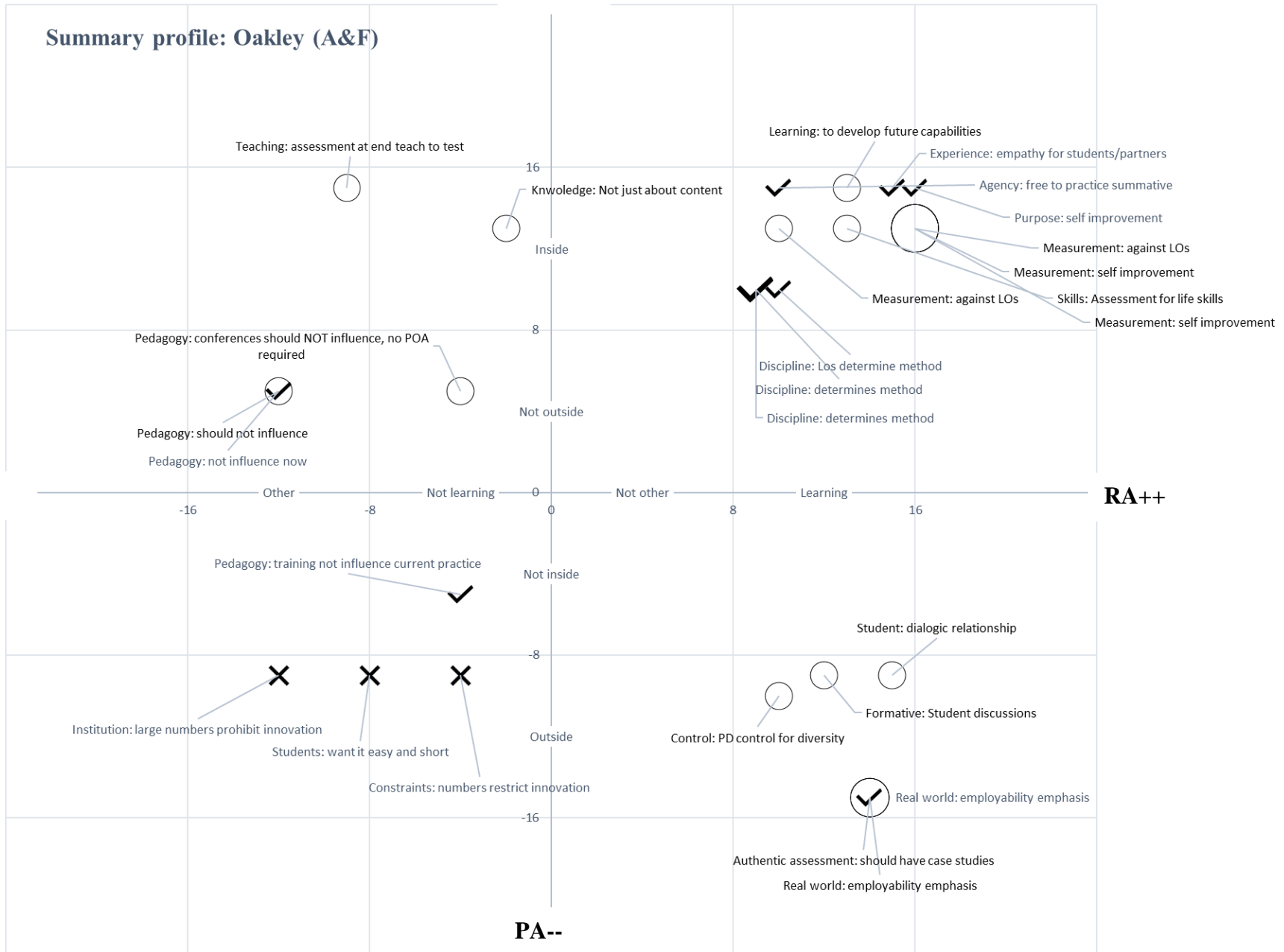
Oakley-AF (A&F): Examination(s)

PA++

Summary profile: Oakley (A&F)

RA--

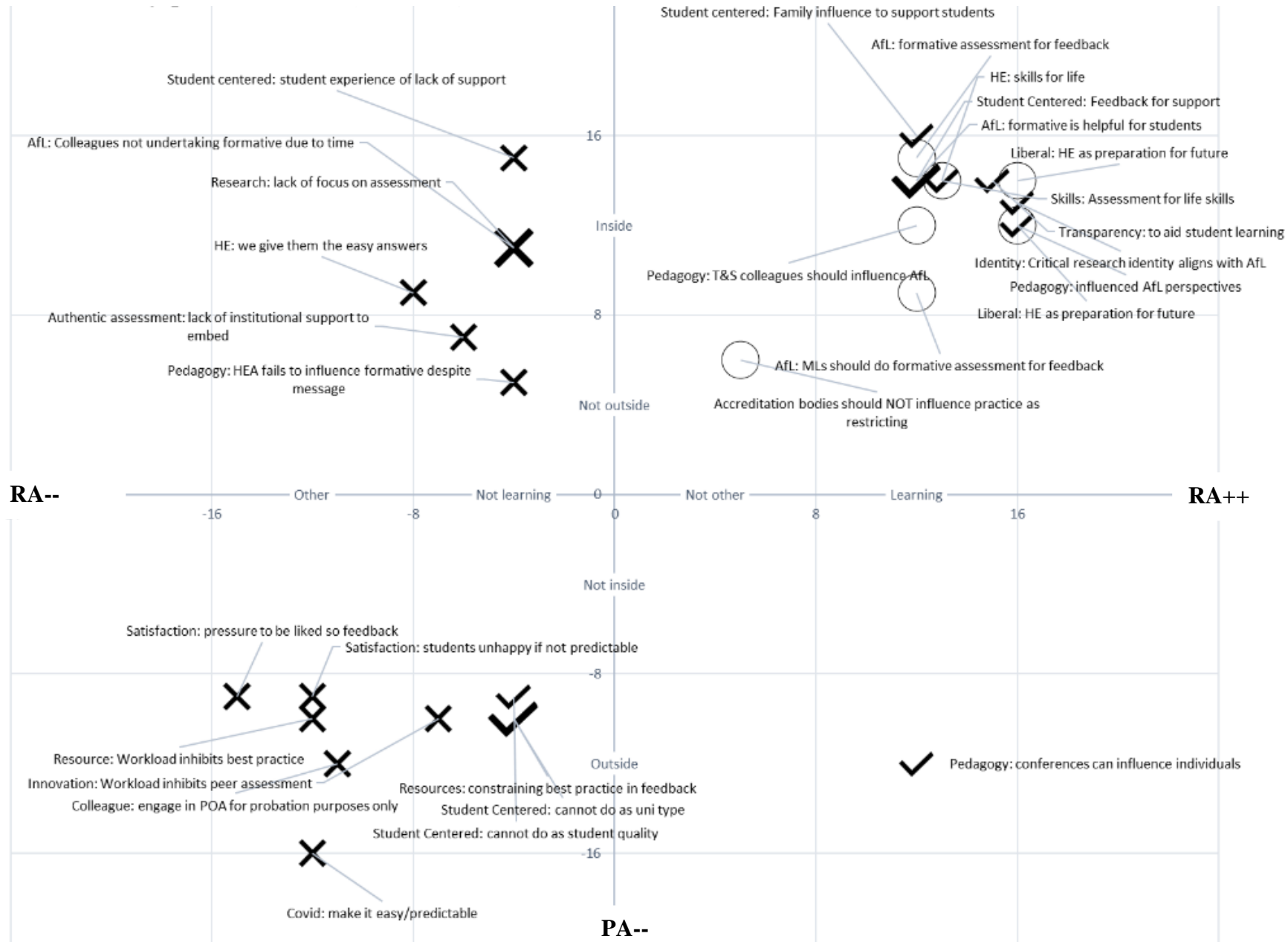
RA++



PA--

Joanne-AF (A&F) Examination(s)

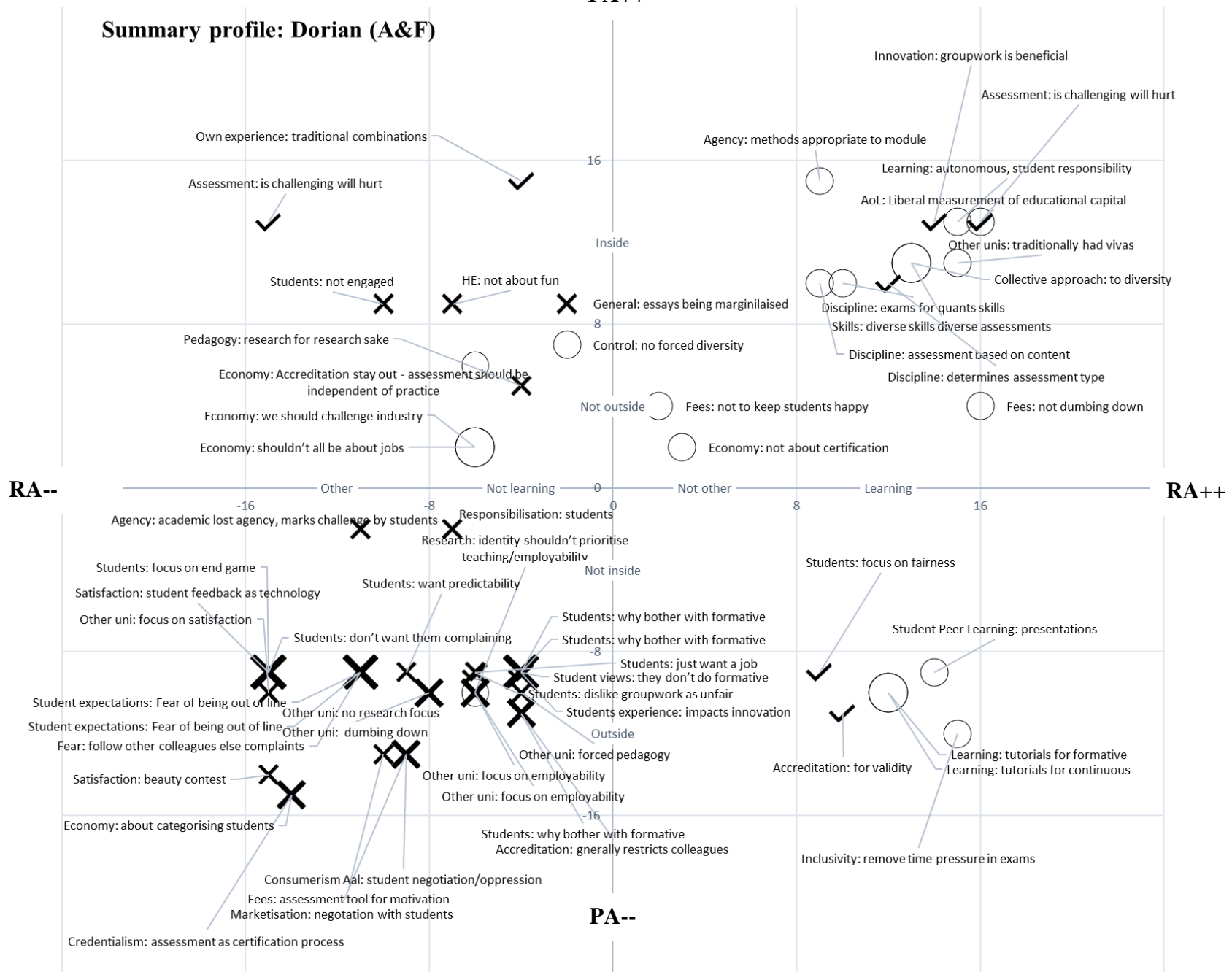
PA++



Dorian-AF (A&F) Examination(s)

PA++

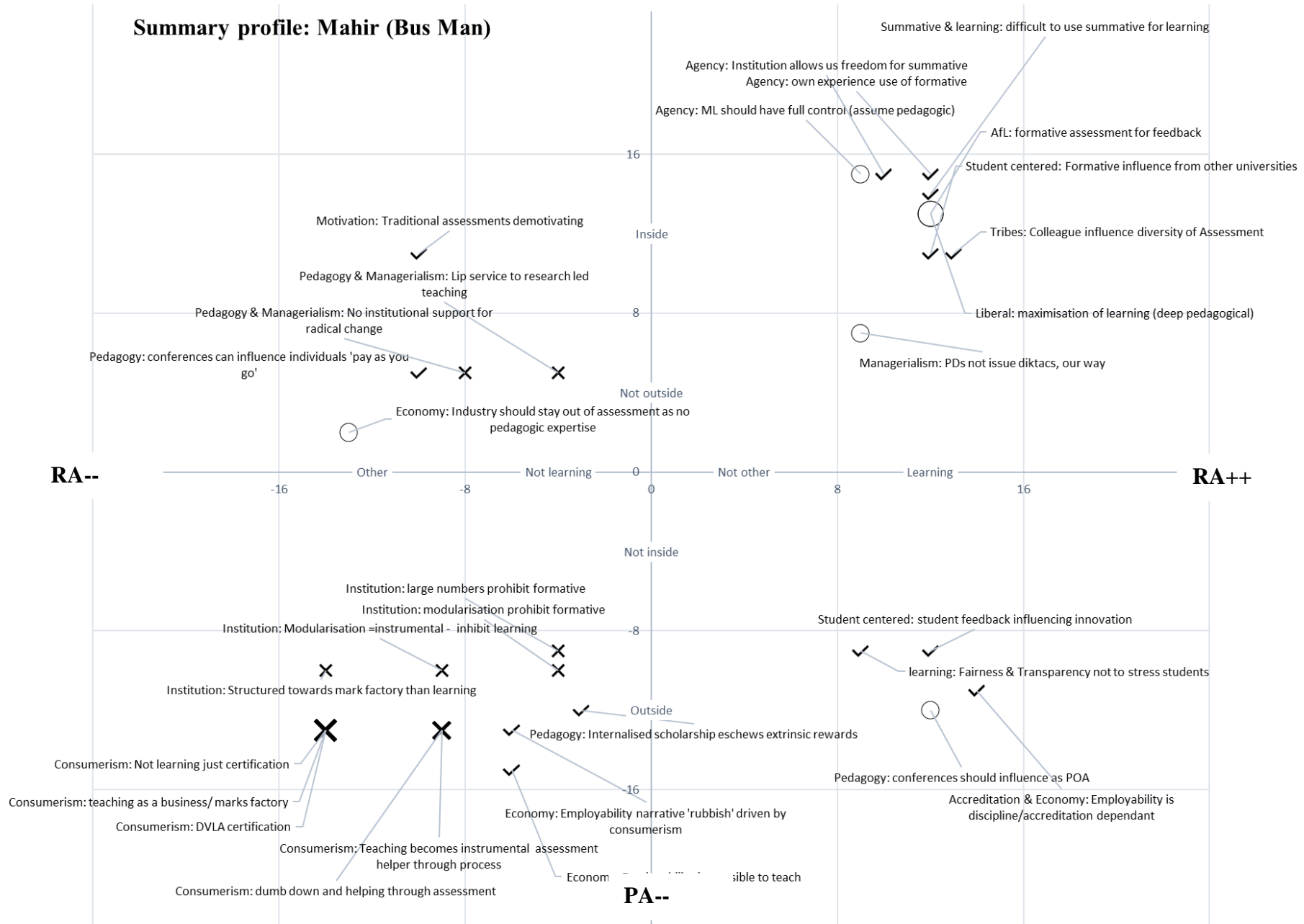
Summary profile: Dorian (A&F)



Mahir-BM (Bus Man): Coursework

PA++

Summary profile: Mahir (Bus Man)

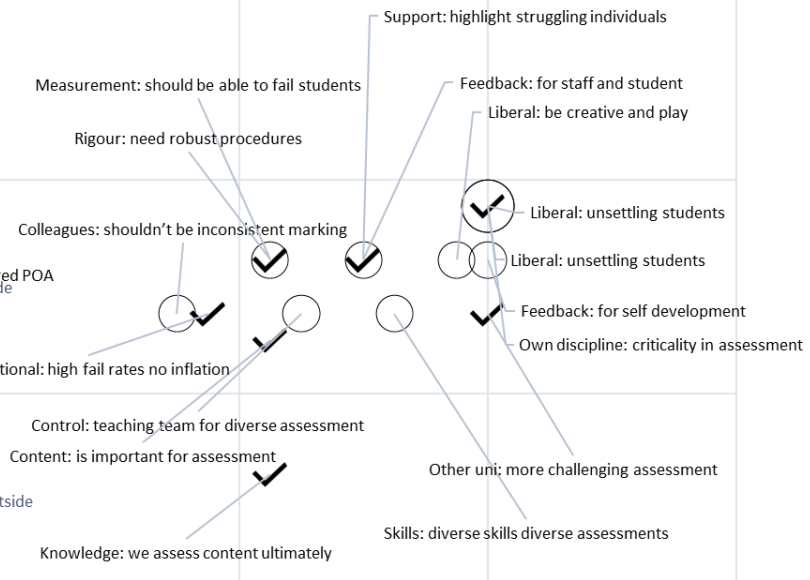
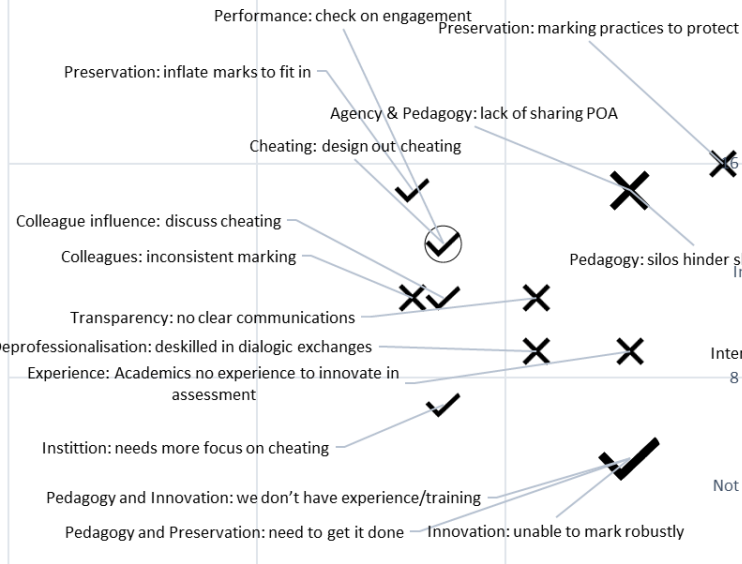


PA--

Tamara-BM (Bus Man) Essavs and innovation

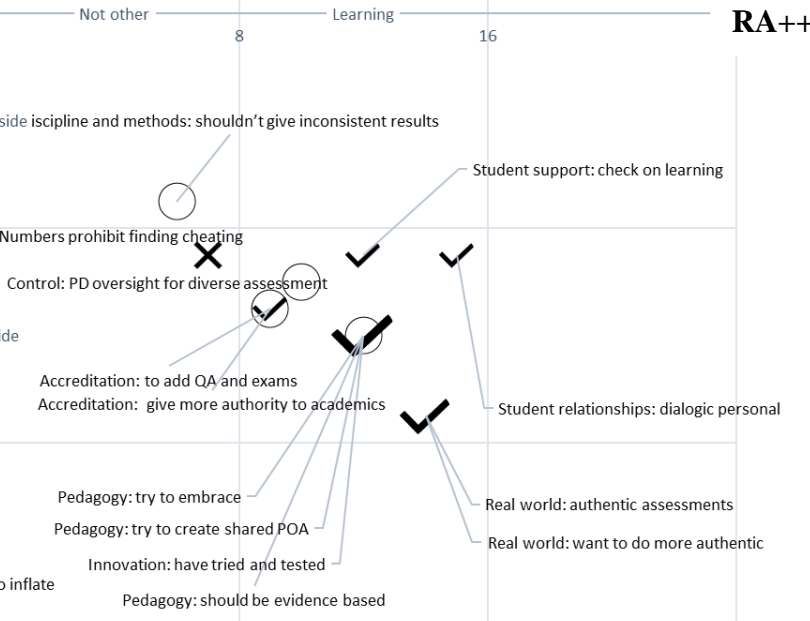
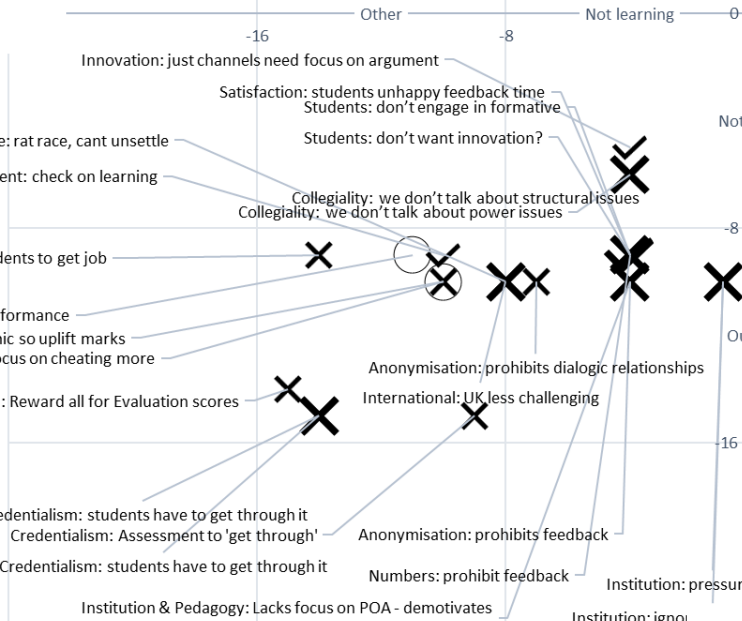
PA++

Summary profile: Tamara (Bus Man)



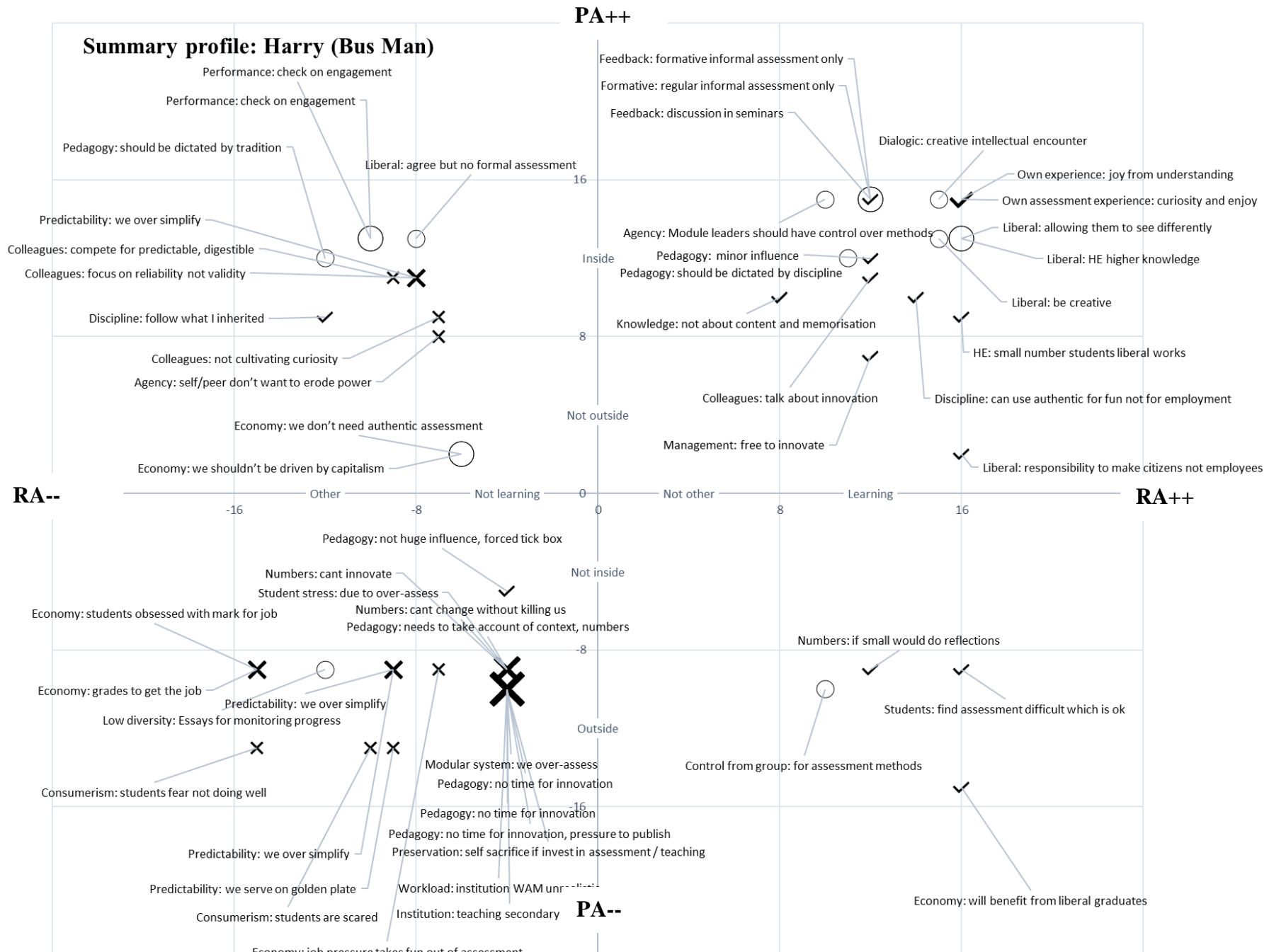
RA--

RA++

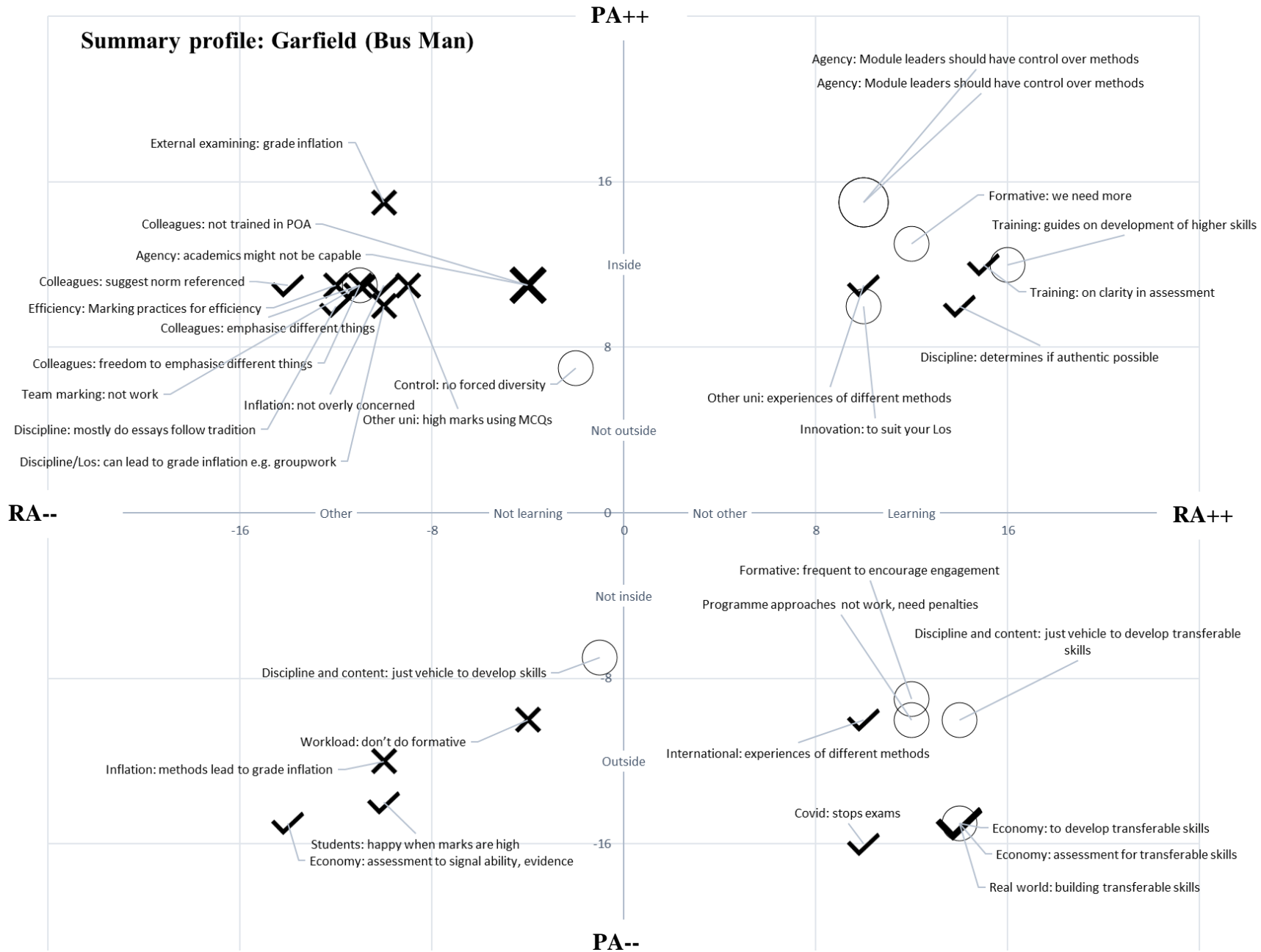


PA--

Harry-BM (Bus Man) Essays



Garfield-BM (Bus Man) Essays



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