STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

SUBHASHINIE DHAMMIKA KUMARIHAMY WIJESUNDERA, BSc., MSc.

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2011

Abstract

This thesis argues that to better understand student learning in undergraduate education, it is useful to focus not only on how students are affected by the context of learning but also how they act on the context to achieve their own valued outcomes. The thesis specifically explored the question of '**how do students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?'**

This longitudinal qualitative study has focused on a group of undergraduates following a four year degree course in Psychology in a Sri Lankan university. I have used an analytical framework informed by Engeström's version of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) for data analysis. Accordingly, I have conceptualised student learning in the undergraduate course as a network of activity systems that weaves together people and cultural tools to transform the collective purpose of learning.

It emerged in the analysis of the activity system that students' learning is affected mainly by tensions or dilemmas arising from the collective purpose and the institutional assessment practices. The collaborative attempt to change the purpose and the context of learning by students' and their lecturers has mutually transformed both the collective purpose (object) and the students' identities and increased their action possibilities. This dialectical process is mediated by the cultural tools which included curriculum, teaching and assessment as well as social relationships.

In the analysis of individual differences in achieving expansive learning there emerged five interacting factors which included; a student's past history of education; goal setting; motivation for transforming identity; mobilising resources and views on the object and tools used on the course. These factors do not operate in isolation and they interact within an individual's socio-cultural context of learning, which simultaneously operates with the collaborative activity of student learning in the undergraduate course.

The above findings are synthesised into a model for understanding student learning in undergraduate education and the implications for policy, practice and further research are presented at the end of the thesis.

The thesis also addresses the issue of striking a balance between enhancing employability skills and providing a broad higher education based on liberal values. This arises directly from my research and is a part of current academic debates within higher education. It is argued that conceptualising student learning in undergraduate education as a dialectical change process of identity transformation of students, which is mediated by social relationships and cultural tools, may be helpful in resolving this issue. The thesis also suggests ways to conceptualise student learning in undergraduate courses, as a network of activity systems, which weaves together people and cultural tools to transform the collective purpose of learning. Such an approach can transform students' identities and increase their possibilities for actions in intellectual, cultural, economic, social and moral spheres of life.

Acknowledgements

Contents

**Chapter Four: Complexities in the Evolving Context
of Student Learning** 146

List of Tables   **Page**

List of Figures   Page

List of abbreviations

APS   -   Advanced Personality Studies

CoPT   -   Communities of Practice Theory

CEQ   -   Course Experience Questionnaire

CHAT   -   Cultural Historical Activity Theory

ESECT   -   Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team

FGI   -   Focus Group Interviews

GPA   -   Grade Point Average

GER   -   Gross Enrolment Rate

HE   -   Higher Education

MOH   -   Medical Officer of Health

NIE   -   National Institute of Education

NEC   -   National Education Commission

SCHSS   -   Standing Committee in Humanities and Social Sciences

SAL   -   Students Approaches to Learning

SPQ   -   Study Process Questionnaire

TLR   -   Teaching Learning Regimes

UG   -   Undergraduate Course

UGC   -   University Grants Commission

ZPD   -   Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

In this first chapter, I wish to introduce the topic and the specific context of this thesis. The chapter is organised in two parts. In part one, I present a brief background to the research, outline my motivations, beliefs and expectations, set out my research question and sub-questions, clarify the research approach and define the key terms used in this thesis. I also present an overview of the chapters.

In part two; I describe, briefly, the historical development of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka, whilst highlighting the current issues and dilemmas in it. I also present the historical development of the particular 'special degree'[1] course in psychology on which the present study has been based.

Part One: Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 Background to the research

This research focuses on students' experiences of learning in an undergraduate course in a Sri Lankan university. The review of literature on students' experiences of learning in higher education indicates that it has been studied over the past six decades or so in the USA, the UK and other countries. The majority of these studies are based on psychological perspectives. These psychological studies tend to measure and quantify different types of learning to find out the most effective type. They are concerned with one of two conceptions of learning, namely students' 'approaches to learning' and 'learning styles' (Murray-Harvey, 1994). The former explains that

students' approaches to learning depend on how the students perceive the context and learning tasks (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1982). The latter is based on a cognitive psychology theory and assumes that students' preferences for learning are determined by their psychological predispositions towards learning (Ashwin, 2009). Most of the recent studies on student learning have been dominated by approaches to learning and teaching research which focused on how the students' learning and teachers' teaching have been affected by the way they perceived the teaching-learning environment (Ashwin, 2009).

The issues of power relations, individual agency, identity and the effects of other socio-cultural factors have not been given due consideration in these studies and therefore, in the literature, they have been considered as theories which partially illuminate the phenomena of students' experiences of learning (Haggis, 2004). The assumptions underpinning these studies are also contested due to their conceptualisation of student learning as a transaction between individual teachers and students, and for constructing students or learners as 'anonymous, decontextualised, and degendered' human beings (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001, p.38). There is a need to understand the students' experiences of learning from different perspectives and to explore further the issues of meaning, identity, effects of power relations, institutional and cultural factors. These are highlighted in the literature (Mann, 2001; Haggis, 2004).

Most of the studies on approaches to learning have been based either on interviews (Marton and Saljo, 1976a; 1976b) or standardised questionnaires (Ramsden and

Entwistle ,1981; Entwistle, 1987; Biggs, 1993; Biggs et al, 2001; Ramsden, 1992; Wilson et al, 1997), or both (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Theories of students' approaches to learning have been further contested because of the inherent limitations of these data collection techniques (Murphy and Scott, 2003). Murphy and Scott (2003), in particular, argue that there is a need to understand students' learning further through longitudinal qualitative studies, ethnographies, action research, and approaches such as 'the student as a researcher.'

The other studies on student learning which are categorised as the social practices approach (Ashwin, 2009), focus on how students' identities are affected by the demands of reading and writing practices adopted by different subject disciplines, courses and individual lecturers (Lea and Street, 2000) or how the teaching and learning environments affect alienation, or engagement with learning, among students (Mann, 2001; Case, 2008). However, the focus is still on how students are affected by the context. The other important question of how the learning environment is created by the students and their teachers has not been studied (Ashwin, 2009).

In this thesis, I argue that to better understand students' experiences of learning, it may be useful to focus not only on how students are affected by the learning environment but also on how students act on their context or the learning environment to achieve their own valued outcomes. Accordingly, the specific research question that I address in this thesis is 'How do students regulate their

learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?' To address this research question I have employed a qualitative, longitudinal research design and have used an analytic framework informed by the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) that was developed by Engeström (1987).

1.2 My motivations, beliefs and expectations for this research

At the outset, as a researcher, I need to outline my own personal background, my beliefs about learning and learners, and my expectations for this research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, in this section I wish to answer the questions, 'Why am I conducting this research? What are my beliefs about learning and the learners? How have those beliefs been developed? Who am I conducting this research for? What do I expect the research to do?'

My motivation for studying for a PhD is both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically I was interested in understanding more about 'learning' and 'qualitative research'. Extrinsically I wanted a PhD for career advancement as a university lecturer.

When I reflect on my own experiences as an undergraduate in the stream of biological sciences in a Sri Lankan university three decades ago, I remember that I had not felt pressurised by the need to enhance employability. In the early 1980s the then government had a policy to recruit employees through competitive examinations. We had the belief that as science graduates we would easily be able to find employment, especially in the government sector (as a teacher or an officer in the administrative services, in the banking sector, or as a management trainee in a government corporation). I was not particularly interested in becoming a secondary school teacher

because of the relatively low salary and the bleak career prospects for teachers at that time. However, I was interested in acquiring a good degree because it was the basic requirement for pursuing an academic career or a career in other sectors.

Like many of the students in the present study who told me that they became interested in gaining a good degree after seeing their results in their first or second year, I became interested in gaining a good degree, when I obtained good results in my second year examinations. I attended lectures, practical classes and tutorials regularly and used the resources available in the library to get more clarification about the difficult content delivered in lectures. I was involved in self learning as well as learning from peers. One thing that I remember vividly, even after about nearly 30 years, is attending one or two '*kuppi classes*'[2] conducted by our more able peers who were specifically skilled in teaching others the difficult topics in final year Physics. I was able to move through my zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) in understanding quantum mechanics and physical optics by attending these classes conducted by peers who volunteered to help others. An important point that I want to make here is that even in those days, students acted individually and collectively on the context of their learning and changed it to achieve their purposes.

After completing a special degree with honours in Biology with Physics and Mathematics as subsidiary subjects, I worked in the Department of Botany of the same university, as a temporary demonstrator. Then I assumed duties in a secondary school after undergoing a one-month pre-service training as a teacher. I sat for several competitive examinations, held for recruiting graduates for various institutions during

the time, and was successful in being selected for three different positions in the government and banking sectors. A few months after serving in a secondary school as a teacher I joined the Ministry of Education as an educational planning officer. I was trained locally and at Monash University, Australia in advanced educational planning. By that time, I made a firm decision to pursue a career in education. My parents, both of whom were school teachers also supported my decision.

Limited opportunities for post graduate studies in education in Sri Lanka affected me in receiving relevant post graduate education. However, I was successful in securing a place in the postgraduate diploma course in Educational and Psychological Measurement and Evaluation conducted by the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, on a part-time basis. It was the only post graduate diploma course available at that time for professionals in education other than teachers in schools. The other post graduate diploma course in education was restricted to graduate teachers who had two or more years of experience in teaching in schools. I decided to follow the course in Educational and Psychological Measurement although it was not directly relevant to the work I did at the time. The course, however, helped me not only to develop insights about educational and psychological measurement but also to conceptualise curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment as an integrated process.

After serving in a divisional education office in a rural area for some time, I joined the Staff College for Education Administration of the National Institute of Education (NIE), Sri Lanka as a project officer. Then, I had the opportunity to follow a Master of Science degree in Education Management and Administration at Moray House

College of Education, Edinburgh. I began teaching for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Management course and other short term training programmes on education management, conducted for education officers and school principals while I was at the NIE.

My involvement in implementing a school improvement project in disadvantaged schools in Sri Lanka was another turning point in my ways of thinking about learning and learners. In that project, I focused on five disadvantaged schools in a remote area in Sri Lanka. I used the methodology of action research in achieving the project objectives (Wijesundera, 2002a). I have used Kolb's (1974) theory of experiential learning in this project and witnessed how people learn new things by acting on their context to change it and reflecting on their actions (Wijesundera, 2002a). Reflections on my own experiences suggest that learning takes place in different settings through different mechanisms.

After serving at the NIE and completing a Masters degree in Applied Psychology at the University of Colombo, I joined the Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, of the University that I am serving now as a lecturer. I have been teaching Education Management and Education Psychology to the teachers enrolled in the Post graduate Diploma in Education and the Masters Degree in Education courses since then.

When I look back on my professional career so far, I see that I have been affected by the demands of my own socio-cultural context, and at the same time I have acted on that context to choose and use opportunities to achieve the desired goals that I had

wanted to achieve. I was not only passively responding to the contextual demands but also actively involved in learning and shaping my career. I started my professional career as an amateur biologist and I have gradually transformed to be an educationist. My professional learning which has transformed my identities from time to time is a result of the interplay between structural and agentic processes (Ashwin, 2009). Self-learning habits that have developed throughout my learning career (Bloomer, 2001) and the mediation by cultural and social factors have affected this transformation. Hence, I see learning as a process of identity transformation mediated by social, cultural and individual factors. The learner is an active agent in partially given and partially-constructed learning contexts.

So far I have discussed how my academic and professional career has evolved over the past three decades and how the experiences of learning I have had shaped my beliefs about learning and learners. It is now opportune to discuss why I am conducting this research and what my expectations from this research are.

1.2.1 My interests and expectations

In 2002, the Faculty of Arts of the University in which I am working now, changed its curricula and assessment system. A modular course unit system and a system of continuous assessment had been introduced. At the beginning of the implementation of the new system, the changes made in the curricular and assessment structures were not well received by students. At the faculty board meetings, the problems faced by the students were discussed and decisions were made. However, I felt that the students' point of view was not well represented or understood in these discussions. I

was concerned about many unanswered questions. How do the students really feel about the innovations? What do they want to learn in their undergraduate courses? How do they learn? How do they interpret their experiences of learning? Nobody seemed to know.

The topic for my PhD thesis has emerged from my curiosity to understand how students, coming from different socio-economic backgrounds, interpret their experiences at university and how they respond to the demands of the context of their course. Initially, I was interested to understand how students respond to assessment demands. However, after the preliminary data collection and analysis I defined the specific research question that I have addressed in this thesis. It emerged from the preliminary data collection and analysis, that the students are affected not only by the assessment demands but also by other demands. Moreover, students were not only passively responding to the demands of the context but also acting on the context to change it and to achieve valued outcomes. Therefore, I redefined the initial research question to state: **How do students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?** In this research, I expect to uncover the problems and issues faced by undergraduates in their pursuit of learning and how they act on the context to achieve their own valued outcomes. I also expect to identify the implications for policy, practice and research in undergraduate education to improve student learning.

1.3 The research questions, research approach and structure of the thesis

The focus of my study is on the question;

How do students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?

To address this question in more detail I have set the following sub questions:

1. What are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?

2. How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?

3. What are the valued outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at individual level?

1.3.1 The research approach and definitions of key terms

I have employed a qualitative approach in this research. As pointed out by Patton (1985):

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. ... and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting.(p.1)

Therefore, the concern of qualitative research is to understand phenomena in their natural settings and from the perspectives of the participants of those settings. The

purpose of qualitative research is to understand the meanings the participants attach to their experiences and not a prediction of what may happen in the future. I have used a qualitative approach in this research because I wanted to understand how the students learn in their undergraduate course, by analysing the meanings that they attach to their experiences of learning at university.

I do not intend to define 'students' experiences', 'expansive learning', or 'the demands of the context' here, because these conceptual aspects are discussed in detail in chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this thesis. I only wish to clarify a few terms in my title and the main research question, which are useful in defining the scope of this research in this current chapter.

The 'students' referred to in the title of this thesis were undergraduates who specialized in psychology through a four-year degree programme in a Sri Lankan university. I use the term 'regulate' in the main research question to mean how the students plan, guide and monitor their behaviour flexibly according to changing circumstances. Similarly the 'valued outcomes' included in the main research question mean the outcomes of learning that were valued most by the students.

Finally, the term 'context' in the second sub-question refers to the whole that constitutes the factors affecting student learning. In this research I have constructed the context of student learning using the participants' view and my own observations. The analysis of the context of student learning at different intervals expanded my understanding of the nature of context in this particular course. I discuss the emergent

findings about the nature of the context in more detail in the concluding section of Chapter 5 of this thesis (See p. 256).

1.3.2   Structure of the thesis

In this chapter, first, I have introduced the topic of this thesis, explained my motivations, beliefs and expectations from this research while describing my personal biography, and defined the specific research question that I address in this thesis. Second, I will discuss the historical development and the issues and dilemmas of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka and a brief history of the 'special degree' course in psychology in this particular university.

In chapter 2, I will define what I mean by students' experiences of learning, trace the history of research on students' experiences of learning and evaluate the dominant current approaches to research in this field. In the light of the key issues emerging from the review of existing research, I will argue for the need to explore the specific research question that I address in this thesis and explain my ontological and epistemological assumptions about student experiences and learning. Finally, I intend to examine the applicability of two major theories in the socio-cultural perspective of learning and substantiate the use of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to frame the research and to analyse the data.

Chapter 3 will clarify the research process, methodological implications of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) for this research, the research design, processes

of data collection and analysis, and measures taken to ensure ethical standards, credibility of findings and minimise error.

Chapters 4 and 5 will present the findings. Chapter 4 specifically reports the findings in relation to the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course. The chapter highlights the tensions or demands that emerged in the context of the course in relation to the students' collective purpose and assessment practices and between various elements of the activity system of student learning in different phases.

Chapter 5 reports how the students collectively and individually responded to the demands of the context, using the affordances or the opportunities in it. The chapter also discusses the valued outcomes reported by the students and how the students achieved expansive learning in different degrees. The chapter finally synthesizes the key findings into a model for understanding diversity among students in achieving expansive learning.

Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by reflecting on how the research questions have been addressed, implications of the key findings for policy, practice and research in student learning in undergraduate education in general and in particular in the Sri Lankan context, the strengths and weaknesses of the research and how the research affected my own learning.

Part two: An overview of the specific context of this thesis

In this part of the chapter, I present an overview of the historical development of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka and the issues and dilemmas in it at present. Then I move on to discuss the historical development of the 'special degree' course in psychology in the particular university used in my research.

1.4. An overview of the development of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a long tradition of higher education evolved over many centuries through Buddhist monasteries. Monastic education has produced eminent scholars and left behind a rich heritage of religious and literary works. However, this ancient system of higher education had been affected adversely by the impact of successive European invasions since the year 1505 (Indraratne, 1992).

The British captured the coastal areas by 1796 and began to rule the whole island, by 1815. British rule established a system of secondary schools in the country based on the British system of education. The schools were fee levying and the medium of instruction was English. The schools were designed to serve the needs of the colonial rule and interests. These schools produced the limited number of graduates needed for the middle and lower ranks of the government service. Parallel to the English medium schools located in urban areas, there was a system of 'vernacular schools' meant for the masses (Jayasuriya, 1969). Major problems that universities faced in the late 50s and 60s had their origins in this dual system of education (University Grants Commission (UGC), 1981).

The present system of higher education in Sri Lanka is of more recent origin which dates back to 1870, when the Ceylon Medical College and the Ceylon Law College were established. Half a century later, the University College of Ceylon was established in 1921 in Colombo while the Ceylon Medical College continued as an independent institution. The University College was a government institution affiliated to the University of London, and conducted courses of study designed for external degrees awarded by it. The University College was fee levying and therefore confined to students from relatively affluent families. There were three departments of arts, oriental studies and science. The medium of instruction was English and even the study of Sinhala and Tamil languages was in English (UGC, 1981).

In 1942, the University College and Ceylon Medical College were combined to form the University of Ceylon by the Ceylon University Ordinance No. 20 of 1942. The University Ordinance defined that the University of Ceylon was to be 'unitary, residential and autonomous'. It meant that the university could not have a number of campuses in different parts of the island. Its expansion was also limited by the requirement that it should be residential. (Special Report, 1983, p.10)

The faculties of Arts and Oriental studies, Agriculture, and Veterinary Science were moved to Peradeniya in 1952 and the University of Ceylon was established there while the faculties of Science, Medicine, and Engineering continued to be in Colombo until the completion of necessary buildings. The style of life in the halls of residence at Peradeniya were modelled on the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK and the university was subjected to criticism for being insensitive to the

country's needs and even hostile to what is indigenous, and for becoming a major force in creating a 'westernised elite' (Jayawardene, 1992).

Meanwhile, legislation was introduced in 1945 to bring all schools into one system, implement free education and provide instruction in the mother tongue from kindergarten right through university. Other measures to improve education in rural areas, such as establishing centres of excellence called Central colleges and Maha Viddyalayas, providing a free mid day meal also contributed to the steady growth of participation in school education (Jayasuriya, 1969). As a result, the demand for university admission continued to rise and the demand for arts-oriented[3] courses rose sharply because the subjects offered in the majority of secondary schools were also arts- oriented (Special Report, 1983).

The university was particularly non-responsive to two vital issues emanating from the developments that had occurred in the General Education System and the growth of the 'nationalist movement' during the late 1950s. The first was the expansion of university education. The second was teaching through the national languages (Sinhala and Tamil) (Special Report, 1983; Jayawardene, 1992).

Due to the structural features and the value system on which the University of Ceylon was based, the university found it difficult to adapt to the changing needs of society and the new values emerging in it. Successive governments responded to the situation by enacting legislations to curb the autonomy of the university to fulfil the aspirations of people for higher education (UGC, 1981). The University of Ceylon lost its monopoly with the establishment of two 'pirivena universities[4]' by upgrading

selected institutions of Buddhist monastic education. In response to mounting pressure from the government and the public at large, the University of Ceylon increased its intake of arts and social science undergraduate students and began imparting instruction in Sinhala and Tamil in addition to English on an experimental basis from the academic year 1959/60.

The pressure for increase in intake began to worsen with the entry of students educated in national languages in the 1959/60 academic year. The university could not cope with the increasing demand for university places especially in Arts and Humanities, particularly in the Sinhala medium. The total enrolment in 1965/66 was five times that of 1958/59. The government was able to fulfil the objective of completely democratising the opportunities for university education at that time by taking various ad hoc measures of expansion mentioned above (Indraratne, 1992).

Unrestricted admission to universities without due attention to social and economic needs of the country created additional problems in the university education system. Unemployment among arts graduates[5] had increased while a shortfall of manpower had affected other fields such as Engineering and Medicine. The Government at that time had decided to bring the universities under its control and hence introduced the Universities Act no. 20 of 1966. For the first time in the history of Sri Lankan universities, the intake was restricted in 1966/67. This was mainly due to dwindling resources for higher education and the rising unemployment of graduates especially in the arts subjects. This restriction of university admissions continued until 1969/70.

In this year, the number admitted as a percentage of the total number 'eligible' for university education had declined to nearly 34 percent (Indraratne, 1992).

A new Government came into power in May 1970 and after the outbreak of the youth insurrection in 1971, where university students had played a major role, the government took drastic measures to curb the autonomy of all universities. During the period from 1970-1977, further changes were made to the admission policy, paying attention to the imbalance between Arts and Science based education in the universities. Intake into Arts faculties was contained to a figure below 2000 while a modest increase of the intake into science based courses was allowed every year in keeping with the social and economic needs of the country.

The Government that came into power in 1977 introduced the University Act no.16 of 1978 and the six campuses of the University of Sri Lanka that had been established under the Act of 1972 were converted into six autonomous universities. The policy of increasing the opportunities for higher education without impairing the quality of education continued for some time. To further increase opportunities for higher education, the government made provision for private and public institutions to conduct courses of study for examinations of higher educational institutions coming under the Ministry of Higher Education. With these changes, the government lost the monopoly of university education (Indraratne, 1992).

Despite the measures taken to increase the intake, the number admitted as a percentage of eligible students began to decline during the 70s. Although there were nine universities, including the Open University, established over time, the number

admitted as a percentage of the eligible students had declined to 16 percent by the academic year 1993/94. The government that came into power in 1994 adopted a policy to establish a number of universities across the country, with at least one university per province. As a result, the total number of public universities has increased to 15 at present. However, the number of students admitted as a percentage of eligible candidates further declined to 14.4 percent in the academic year 2006/07. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), for universities records a slow growth from 1.6 percent in 1990 to 3.5 percent in 2009. Increasing intake has been a continuing challenge for all public universities.

The other main problem in undergraduate education in Sri Lanka is unemployment among graduates. According to the World Bank (2009), the total number of graduates reported as unemployed in 2005 was 42,585 and 63 percent of them were arts graduates. The rest were Commerce and Management (17%) and Science graduates (20%). According to the World Bank (2009), the majority of students (57 percent) at present enrolled in public universities are in the Arts, Management, Commerce and Law degree programmes. However, in recent years there has been a steady increase in the intake for science based courses while there has been a relative decrease in the intake for arts and management courses. The intake for arts has reduced from 43% in 1981 to 31% in 2006 (World Bank, 2009). The history of higher education in Sri Lanka records different measures taken by successive governments to increase the intake for higher education and to decrease the proportion of students enrolled in arts based courses in relation to the employment oriented and science based courses.

1.4.1 Present situation, major issues and dilemmas

As a result of the measures taken by successive governments to increase the opportunities for higher education over the decades, the higher education sector in Sri Lanka has expanded and diversified to include a range of organisations and institutes which offer degree qualifications, other than the national universities. Figure 1 indicates the present structure of the higher education sector in Sri Lanka, which comprises both public and private higher education institutions.

The Public Higher Education Sector

Sri Lanka Institute for Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE)

University Grants Commission (UGC)

Advanced Technological Institutes

Universities
(Conventional and distance mode)
Postgraduate and Research Institutes

The Private Higher Education Sector

Private Higher Education Institutions offering professional Diploma and certificate courses

Private Degree awarding Institutions

Figure 1: The structure of Higher Education in Sri Lanka
(Source: World Bank, 2009, p.3)

The system of Higher Education in Sri Lanka at present consists of three main types of institutions. They are;

- full government institutes with department status, (denoted as rectangular shapes in Figure 1)

- semi-autonomous institutions (denoted as ovals in Figure 1)

- fully-autonomous private institutions (denoted as diamonds in Figure 1).

The public sector comprises universities, research and post graduate institutes and advanced technical institutes. The universities offer courses in both undergraduate and postgraduate education. The postgraduate courses range from diplomas, masters degrees and PhDs. The undergraduate programmes are of 3-4 year duration except the medical degree programmes which are of five years duration. The Advanced Technical Institutes provide employment oriented courses at Diploma and Higher National Diploma levels of 2-3 year duration. The private degree awarding institutions usually offer degrees from foreign universities. Private higher education institutes also prepare students for professional certificates and diplomas offered by both local and foreign institutions, particularly in the fields of accounting, marketing, business management and ICT (World Bank, 2009).

According to the World Bank (2009), the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Higher Education has increased from 9.5 percent in 1990 to 21 percent at present. The total number of students enrolled in higher education is estimated to be around 390000. External degree programmes conducted by three public universities share 58 percent of this total number while only 19 percent of students are enrolled in public

universities as internal students. A further 7 percent are enrolled in the distance mode courses offered by the Open University while private higher education institutes share 12 percent. The World Bank (2009) suggests that the GER of 21 percent in Higher Education in Sri Lanka may be an over-estimate because a considerable proportion of students enrolled in external degree programmes and distance education programmes may only be nominally enrolled. When this is taken into account, the GER is estimated to be between 10-12 percent which is similar to the GER for India and Morocco (World Bank, 2009, p. E8).

Sri Lanka reached middle income status in 2004. The country's per capita income was slightly more than US $ 2000 in 2008. The World Bank (2009) argues that Sri Lanka's position in the global knowledge economy depends critically on its intellectual and human capital. Therefore, Sri Lanka needs a higher education system that can produce 'skilled, hard working and enterprising' graduates (World Bank, 2009).

On a positive note, the World Bank (2009) further observes that the higher education system of the country has provided the major proportion of the government's policy makers and administrators, managers in the private sector, technical specialists and knowledge workers. Moreover, it has produced many graduates who have been able to obtain employment in the world's most advanced economies. At present, there is a rich and diverse set of higher education programmes and courses available in the country.

However, the two historically evolving and interrelated issues of increasing intake and enhancing employability continue to affect undergraduate education in the country. Government publications (UGC, 2008) and the World Bank (2009) share the opinion that improving quality, relevance and equity, and meeting the growing demand for higher education as the salient issues in higher education in Sri Lanka.

To address the issue of increasing intake, the National Education Commission (NEC) in its summary of policy recommendations (NEC, 2010) proposes to 'Make provision to provide opportunities for higher education for all those seeking such education' (Policy 5) while the World Bank (2009) hesitates and poses the question 'whether the enrolment in higher education be stabilised or increased?' (p.27). The World Bank (2009) argues that the decision should be based on how the other important and related questions of, 'what will be the direct (monetary) and indirect (opportunity) cost of the expansion? Who should bear this cost so that the expansion is efficient and equitable? And how can the policy makers make sure that the expanded system will be improved in terms of quality and relevance?' are addressed. After some detailed analysis of these issues, the World Bank (2009) concludes that:

> ...the country could recognise that it has sufficient graduates in the 'liberal arts' type programmes and concentrate further expansion in more job-oriented degree programmes. This would include enrolment in job-oriented arts programmes where the country faces a labour shortage, such as English Language Graduates. (p. 27)

It further recommends expanding the alternative higher education and the private sector to expand degree programmes which focus on employment-oriented courses.

Neither the NEC (2010) nor the World Bank (2009) defines the purposes or the functions of higher education in Sri Lanka. However, both publications seem to focus more on the economic purposes of higher education while paying little or no attention to providing a good general education of intrinsic worth. Only the NEC (2010) in its policies mentions the need to 'encourage self-directed and reflective learning, independent thinking and creativity, critical analysis, application of knowledge and skills of problem solving.' Nevertheless, both publications emphasise the economic value of higher education and the need to provide employment-oriented programmes rather than liberal educational values such as 'enrichment of life of the individual, cultivating an inquiring mind, and advancing the effort to bring reason, justice and humanity into the relations of men and nations' (Senator William Fulbright cited in Warnapala, 2009, p. 212).

The World Bank (2009) has attributed the root cause of the problems of the lack of an adequate supply of manpower in technical and scientific fields, graduate unemployment and graduate under-employment to the deficiencies in secondary education. Accordingly, the World Bank suggests that measures should be taken to develop adequate English language fluency and ICT skills of students graduating from secondary schools to prepare them for employment-oriented courses at the tertiary level.

To enhance employability of graduates, the World Bank (2009) suggested specific measures that include;

- 'developing English language and ICT skills of students especially in the arts, humanities, commerce and social sciences;

- developing soft-skills which include the skills sought after by employers in Sri Lanka such as initiative, trainability, flexibility, team-orientation, communication, positive work attitudes and discipline;
- expanding internship programs to provide work experience;
- increasing private-sector partnerships in career guidance programmes' (pp. 81-82).

The NEC (2010) also specifies policies to ensure relevance and enhance employability of graduates. These policies suggest;

- designing curricular content of academic programmes with sufficient opportunities for practical experience in skills required for relevant professions/occupations;
- developing linkages with industry and the service sector to widen opportunities for employment of graduates and the introducing internships and training placements for students in higher education institutes (Policy no. 12, 21 and 22, NEC, 2010).

It is not clear how the concept of employability is defined by these authorities. However, the general impression of their recommendations suggests that they conceptualise employability in terms of what employers expect from graduates. As in the case of measures to increase the intake, the policies and strategies recommended by the World Bank and the NEC for enhancing employability, again focus on the economic value of higher education while paying little or no attention to the liberal educational values. Therefore, the major dilemma faced by undergraduate education in the country is how to provide a good higher education, promoting liberal educational values, while being responsive to social and economic demands. This

dilemma is also reflected in the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course presented in chapter four of this thesis. This thesis addresses this dilemma. It finally argues that it is useful to conceptualise student learning in undergraduate education as a dialectical change process of expansive learning, which is mediated by cultural tools and social relationships. The students should be provided with opportunities to use new tools or to use existing tools in new ways and to interact with different people in different settings to move through the many zones of proximal development in intellectual, social, moral and personal spheres of their lives.

1.4.2   Historical development of the 'special degree' course in psychology

Psychology was introduced to the university curricula in Sri Lanka in 1950. The Department of Philosophy and Psychology was one of the first departments established in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ceylon, in this year. The faculty was shifted to Peradeniya in 1952 and the 'special degree'[7] course in psychology was introduced in 1990 on the initiative of the then Head of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology.

Pushpakumara (2009) relates the introduction of the 'special degree' course in psychology in 1990 to the felt need of the importance of a subject like psychology to understand the intricacies of the insurgency of Sinhala youth in Southern Sri Lanka in the late 1980's where nearly a hundred thousand young people lost their lives. The importance of the subject was further recognized during and after the Tamil Eelam

war, which has affected the country over the past three decades and in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster in 2004.

Special degree courses in Psychology are offered in only two universities in Sri Lanka and less than 100 students annually graduate from them. Therefore, the number of graduates trained in psychology is clearly inadequate to meet the high demand for professional psychologists in the country (Department of Philosophy and Psychology, 2009).

Until the year 2006, the curriculum of the special degree course in psychology emphasised theory with little or no concern for practical training. The contents included: History of psychology, Test and measurement, Methodology, Cognitive psychology, Counselling psychology, Social psychology, Psychology of personality, Social psychology, Buddhist psychology, and Applied psychology. (See Appendix 1 for the curricular structure of the 4-year degree programme).

In 2006, some lecturers have taken initiatives in their courses to introduce practical work in psychology related settings such as schools, hospitals, offices of the Medical Officer of Health (MOHs), prisons etc. An informal internship was also introduced in 2007 and all final year students have to work 60 hours per semester in a therapy related setting (Department of Philosophy and Psychology, 2009).

The students who participated in this research were the first batch of students who participated in this newly introduced internship programme which was then called 'work project'.

The Department reorganized the curriculum in 2010 (See Appendix 2 for the new structure of the curriculum). According to the new structure, students can now select electives either from the psycho-social stream or the counselling stream from the third year onwards. They also have the opportunity to participate in internship programmes of their particular specialisation in the final year.

The brief history of the special degree in psychology course indicates its transformation from a purely theoretical programme to an employment-oriented course with a substantial component of practical training. The course has also been responsive to the increasing social and economic demands. The course team expects to further develop the programme to be on par with other professional degree programmes such as Medicine, Dental Sciences and Veterinary Sciences (Department of Philosophy and Psychology, 2009). However, the lack of qualified lecturers with PhD qualifications, infrastructure and a separate department for Psychology have been affected the future development of the 'special degree' programme.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have clarified my motivations for this thesis, my beliefs about learning and learners, and how they have been developed through the experiences that I had during my academic and professional career. I have also introduced my research question and sub-questions, clarified key terms in my topic and presented an overview of the chapters in this thesis. In part two of the chapter, I have discussed the historical development of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka and the special degree course in psychology on which the thesis is based.

I also argued that undergraduate education in Sri Lanka has been shaped by the social and economic demands and a major dilemma that it faces at present is providing a good higher education which allows for complex learning while responding to the social and economic demands. This thesis addresses this issue in particular and argues that student learning in undergraduate education needs to be conceptualised as a dialectical change process of identity transformation, mediated by cultural tools and social relationships. The students need to be provided with new tools of learning and opportunities to interact with different people in different settings to facilitate the process of identity transformation.

In the next chapter I shall evaluate research on students' experiences of learning in undergraduate education and identify the strengths and weaknesses in existing research as well as areas that need further exploration. I will also clarify my ontological and epistemological assumptions about student learning and evaluate the usefulness of socio-cultural theories of learning to frame this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.0   Introduction

In this chapter, my purpose is to discuss the key research and key issues in understanding student learning in undergraduate education. This is in order to identify the conceptual and methodological inadequacies in the existing research and to substantiate the use of an alternative way to conceptualise and conduct research in this area. To achieve this purpose, I shall explore what is already known about student learning in undergraduate education, my critical thoughts about what is already known, how my work fits in with what has already been done in this field and substantiate the need for conducting the kind of research that I intended to do in the light of what has already been done (Silverman, 2010).

This chapter begins by defining what is meant by students' experiences and exploring the historical development of research on students' experiences of learning in undergraduate education. Secondly, I examine the conceptual and methodological inadequacies in the existing approaches to research in this area to frame the research problem that I want to explore in this study. Thirdly, I clarify my ontological and epistemological beliefs about student learning before moving onto evaluate the usefulness of the Communities of Practice Theory (CoPT) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to explore the specific problem thus identified.

2.1 Understanding students' experiences in undergraduate education

The term 'students' experiences' seems to be a rather vague and ambiguous. It can have several meanings in relation to different purposes and contexts in which it is discussed. Barnett (1995) delineates four different meanings to the term students' experience as;

> i) a set of intentions held by the course team;
> ii) the overt happenings to which students are exposed (whether in the classroom, the laboratory, or other forms of exchange between teacher and taught);
> iii) the totality of the situation in which students are likely to find themselves during their course, both on campus (including the library and the refectory) and off it;
> iv) the inward experience of individual students as they struggle to make sense of all they encounter, accommodating with their current understandings and attitudes the myriad of intellectual and emotional demands of the formal and the hidden curriculum (Barnett, 1995, p.109).

The fourth definition listed by Barnett, mentioned above is the most appropriate in my research context where the purpose is to understand student learning which involves individual sense making in context. Students' experiences in this sense include their inward observations, interpretations, understandings and feelings about the complexities of expectations, happenings and situations. However, when it is defined in this way it makes a complex task for the researchers to study students' experiences because they are required to enter into the subjective world of students.

Studying students' experiences in undergraduate education is important for a number of reasons. First, it is useful to study students' experiences to understand the differences between the intentions of higher educational institutions, teachers and the students and to understand why such differences exist in order to explore ways and

means for reducing such gaps to make teaching and learning more effective. Second, it is useful to study the variations in the students' experiences and in the ways that they respond to the academia and other demands in the context within which their learning takes place. This information may be useful to improve the policy and practice of higher education.

Referring to higher education in the UK, Murphy and Scott (2003) argue that research into higher education needs to pay more attention to understanding students' experiences for two main reasons. First, policies for widening participation in higher education have attracted a much more diverse range of students than have traditionally participated in HE. Therefore, a deeper understanding of those students and their experiences within HE is an urgent priority for both educational researchers and for many practitioners, who are trying to make teaching and learning more effective.

Second, there is an expectation for students to become autonomous learners by being insightful to their own learning. As resources diminish and technology opens up new learning opportunities, students need to reflect upon how they organise their learning, how they make learning to learn in a wide variety of settings with different resources available to them effectively. Both students and their teachers may benefit from research on students' experiences, as it can help them to understand and reflect upon their current experiences of being students and teachers in HE (Murphy and Scott, 2003).

In fact, in recent times there has been a growing interest in studying teaching and learning in Higher Education by understanding students' experiences in many countries. In the next section I am going to discuss the developments of this new line of research and the recent trends.

2.1.1 Historical development of research in student learning in undergraduate education in the UK and other countries

Two of the earliest and well-known studies in this field were from the United States. First, Becker et al (1968) studied the social and academic life of undergraduates in an American university through participant observations, attending classes and becoming involved in students' social lives. Their main finding was that students' academic lives were dominated by assessment demands. Students adopted a Grade Point Average (GPA) perspective, which is aimed at achieving the required grades necessary to make progress through the university system. This study looked at students' experiences in broad terms and focused on the totality of social and academic life of students. It also highlighted the differences between contrasting perspectives of the institution, teachers and students on student learning and assessment.

Second, Perry (1970) focused on students' intellectual and ethical development during their years at college. Perry developed a nine-stage progression model of students' conceptions of learning in which the students' conceptions progressed from 'absolutist' to 'relativist' over the years. Students' conception of learning progressed from a dualistic view of knowledge as right or wrong, and good or bad and was handed down by an authority figure, to a more sophisticated contextual relativistic

view, where knowledge was seen to be flexible and contestable via reasoning. Perry (1970) indicated that students seemed to move from a belief that all questions have simple answers, which are either right or wrong, to a gradual recognition that few problems, particularly in real life, have simple solutions. They begin to realise that even where facts are agreed upon, personal interpretations lead to different conclusions. Finally they realise that relativism is the rule rather than the exception and they develop the strength to make a commitment to a personal interpretation derived from relevant evidence (Perry, 1970).

In the UK, Miller and Parlett (1974) used the principles of illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972) in an investigation of students' responses to the assessment procedures in a small sample of departments. They used participant observation, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires in this study. They categorised students' comments on the basis of 'cue consciousness' and identified three categories of students namely, the 'cue seekers', 'cue conscious' and 'cue deaf'. Cue seekers, actively sought cues from the staff about examination questions over coffee, made a point of discovering who their oral examiner was, what his interests were and deliberately tried to make a good impression on staff. Cue conscious students were aware that there were cues and these were important, but made no attempt to approach staff directly. Cue deaf were a group of students who did not believe that marks were affected by the impressions made on staff. They believed the assessment system to be objective and not open to being influenced by extraneous factors (Miller and Parlett, 1974).

A growing interest in understanding students' experiences has been highlighted in literature in the mid-seventies to present. This increased interest has been attributed to worldwide changes in the structure, function and financing of the university system (Ramsden, 1992; Biggs, 1999). This heightened interest has resulted from a need to identify more effective teaching and learning strategies through research in order to overcome the problems and issues that have emerged from policies to provide greater access, improve accountability and efficiency and to provide more vocationally-oriented courses (Biggs, 1999).

Entwistle (1990) attributes the reason for failure to improve teaching and learning in higher education, to the lack of any coherent framework, which is based on a sound theory to guide teaching and learning. Biggs (1999) also argues in a similar vein and says that the early theories of learning had remarkably little impact on improving teaching. According to him the reason for this is that those psychologists were more interested in identifying a One Grand Theory of learning than in studying the contexts in which people learned, such as schools and universities. It has become clear that the concepts and ideas developed from the introspections of university and college students can be used to guide investigations on learning at the tertiary level (Entwistle, 1990). Consequently, the focus of research on learning has been shifted towards the ways in which students go about their learning. The field of study thus emerged is now called 'student learning' research (Biggs, 1999).

These studies have attempted to define, measure, and quantify different 'types' of student learning in order to identify the most effective. They have been mainly

concerned with one of two conceptually different things, namely, the 'learning styles 'and the 'approaches to learning' (Murray-Harvey, 1994).

The learning styles approach is based on cognitive psychology theory. It is assumed that students' psychological predispositions determine the ways in which they learn (Entwistle, 1990). Pask (1976) identified contrasting styles of learning among students. According to Pask, students who use a 'holist' style prefers to set the task in the broadest possible perspective and to use visual imagery and personal experience to build up understanding. Students who use a 'serialist' style attempt step-by-step learning. They concentrate on each step of the argument in order and in isolation. Information is interpreted cautiously and critically but they rarely use visual imagery or personal experience. However, full understanding or the effective solution of problems requires an alternation between both styles. Pask (1976) found that some students were equally comfortable with both styles and had used each appropriately and these students were said to have had a 'versatile' learning style.

Since the 1970's many other researchers have become involved in researching learning styles of individuals. Coffield et al (2004) identified 71 models of learning styles, classified them into five families and evaluated the implications of these models for pedagogy in different post secondary contexts including higher education. At the end of their evaluation, they have highlighted the problems and gaps in the current state of knowledge and commented on the prospects of learning styles. One of the most popular beliefs about learning styles is the 'matching hypothesis', which states that 'the learning styles of students should be linked to the teaching styles of

their tutor' (Coffield et al, 2004, p. 121). However, Coffield et al (2004) conclude that it is 'premature and unethical to suggest such simple implications for practice because of the complexity of the phenomena of learning and the many gaps in knowledge.

In contrast to learning styles, approaches to learning research focuses on how students' perceptions of their learning environment affect their interaction with the learning. Marton and Saljo's (1976a, 1976b) study of 'surface' and 'deep' approach has been the pioneering work of this new field of study. Marton and Saljo (1976a) were interested in exploring how students went about the everyday task of reading an academic article. The approach used in this research was later named the 'phenomenographic' approach (Marton, 1981). This original work of Marton and Saljo (1976a, 1976b) has paved the way for the conceptual framework known generically as 'students approaches to learning' (SAL) theory (Biggs, 1993).

The concept of approach describes a qualitative aspect of learning. It is about how people experience and organise the subject matter of a learning task; it is about 'what' and 'how' they learn, rather than 'how much' they remember (Ramsden, 1992). The common notion of all SAL sub-theories is that, students' perceptions and learning-related activities are central to teaching and learning (Biggs, 1994, 1999). A consistent finding in this type of research has been how learners at different times have tended to adopt a 'surface', a 'strategic' or a 'deep' approach to, learning. A surface approach is characterised by a focus on rote learning, memorisation and reproduction, a lack of reflection, and a preoccupation with completing the task (Marton and Saljo, 1976a). Strategic approach is characterised by focus on

assessment requirements and lecturer expectations, and a careful management of time and effort, with the aim of achieving higher grades. Deep approach is characterised by the intention of understanding ideas for oneself, relating ideas to previous knowledge and experiences, looking for patterns and underlying principles, checking evidence and relating it to conclusions, examining logic and argument cautiously and critically and becoming actively interested in the course content (Marton et al, 1997). Subsequent research carried out in Australia, the UK and other countries in Europe have generated several models of learning, conceptions of learning and learning outcomes in Higher Education (Entwistle and Tait, 1990; Ramsden, 1992; Biggs, 1999; Marton and Saljo, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Entwistle and Smith, 2002).

The approaches to learning research is mainly based on phenomenographic and cognitive perspectives (Ashwin, 2009). Phenomenography originated in Sweden in the 1970's. Its focus was on identifying qualitatively different ways in which students and academics experience a phenomenon in higher education such as teaching (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999), learning (Marton and Saljo, 1997) or particular academic tasks (Ashwin, 2005). Usually the phenomenographers use qualitative interviews and sometimes open-ended questionnaire items to collect data.

Approaches to learning and teaching research based on the cognitive perspective were developed by Entwistle and Ramsden in the UK and by John Biggs in Australia. This research has led to the development of inventories such as the 'Approaches to Studying Inventory' (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983) and questionnaires such as the

'Study Process Questionnaire' (Biggs, 1987) to measure students' approaches to learning and the Course Experience Questionnaire (Ramsden, 1991, 1992) to measure the variations of students' perceptions of the quality of their courses.

The common focus of both these perspectives is on how students' and academics' perceptions of the teaching learning environment relate to the ways in which they engage with the teaching learning processes and also how these approaches are related to the outcomes of these processes (Ashwin, 2009). It is argued that deep and surface approaches to learning are related to learning outcomes and the students who use a deep approach are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes (Richardson, 2005; Entwistle, 2007).   The research into teachers' approaches to teaching also used the concepts, methods and findings of research into students' approaches to learning. They have identified five different approaches to teaching (Trigwell and Prosser, 1993) and five different conceptions of teaching (Kember, 1997) used by the university teachers. It is suggested that there are consistent relations between students' and academics' perceptions of the teaching learning environment, and the quality and outcomes of teaching learning processes (Ashwin, 2009).

2.1.2   Key issues arising from the research on approaches to learning

The approaches to learning and teaching research in undergraduate education have illuminated several aspects of student learning and teaching in higher education in many ways (Ashwin, 2009). However, these models and psychological theories have been contested for the underlying assumptions and the methods used to develop them.

For example, Malcolm and Zukas (2001), after reviewing pedagogical literature on higher education, suggest that theories of learning in higher education are mainly developed in psychological terms. They are also of the view that students' approaches to learning theories are based on a limited conceptualisation of pedagogy as an educational transaction between individual learners and the teacher while promoting an asocial construction of the learner. The theories further imply that it is possible to predict and control what will be learned and how. As a result, pedagogic theory has been reduced to a set of professional rules for practice (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001).

Furthermore, in this research the learner is considered frequently as an 'anonymous, decontextualised, degendered being whose main distinguishing characteristics are personality, learning style or approach to learning' (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001, p. 38). However what distinguishes one learner from another or one teacher from another is cultural, historical and social situatedness. Therefore Malcolm and Zukas finally advocate that higher education could benefit from studying the developments in other pedagogic areas such as school education, further education and medical education where the age, class, race and gender of students are common subjects of theory building, practice development and policy contestation.

Like Malcolm and Zukas (2001), other writers have been critical about these models, which adhere to the scientific approach to knowledge found in psychology, because they have failed to take account of the effects of wider social processes on learning. It is argued that these theoretical models are weak in explaining the socio-historical context within which learning takes place and the power relationships between the

teacher and the student (Webb, 1997; Goslin, 2000; Haggis, 2003). Here the individual learner is considered as a 'human being without agency' (Haggis, 2003, p. 98) and is constructed as a passive creation of his/her past experiences and is passively amenable to become a deep learner in response to the processes taking place at the university. Haggis (2003) argues that to provide a better service to the students coming from diverse backgrounds, research in HE needs to investigate more difficult questions of interaction of task, context and power in a range of diverse higher educational situations.

Haggis (2003) also questions the 'elite set of assumptions' underpinning the approaches to learning models about students' purposes and motivations. It is assumed in these theories that students' aims can be made to be the same as the aims of academics or the institutions and the students are already "at a level" to relate to the text, ideas and debates, in the way academics expect. Haggis (2003) questions the appropriateness of these assumptions in the present UK context where higher education is to play a central role in forming a learning society and to be expanded to prepare 50% of the relevant age cohort for the world of work.

In a later study, Haggis (2004) further argues that there is a need to use a wider range of approaches for studying learning in higher education. Although psychology and phenomenography have illuminated part of the issues of student learning and teaching in undergraduate education in a particular way, there may be other aspects that need further illumination. What is hidden in grey areas may be different from what is already illuminated and these hidden aspects may have powerful effects, which

cannot be examined or understood by the approaches to research currently in use (Haggis, 2004).

Approaches to learning theories are further contested due to the methodologies that are used in developing those theories. For example, Murphy and Scott (2003) point out that many studies have been conducted for understanding students' experience for various purposes and in using a variety of approaches. The approaches used included whole institutional or large scale surveys and detailed research investigations focusing on small groups, or individuals in specific situations. The purposes of more recent studies have been to provide evidence for quality and accountability of teaching and learning in higher education (Murphy and Scott, 2003).

Murphy and Scott (2003) also argue that it is necessary to conduct more in-depth studies on student experiences to generate knowledge to inform the policy and practice. They are of the view that recent research in HE has been more evaluative rather than empirical and has not been very critical of the policy agenda. These studies have been driven by the demand for evidence of quality and accountability. The need to collect feedback from students for accountability purposes have led to the development of a large number of questionnaires (Murphy and Scott, 2003).

Further commenting on widely used questionnaires such as the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) (Biggs, 1993) Murphy and Scott argue that the questionnaires have a limited capacity to explore and explain the complexity and the diversity of student experiences in HE. Questionnaires are confined to closely defined predetermined parameters. Therefore, they cannot

capture the underlying complexities of a situation. Moreover, many studies carried out on student experiences rely on the interview as their primary and often only method of data collection (Evans, 1993 cited in Murphy and Scott, 2003). However, there are reservations about the quality of interview data and the circumstances under which such data are collected. Interview data can be affected if the interviewee is 'overly conscious' about the artificiality of the situation, the requirements and expectations of the interviewer (Murphy and Scott, 2003). It is also possible to get distorted responses due to anger, personal bias, politics and anxiety (Patton, 2002). Therefore, it is possible that interview data may not represent the actual beliefs and views of the person being interviewed. Power differences between the interviewer and interviewee may affect the data generated in situations where academics interview their students (Murphy and Scott, 2003). Pointing out the above-mentioned methodological weaknesses in the existing research and the restrictive nature of the approaches to learning model, Murphy and Scott infer that there is a need to conduct more in-depth studies to illuminate student experiences in higher education.

Murphy and Scott (2003) advocate student-centred, open-ended and exploratory research, which provide students themselves with opportunities to reflect and represent their experiences. To understand the students' world better they suggest methods of participant and non-participant observation of teaching and learning, ethnography, observational shadowing, and focus groups for data collection. They also highlight the importance of using such approaches as 'teacher as researcher' as well as 'student as researcher', and measures such as personal development planning by the students, keeping a journal by the student and student profiling.

In the following section I discuss research that has been carried out in the UK and other countries, using perspectives other than the 'approaches to learning'.

2.1.3   Research based on perspectives other than 'approaches to learning'

More recent literature on students' experiences in higher education records a number of studies which have used qualitative approaches and different perspectives for understanding students' experiences better. In this section, I peruse studies carried out on traditional students in other countries first and then the studies carried out in the UK using perspectives other than the 'approaches to learning'. A common feature of most of these studies is that they conceptualise learning as a social practice.

Stiwne (2003) presents two 'study histories' of two successful students (who graduated in the stipulated time) in a 'prestigious and tough' engineering undergraduate course in a university in Sweden, to illustrate how their 'study lives' were shaped and interpreted within the context of the study programme. Based on her findings she argues that students' perception of their study environment is a major factor affecting their attrition, motivation, study and learning orientation and achievements. These perceptions contributed to the creation of meaning by the students. Different students perceive and interpret the curriculum, exams, teaching and guiding and student counselling differently and therefore different students create their own 'study environment' to suit their personal goals (Stiwne, 2003). Finally, Stiwne challenges the practice of relying on 'rational planning and actions' in designing and implementing study programmes for students with heterogeneous family and study backgrounds, motives and motivations for studying and future goals.

In a study where neo-Vygotskian principles were enacted in an undergraduate course in a major research university in the USA, Ball and Wells (2006) offer insights into the ways in which learning activities interact with larger institutional norms and how the students negotiate university experience. Using a Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) perspective, the researchers attempted to design a course that facilitated interacting networks of learners to negotiate and to achieve meaningful goals through dialogue and activity. Based on their findings they suggest that " good students" tried to 'conform to what they believe to be their instructors' expectations often at the expense of "learning with understanding" (p. 198). On the other hand, learning-with-understanding may also be constrained by the uncertainty and ambiguity which results from the removal of clear and explicit expectations.

The above researchers also attempt to put forward tentative explanations on why and how some students gained proficiency in goal formation and meta-cognition, while overcoming a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. They suggest that those students who tried to conform to the expectations of the instructors, tended to rely on previously established value orientations and ideology. These students believed that 'instructors have established notions; not only about correct and incorrect responses but also about how they are formed and performed' (Ball and Wells, 2006, p.199). It is advantageous to the student if he/she is able to recognise the instructors' position as quickly as possible and align his/her actions and perspectives accordingly. Alternatively, the students who were able to "find relevance and to integrate multiple meanings by adopting a dialogic and meta-cognitive stance towards their own learning arrived at a more complex understanding of 'how people learn' more

generally" (p.199). However, the authors finally point out that the question about why some students were likely to rely on previously established expectations while others were motivated to confront multiple cues and construct new meanings remains unanswered.

Studies carried out in the UK were particularly concerned with non-traditional students and issues of age, class, ethnicity, gender and disability. For example, Tett (1999) discusses the institutional and dispositional barriers that affect working class, disabled and ethnic minority communities to access and sustain participation in higher education. She reported about the success of a project implemented in Scotland to overcome such barriers faced by a group of working class, black or disabled community activists. According to Tett (1999), the project had been successful in changing the attitudes of the people who believed that higher education is not for them and also those of others in their communities. However, she casts doubts about the sustainability of the 'very resource intensive approach' that they used in the project in conditions of decreasing resources.

Tett (2000) also analysed the gendered experiences of the participants in HE in the same project, over a three-year period using interview data. The data on students' recollected and current experiences were discussed under three themes: their school experiences and their later learning experiences; their views about higher education; and their attitudes to being working class. She observed that the ways in which people describe their experiences reflect on the way they construct their feminine and masculine identities. These identities were not static but 'historically and spatially

situated and evolving.' She concluded that the questioning of discourses of class and gender that frame the ways of their thinking helps the students to open up new ways of thinking reflexively about the social construction of their experiences of education.

Lea and Street (1998, 2000) have attempted to understand student learning by focusing on academic literacy practices. According to them, academic literacy, or reading and writing constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new practices. The practices approach to literacy takes into account the cultural and contextual component of writing and reading practices.

Their research is based on the premise that in order to understand the nature of academic learning, it is important to investigate the understanding of both academic staff and students about their own literacy practices, without making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective. Research based on this approach suggests that one explanation for student writing problems might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing (Lea and Street, 2000). Academic literacy practices require students to 'switch their writing styles and genres between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes' (Lea and Street, 2006; p. 368) . Therefore, the authors recommend that there is a need for more context specific research to illuminate student learning in HE.

In an ongoing longitudinal study Haggis (2004) uses an approach based on a range of perspectives drawn from different contexts of learning which include adult education, situated learning in work based contexts, learning careers in post compulsory education and academic literacies in higher education. The above perspectives conceptualise learning as a complex and situated phenomenon. They suggest that 'people are likely to have individual, even unique, experiences of learning, which will vary according to different contexts and situations' (Haggis, 2004, p.337). They also share a concern with 'differences' rather than 'commonality', with 'specificity' rather than 'generalizability' and with the 'effects of context' rather than the 'processes of abstraction' (Haggis, 2004, p.337).

After analysing the first round of interviews with the participants of an access course in Scotland using an indeterministic analytic approach which focuses on differences between individuals, she asserts that her analysis has useful implications for current conceptualisations of learning in higher education. Some of the implications of an awareness of difference are that it can: reduce the tendencies to stereotype on the basis of research generalisations and also remind the practitioners not to make other kinds of assumptions about students such as that students are similar to the practitioner or similar to the students the practitioner has worked with in the past (Haggis, 2004). Her analysis also suggests 'the possibility of a more complex and interconnected set of pressures, reactions and desires, within which learning at university appears, for some students at least, to present possibilities for the creation of new identities and selves', (Haggis, 2004, p. 350). She infers that it seems important to try to understand learning as an individual and situated process. Finally

she points out that what is considered as non-generalisable could be useful in better understanding the overall complexity of the idea of learning in Higher Education.

Mann (2001) also suggests that we need to use alternative perspectives to understand students' experiences in higher education. She argues that, in both surface and strategic approaches to learning, the students express an alienation from the subject and the process of study itself. Therefore she points out that to further understand students' experience of learning, it is necessary to shift from a focus on surface/strategic/deep approaches to learning to a focus on alienated and engaged experiences of learning. She theoretically explored alienation from seven different perspectives and suggested five different responses the teachers could make to influence alienation. They were solidarity, hospitality, safety, the redistribution of power and criticality. Case (2008) further develops this theme to provide a framework to understand students' alienation resulting from entering the higher education community, fitting into higher education community and staying in the higher education community. Each category was associated with theoretical tools that are useful in analysing student experience in the relevant aspect.

2.1.4 Historical development of research in student learning in undergraduate education in Sri Lanka

The perusal of literature on student learning in undergraduate education in Sri Lanka reveals that the few studies carried out on student learning over the past two decades have focused on measuring students' approaches to learning and how they had affected students' learning (Perera, 1992; Dayaratne, 1994; Ratwatte, 1999); whether

the students' approaches to learning varied according to the cultural factors (Niles, 1996); and how the students' approaches to learning correlated with students' experiences in different courses (Wijesundera, 2002b).

However, more recent research in student learning in undergraduate education in Sri Lanka records a welcome change which focuses on context-based interventions to improve student learning. In their research different lecturers/groups of lecturers have introduced innovative practices of teaching (Chandrika and Perera, 2006; Dissanayake and Atapatttu, 2010; Perera et al, 2010; Liyanage, 2010; Gunawardene et al, 2010; Sooriyarachchi and Nanayakkara, 2010; Kodithuwakku, 2006; Zakeel, 2010) and assessment (Kodithuwakku, 2006; Udayashantha and Dilhani, 2006; Sivayogan, 2006; Abeysinghe, 2008; Nanayakkarawasam, 2010) in selected courses and assessed the effects of such innovations on student learning. The purpose of the above research was to improve practice at course level. The innovations were mainly based on theoretical ideas of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999) and experiential learning (Kolb and Fry, 1975). All the above research was carried out in the subject disciplines related to Agriculture, Applied Sciences, Engineering, Management and Medicine. A significant feature of the available research is the absence of studies on innovative practices of teaching, learning and assessment in the disciplinary areas of Social Sciences and Humanities. The lack of theory-building research in student learning is also another problem that needs the attention of the academic community in Sri Lanka.

2.1.5 Key issues emerging from existing research and the research problem that I intend to explore

The above review reveals that there is a need for understanding students' experiences in HE using a variety of perspectives and using qualitative research methodologies. Among the reasons highlighted in the literature for such a necessity are;

- the diversity of the student population in terms of age, gender, class, ethnicity, disability and previous experiences in learning;

- the variety of factors mediating students' learning in different contexts;

- issues of power relations and identities which seem under researched;

- the issue of students as autonomous learners and

- the complexities involved in understanding students' experiences and learning, and the limitations of methods used in data collection.

In fact, the studies discussed in the latter part of the above review have attempted to address some of these issues by adopting the perspective of situated learning or other socio-cultural perspectives. Some of these studies relied on interviews (Haggis, 2004; Stiwne, 2003) and others on combinations of different qualitative techniques (Tett, 1999, 2000; Lea and Street, 1998, 2000; Ball and Wells, 2006) and three of the studies on planned intervention based on some theoretical perspective (Tett, 1999, 2000; Ball and Wells, 2006). The majority of these attempts signify the complex nature of the students' experiences in higher education and the need to explore learning as both an individual and social phenomenon. They further suggest the need to conduct more context-based studies on students' experiences.

Most of the above research, including approaches to learning and teaching and academic literacies tend to conceptualise student learning as a process of perceiving contextual demands and responding to them in specific ways. Furthermore, they address only a part of the question of **how** the students learn while ignoring **what** they learn in the process. Two exceptions are the studies by Haggis (2004) and Ball and Wells (2006). Haggis (2004) recognises that individual students may have desires to react and respond to the possibilities in the context to create new identities and selves. She also infers that learning has to be understood as both an individual and a situated process. Ball and Wells (2006) also recognise this need to focus on both the individual and the context for understanding student learning at the end of the study, when they found that they had difficulty in understanding why some students rely on previously established expectations, while others use opportunities in the context to create new meanings. They wonder whether the differences they observed among different students were "systemic" or whether they were tied to similar cultural historical contexts of different students. These latter two studies suggest that individual desires, expectations, motivations and other agentic factors may interact with the learning context to affect **what** and **how** the students learn in their courses.

Therefore, in my research I argue that to better understand students' learning experiences we need to focus on both collective and individual actions of students as well as their agentic factors that interact with the learning context to produce the desired or valued outcome for them. Hence, I am interested in exploring how students

regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and the valued outcome expected by them. Accordingly, I look at both how students are **affected by the contextual demands** and how they **act on the context** to achieve valued outcomes expected by them.

In the previous three sections I have critically examined the research that had been carried out so far on student experiences of learning, and I believe that it is my responsibility now to propose how I would conduct research in this area. At this point it is necessary for me to clarify my own position about what I mean by student learning and how I expect to develop knowledge about the phenomena of student learning. For this purpose I need to clarify my ontological and epistemological assumptions of students' experiences and learning. Accordingly, in the following section I clarify my ontological and epistemological assumptions of student experiences and learning, before I move onto examine the usefulness of socio-cultural theories, specifically the 'Communities of Practice' theory and the activity theory to explore my research question.

2.2 My ontological and epistemological assumptions of students' experiences and learning.

To clarify my position on how I conceptualise students' experiences and actions of learning, I need to examine my view of the social world (ontology) and knowledge of the social world (epistemology) that underpins this conceptualization. In this section I wish to clarify the particular views that I hold about the nature of reality and the

human being (ontology) and about the nature of knowledge or the relationship between the inquirer and the known (epistemology) (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). It is important to make explicit my position in relation to these issues because it helps to clarify the nature of the claims that I make in this research.

I believe that there is an independent reality, which is external to me. I think that this is a belief which is related to my secondary and tertiary educational experiences in the stream of natural sciences. This conception of reality is characterised by 'realist ontology' (Pring, 2000a). According to Pring:

> 'Realism' is the view that there is a reality, a world, which exists independently of the researcher and which is to be discovered. Research is a matter of finding out about it. And the conclusions of the research are true or false, depending on whether they match up to that reality (pp. 58-59).

However, my views about reality and what is knowable about it are quite different from the above description of realism or 'naïve realism', which implies that 'there is a one-to–one relation between our description of reality and the reality itself,' (Pring, 2000a, p.60). I believe that, even though there is an external world independent of me, what is knowable about that reality is constrained by my sensory and mental capacities, concepts, the language that I use to understand it and the interactions that I have with it, as well as the values, beliefs, motivations and emotions that I have. I also believe that human being is real and unique and therefore different people make sense of and describe the reality about the world (both physical and social) around them differently. In other words, people make 'multiple representations' (Murphy and Dingwall, 2005) about both natural and social worlds. This does not mean that reality

is understood in an infinite number of ways. There can be both commonalities and differences in the way different people interpret the world around them. It is also possible that reality itself and people's representations about it change over time and space.

I also think it is possible to know to some extent, the nature of social reality by developing trusting relationships with the "actors" and listening to and reading written accounts of their experiences and interpretations about them, observing their actions and behaviours and examining the artefacts that they use and produce. However, it is not possible to fully understand the social reality through these means because of the changing nature of reality as well as the changing nature of human beings. What I try to make sense about in this study is the relatively stable aspects of that reality.

Human beings are also capable of both individual and collective actions and therefore they are able to take action to change the undesirable elements of the perceived reality at least to some extent. My own personal experiences as well as the work that I carried out with the teachers of a disadvantaged school in Sri Lanka (Wijesundera, 2002b) provide ample support for me to hold this view. I believe that learning is individual, social and context related. Similarly, cognition is both individual and situated. Individuals also bring memories, past experiences, beliefs, values, needs, motivations, emotions and identities to any learning situation. These individual factors also interact with the context and therefore individuals' actions of learning shape and are shaped by the context.

The undergraduate course and the way the students learn in the course exist independent of me. The course pre-existed and will continue to evolve with new sets of participants even after I conclude my research. It is possible that the nature of the undergraduate course and what it means for different students and the lecturers will change over time and space. It is, in fact, like any other structural arrangement, 'a set of regularities in the aggregate patterning of the activities' (Benton and Craib, 2001, p. 119) of students, lecturers and administrators. The course is partly given (rules, regulations, syllabi, assessment procedures etc.,) and partly constructed by the students and the lecturers in their daily activities.

I find that my ontological positions clarified above are closely related to the views of critical realism. Critical realism posits that absolute knowledge of anything is not possible and any deliberation about the world is time specific. As pointed out by Pring: 'Social reality is not static. It changes certainly as the participants in it become more aware of it (Pring, 2000b, p.259).

Critical realism is also 'fallibilist'. Critical realists' stance of independent reality of natural and social objects of our knowledge, and the need for work to overcome misleading appearances, implies that 'current beliefs will always be open to correction in the light of further cognitive work (observations, experimental evidence, interpretations, theoretical reasoning, dialogue and so on)'(Benton and Craib, 2001, p.121).

According to Scott (2005), this feature of fallibility is the feature that makes critical realism 'critical'. The critical realist position and its development depend on 'internal

critique', where the present or even past ways of describing the world are shown to be flawed and therefore, can and need to be replaced by alternatives (Scott, 2005). Thus the critical realist accounts of social phenomena are epistemologically tentative. As argued by Corson (1991) they allow only hypothetical grounds for prediction in the open systems like education. "Bhaskar's ontological position allows for the real existence of the 'generative mechanisms', which explains social events in the past and the present, but they do not guarantee that they would operate in the same manner in the future" (Corson, 1991, p.230). This conception of generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1989) provides a strong lead to educational researcher to be more concerned about understanding the real past and the present situation of the education system for bringing about change rather than predicting their future (Corson, 1991).

Critical realism posits that, what is knowable about reality represents the set of meanings we grasp from our encounters with the material world. 'The forms of discourse, in which it is manifested, influence what we can know (that is they are prior to epistemology.) but in part at least denote or connote scientifically real entities' (Corson, 1991, p.235).

According to Benton and Craib (2001) Bhaskar's critical realism also addresses the often contested problem of structure and agency in social theory. For Bhaskar (1989, 1998), society and persons are distinct levels-both real, but interdependent and interacting with one another. 'Society, then, provides necessary conditions for intentional human action, and intentional human action is a necessary condition for it' (Bhaskar, 1998, p.36-37). Therefore, Bhaskar treats society as a continuous

transaction between intentionally acting human agents and the social structures they reproduce or transform (Benton and Craib (2001).

Hence, what I claim as knowledge in this research may be fallible, contestable and tentative. The 'truth' that emerges in this research depends on the theoretical framework that guides this research, the forms of discourse used by me, the participants of this research and time. Students' experiences and their learning in the course depend on their individual characteristics (values, beliefs, habits, attitudes, goals, motivations, and identities), their interactions with the context and how they interpret and respond to the demands of it. I see learning as individual sense-making in a socio-cultural context and the learner as a unique human being who is capable of interpreting that context in relation to his/her previous experiences, goals, motivations and emotions and of taking actions to achieve their desired or valued outcomes by changing the context while being affected by the demands of it.

2.3 Choosing a theoretical framework

Perusal of literature on theories of learning (Brown, 2004) indicates that there are a large number of theories which represent a range of perspectives spanning from rather mechanistic views of learning to a sociocultural point of view. There is no one grand theory of learning which is applicable to any situation or which could fully explain the phenomena. Sfard (1998) classified these theories into two metaphors based on the discourse that they use. The two metaphors are acquisition metaphor and articipation metaphor, which are conveniently used to classify our ways of thinking about learning.

In the acquisition metaphor, learning is conceptualized as acquisition of something and the goal of learning as individual enrichment. The student is a recipient or a consumer and the teacher is a provider, facilitator or mediator. Knowledge is considered as a commodity, property or a possession. Knowing is considered as possessing or having something (Sfard, 1998). Cognitive theories, humanistic and constructivist theories are all classified under the acquisition metaphor. Contemporary theories of student learning also come under this category because they focus on individuals acquiring concepts or knowledge through reconstruction.

In the participation metaphor (Sfard, 1998), learning is conceptualized as becoming a participant or a part of a greater whole. The goal of learning is considered as community building. The student is an apprentice or peripheral participant and the teacher is an expert participant and a preserver of the practice. Knowledge is considered as an aspect of practice, discourse or activity. Knowing is belonging, participating or communicating (Sfard, 1998). Situated learning and cultural historical activity theory come under the participation metaphor because they focus on development of community through participation.

Sfard (1998) evaluates these metaphors and points out both their strengths and their weaknesses. She does not identify any one of them as superior to the other and concludes that one metaphor is insufficient to fully understand learning. Each has something to offer that the other cannot provide. She argues that it is necessary to combine two metaphors in teaching and in educational research.

However, I do not fully agree with Sfard's classification because in the theories that she classified under participation metaphor there are cognitive elements (Edwards, 2005a) and an internalisation process as discussed below.

There are two prominent strands of theories which have been classified under the 'participation metaphor'. They are the Situated Learning Theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) developed by Engeström (1987). Situated learning focuses on the role of context in the development of knowledge. In contrast to the cognitive and constructivist perspectives which explain learning as an abstraction, the situated learning theory views that the understanding of a concept is tied to the context within which it is learned (Tennant, 1997).

As argued by Greeno (1997), in the situated view it is necessary to recognize that cognition is a process of 'coming to know' and the outcome of learning is 'generality of knowing' which is defined as 'regular patterns of someone's participation in interactions with other people, and with material and representational systems' (p.11). In this view, learning is:

> ...hypothesised to be becoming attuned to constraints and affordances of activity and becoming more centrally involved in the practices of a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and transfer is hypothesised to depend on attunements[7] to constraints[8] and affordances[9] that are invariant or modifiable across transformations of a situation where learning occurred, to another situation in which that learning can have an effect (Greeno, 1998, p.11).

This means that learners internalise at least some aspects of patterns of participation in one situation which can help them to participate and learn in another situation (Edwards, 2005a).

When comparing the cognitive perspective with the situative perspective, the latter provides a broader framework for understanding and improving educational practice. As pointed out by Greeno (1997) situative perspective includes the important aspects of individual cognitive functions as well as how individuals participate along with other people, material, representational and conceptual resources, and develop their identities as contributors and learners along trajectories of participation. Greeno argues that it is possible to use this perspective to make students participate in the learning more actively 'by formulating and evaluating questions, problems, conclusions, evidence, explanations and arguments'(p.15). This kind of broader participation would make students understand that the skills and knowledge they acquire have significance for their contributions to the communities in which they participate at present and in the future (Greeno, 1997).

The cognitive elements in this perspective highlighted by Greeno (1997, 1998) provide a useful basis for defining what learning is (Edwards, 2005a). Building on the ideas of Greeno discussed above, Edwards observes that 'learning is evidenced in a capacity to recognize how one's actions might be supported in a setting and to use the resources available to take action' (Edwards, 2005a, p. 58). She argues that to understand learning better, it is necessary to 'examine simultaneously (1) how

learners interpret and act on their worlds and (2) the opportunities afforded them for those interpretations and actions (p.59).

In this research I am interested in understanding how students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes. This implies that I need to examine simultaneously the two aspects highlighted above. Moreover, I need a theory that helps me to understand both how individuals are affected by the context and how they act on the context to achieve the valued outcomes. As discussed above, sociocultural theories provide necessary frameworks to understand how students interact with the sociocultural context and also how they act on that context to achieve the valued outcomes. Therefore, I now have to choose between the two prominent theories of learning in this perspective, i.e. the CoPT of Lave and Wenger (1991) and CHAT of Engeström (1987) by paying attention to their strengths and weaknesses in explaining learning as a resourceful action in and across settings as suggested by Greeno (1997) and Edwards (2005a).

2.3.1. Communities of practice theory and its applicability to my research problem

Lave and Wenger's idea of situated learning marks a significant departure from the conventional ways of thinking about learning. In the conventional view, learning has been considered as something that individuals do and as an acquisition of certain forms of knowledge. But for Lave and Wenger (1991), it involved a deepening 'process of participating in communities of practice (p. 49)'. According to them, communities of practice are everywhere and every one of us is engaged in a number

of them at work, school, home and other organisations in society. In some groups we are core members and in others we are at the periphery.

The 'central defining characteristic of the situated learning model of Lave and Wenger is the process called legitimate peripheral participation. In Lave and Wenger's words:

> 'Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

In the process of participating in multiple communities of practice, individuals develop personal identities that are shaped by and are formative of their activities in the various communities in which they participate (Wenger, 1998).

Furthermore, 'in contrast to learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.49). Thus, the person in this community is not an isolated individual, but a whole person acting in a socio-cultural community. Learning is seen as a social process, which involves changing relationships between newcomers, old-timers, activities, artefacts, identities, communities of knowledge and

practices. Learning is 'an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations' (p.50). Thus Lave and Wenger's theory presents a relational view of the person and learning (Tennant, 1997).

Tennant (1997) points out that this way of describing learning is something more than simply 'learning by doing' or experiential learning. The concept of situated learning involves people becoming full participants in the world and generating meaning. Lave and Wenger (1991) comment,

> 'For newcomers… the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation' (p. 108-9)

Therefore the discourse is not separated from practice; discourse itself is seen as social and cultural practice (Tennant, 1997).

Lave and Wenger's theory also rejects the idea of acquiring schemata to understand the world and proposes that learners acquire the ability to play various roles in communities of practice. As pointed out by Hanks:

> 'The skilful learner acquires something more like the ability to play various roles in various fields of participation. This would involve things other than schemata: the ability to anticipate, a sense of what can feasibly occur within specified contexts, even if in a given case it does not occur. It involves a prereflective grasp of complex situations …..Mastery involves timing of actions relative to changing circumstances' (Hanks, 1991, p. 20)

The strength of this theory for understanding student 'learning has its emphasis on the need to understand knowledge and learning in context, and how learning occurs through participation in communities of practice' (Tennant, 1997, p.77) by socialisation into existing beliefs, values and practices. In the CoPT framework, learning is a function of identity and success in an educational context which is considered as full participation. The individuals adopt and engage in the valued practices of the community while contributing to the community and modifying their own practice and shifting values (O'Donnell and Tobbell , 2007).

However, a number of problems arise in using this theory to analyse student learning in the undergraduate course. One is related to the definition of the community and its practice in which the students are involved. If we take the undergraduates and their lecturers as the community' then the lecturers can be considered as the experts and the students as the novices. But then there arises the problem of whether the students and the lecturers are engaged in the same practice. If we consider that the lecturers' practice is characterised by teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge, then is it right to consider that all the students are to become lecturers who are aspiring to become experts in those areas? In reality, all students who participate in undergraduate education do not aspire to become lecturers or academics. Their career choices do not often bear a direct relation to the subject disciplines that they study (Brennan and Osborne, 2008) and therefore they might not feel that they are part of the particular disciplinary community.

A second problem is the lack of clarity in Lave and Wenger's analysis, regarding how communities of practice respond to social and technological changes, where newcomers, for example, have the knowledge and access to new technologies that will displace traditional methods of practice (Tennant, 1997). It also does not explain how we learn new practices or create new knowledge and what is learned in the process of socialisation into existing beliefs, values and practices (Edwards, 2005a). Thus, the communities of practice theory provides only a partial answer to my question of how students regulate their learning in relation to the demands of the context and their valued outcomes.

2.3.2 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and its applicability to my research problem

Activity theory is a widely accepted name for a line of theorising and research initiated by the founders of the cultural historical school of Russian psychology (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999). According to Davydov (1999) the common English term activity is 'too inclusive and broad' while 'true activity is always connected to the transformation of reality' (P.46). The English equivalent of the Russian word '*deyatel'nost'* is activity. He is of the view that German terms of '*Tatigkeit'* and '*Handlung'* better express the notion of transformation of reality in the original Russian term.

The history of cultural historical activity theory can be traced back to dialectical materialism in Marxism, classical German philosophy and the concept of mediated action of Vygotsky (Engeström, 1987; Roth and Lee, 2007). The central thesis of the

Russian cultural historical school of psychology is that 'the structure and development of human psychological processes emerge through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity'. (Cole, 1996, p.108)

2.3.2.1 Some basic principles of activity theory

According to Cole (1998) the cultural historical activity theory is a result of an attempt by psychologists, sociologists, linguists, and anthropologists to develop a theory for understanding human nature by placing culture as their centre of concern. The basic principles of CHAT which is one of the families of approaches called cultural psychology are summarised below:

- The basic premise of a CHAT approach is that human beings have the need and ability to mediate their interactions with each other and the nonhuman world through culture.
- Culture is conceived of as human beings' "social inheritance". This social inheritance is embodied in artefacts, aspects of their environment that have been transformed by their participation in the successful goal-directed activities of prior generations. They have acquired value.
- Artefacts, the constituents of culture are simultaneously material and ideal/symbolic. They are materialised in the form of objects, words, rituals, and other cultural practices that mediate human life. They are ideal in that their form has evolved to achieve prescribed means to prescribed goals, and they have survived to be tools for our use. Culture is the exteriorised mind; mind is interiorised culture.
- Human psychological processes are acquired in the process of mediating one's interactions with others and the physical world through culture and its central medium, language.
- Consequently, it is by analysing what people do in culturally organised activity and people acting through meditational means in context, that one comes to understand the process of human being.

- Because cultural mediation is a process occurring over time, a CHAT perspective emphasises that it must be studied over time.
- In addition to focusing on time and change, a CHAT perspective requires the researchers to focus on the social/spatial ecology of the activities that they study- the relation of activities to their institutional arrangements.
- A CHAT perspective places a special emphasis on the principle of multivoicedness, the principle that every form of human interaction contains within it many different selves, arranged in multiple, overlapping, and often-contradictory ways. The contradictions, experienced by us as conflicts, are a major source of change. (Adapted from Cole, 1998, p.292).

Hence, CHAT provides a contrasting view about the nature of the human mind and its development compared to the behavioural, cognitive and constructivist theories. In this view, learning is not solely an individual activity but a collaborative activity which is mediated by cultural artefacts or tools and the interactions with other human beings. Human beings and their environment mutually transform each other in a dialectical relationship (Barab et al, 2004). Learning is not just responding to an environmental stimulus, or information processing or constructing meaning individually by combining previously acquired knowledge with new knowledge.

According to Cole (1990) the key concepts in cultural historical psychology are mediation through artefacts, historical development and practical activity. The basic idea of mediation through artefacts is that human beings live in an environment transformed by the artefacts produced by previous generations, over the period from the beginning of the species. These artefacts help the human beings to coordinate with the physical world and each other. Cultural artefacts are simultaneously ideal

(conceptual) and material. They mediate human interaction with the world. Therefore they are considered as tools (Cole, 1990). As pointed out by Luria (see Cole, 1990) these tools can help human being not only to radically change his conditions of existence but also to effect changes in himself and his psychic condition. So, there is a dialectical relationship between the individual and his environment.

According to this perspective, culture is understood as 'the entire pool of artefacts accumulated by the social group in the course of its historical experience' (Cole, 1990, p.110). Culture is considered to be the medium of human development. The other basic premise of this approach is that the analysis of human psychological functions must be understood through humans' everyday activities (Cole, 1990).

2.3.2.2 The difference between individual action and collective activity

According to Engeström (2001), the activity theory has evolved through three generations of research. The first generation activity system is Vygotsky's triangular model, which depicts the structure of the 'mediated act'. Vygotsky's idea of mediation is explained in the following quotation:

> 'Every elementary form of behaviour presupposes direct reaction to the task set before the organism (which can be expressed with the simple S-R formula). But the structure of sign operations requires an intermediate link between the stimulus and the response. This intermediate link is a second order stimulus (sign) that is drawn into the operation where it fulfils a special function; it creates a new relation between S and R. The term 'drawn into' indicates that an individual must be actively engaged in establishing such a link. The sign also possesses the important characteristic of reverse action (that is, it operates on the individual, not the environment). Consequently, the simple stimulus response process is replaced by a complex, mediated act….In this new process the direct impulse to react is

inhibited, and an auxiliary stimulus that facilitates the completion of the operation by indirect means is incorporated' (Vygotsky, 1978,p. 39-40).

The auxiliary stimulus (sign) possesses the specific function of reverse action. It transfers the psychological operation to higher and qualitatively new forms and permits humans, by the aid of extrinsic stimuli, to control their behaviour from the outside. The use of signs leads humans to a specific structure of behaviour and creates new forms of a culturally based psychological process (Vygotsky, 1978). This idea of cultural mediation of artefacts is generally presented as a triad of subject, object and mediating artefact (Figure 2).
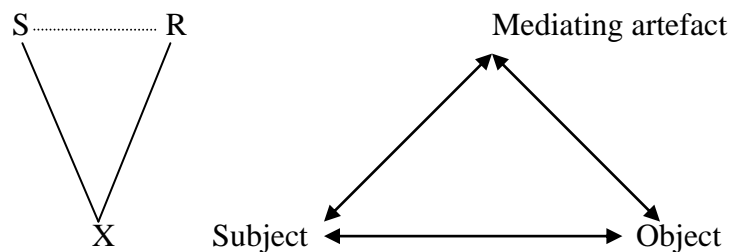
Figure 2: 'Mediated Act' (Engeström, 2001, p. 134)

To explain the role of cultural historical factors on the development of the human mind, Vygotsky proposed the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is the distance between what an individual can achieve on his own (actual level of cognitive development) and what he can achieve with guidance from more capable peers or adults. Vygotsky posited his "genetic law of cultural development" as follows:

> 'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the societal level, and later on the individual level; first between individuals (intermental) and then inside the child (intramental).' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

The inter-mental plane is where the shared cognition emerges through interaction between individuals and the intra-mental plane is where this shared cognition is internalised. Therefore, learning occurs in collaboration with others in a cultural and social environment. The learner is actively constructing meaning in a social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978; Barab et al , 2004)

According to Engeström (2001), the introduction of cultural artefacts into human actions by Vygotsky has helped to overcome the dualism between structure and agency. 'The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts' (Engeström, 2001, p.134). Objects are not just raw materials for the formation of logical operations in the subject, but cultural entities. The object-orientedness of action is the key to understanding human psyche. (Engeström, 2001).

Although the unit of analysis of the cultural historical school of psychology developed by Vygotsky was an object-oriented action mediated by cultural tools and signs, important notions of mediation by other human beings and social relations were not integral to his 'mediated act'. The limitation of this first generation activity system was its unit of analysis, which is the individual (Engeström, 2001). This is addressed in the second-generation activity system, which clarified the difference between individual action and collective activity (Figure 3).

Tools

Subjects   Object ⟹ Outcomes

Rules   Division of Labour

Community
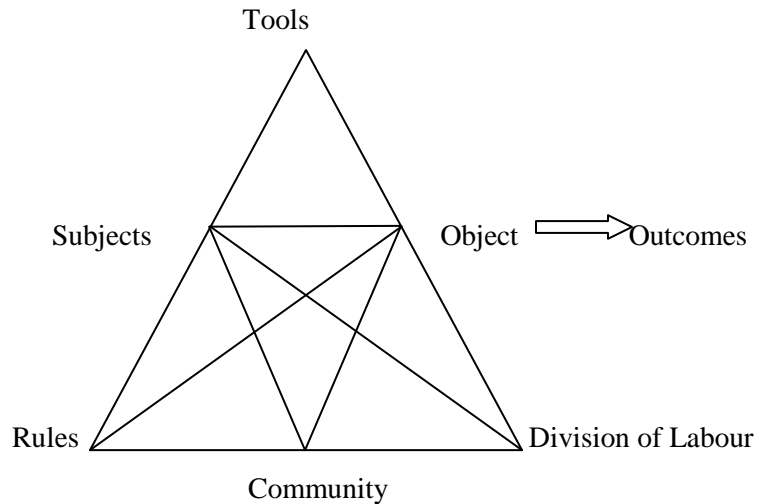
Figure 3: The basic structure of an activity system

According to Engeström and Miettinen (1999), in order to integrate the mediation by social relations and other human beings to the model presented by Vygotsky, it is necessary to understand the concept of activity by distinguishing between collective activity and individual action. They use the famous example of 'hunting' by Leont'ev to illustrate the relationship between collective activity and individual action as follows:

> 'A beater, for example, taking part in a primeval collective hunt, was stimulated by a need for food or, perhaps, a need for clothing, which the skin of the dead animal would meet for him. At what, however, was his activity directly aimed? It may have been directed, for example, for frightening a herd of animals and sending them towards other hunters, hiding in ambush. That, properly speaking, is what should be the result of the activity of this man. And the activity of this individual member of the hunt ends with that. The rest is completed by other members. This result, i.e., the frightening of game, etc., understandably does not in itself lead to satisfaction of the beater's need for food, or the skin of the animal. What the processes of his activity were directed to do did not, consequently, coincide with what stimulated them, i.e., did not coincide with one another in this instance. Processes, the object and motive of which do not coincide with one another, we shall call "actions". We can say, for example, that *the beater's activity is the hunt, and the frightening of the game his action.'* (Leont'ev, cited in Engeström and Miettinen, 1999, p. 4)

According to Engeström and Miettinen (1999) Leont'ev's three-level model of activity is based on the distinctions made in the above quotation, between activity and action. The uppermost level consists of collective activity which is guided by object oriented motive, the middle level consists of individual (or group) action which is guided by a goal and the bottom level consists of automatic operations which are guided by the conditions and tools of actions at hand (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999). Thus, an activity system has a multi-layered structure consists of culturally mediated, object oriented collective activity, goal oriented individual actions and automatic operations. Activities are realised by goal directed actions, subordinated to conscious purposes. These actions are the typical objects of the cognitive psychology motor or mental skills and performances. The hunting example cited in the above implicates that development of actions from the activity is a result of the division of labour (Engeström, 1987).

For Leont'ev (see Engeström, 1987), human activity does not exist except in the form of action or a chain of actions. One and the same action may involve various activities and may be transformed from one activity to another. One motive may find expression in different goals and actions. Actions are carried out in different concrete circumstances. The methods, by which the action is carried out, are called operations. Operations are related to conditions not often consciously reflected by the subjects (Engeström, 1987).

Leont'ev also points out that it is possible that actions may develop into an activity.

85

'These are the ordinary cases when a person undertakes to perform some actions under the influence of a certain motive, and then performs them for their own sake because the motive seems to have been displaced to their objective. And that means that the actions are transformed into activity. '(Leont'ev, cited in Engeström, 1987, p.45).

The motive of the activity is to transform the object into outcome (Engeström, 1987). This motive, no matter how vaguely defined, gives broader meanings to the individual's actions. Furthermore, what distinguishes one activity from another is its object. According to Leont'ev (see Engeström, 1987), the object of an activity is its true motive. The implication is that the concept of activity is necessarily connected with the concept of motive. According to Engeström (1987), it is possible under the condition of the division of labour, for individuals to participate in activities without being fully conscious of their objects or motives.

2.3.2.3 Expansive learning

The particular strength of CHAT and expansive learning in relation to the idea of communities of practice, is its usefulness in understanding how people learn new forms of activity:

> 'People and organisations are all the time learning something that is not stable, not even defined or understood ahead of time. In important transformations of our personal lives and organisational practices, we must learn new forms of activity, which are not yet there. They are literally learned as they are being created. There is no competent teacher. Standard learning theories have little to offer if one wants to understand these processes' (Engeström, 2001, p.137-38).

Hence, this kind of new learning or expansive learning occurs through an attempt to transform the collective activity to create a new activity. According to Engeström

(2001), 'the object of expansive activity is the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged. Expansive learning activity produces culturally new patterns of activity' (p. 139). Activity systems are developed through long cycles of expansive transformations. When the contradictions or the historically accumulating tensions in the activity systems are escalated, some individual participants begin to question and act against the established norms. These actions may develop as collaborative efforts of change where, 'the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity' (P.137). Engeström further elaborates that the expansive transformation of the activity is a collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity:

> 'It is the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions.' (Engeström, 1987, p.174)

In summary, expansive learning occurs as a result of a collaborative effort of participants in responding to a tension in the context. The collaborative effort to change, transforms the individuals and their activity into a new form with expanded possibilities for action.

The idea of object transformation in the theory of expansive learning is useful for studies of learning in practice. Edwards (2005a) illustrates how this idea could be used in a classroom situation. She uses an example of a pupil trying to solve a mathematical problem to elaborate how Engeström's concept of object transformation

could be used to help learners to use more efficient tools and strategies to work on problems.

Engeström uses interventionist research in work situations to promote systemic learning through enabling groups of workers to question how the system is creating opportunities for thinking. However, his framework has considerable potential for researchers who are interested in understanding how conditions for learning are created and what is learned in the process (Edwards, 2005a). This is the strength of this particular theory in relation to the theory of communities of practice of Lave and Wenger.

The above review suggests that CHAT provides a better framework to understand learning as a change process where individuals collaborate with other human beings to transform their activity while being mediated by tools and social relationships. The particular strength of the activity theory to explain student learning in undergraduate education is its focus on how human beings learn new forms of activities by changing their object and the context or the learning environment. The problem that I want to explore in this research is how students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes, which implies that students have to play an active role in **what** and **how** they learn in the undergraduate course. They may have to change at least some aspects of their goals and the context or the learning environment to achieve the valued outcomes that they want to achieve. Therefore, I believe that the CHAT framework would help me to understand how they engage with this change process. Moreover, the CHAT framework also provides a better

framework to understand the contextual demands. The concept of 'contradictions' or tensions in CHAT, which I shall explain in more detail in the next chapter, is particularly useful for this purpose.

Engeström's theory of expansive learning is based on the studies of workplace learning. However, education researchers have also used his theory to understand professional learning (Edwards and Prothero, 2004; Fanghanel, 2004; Knight et al, 2006; Edwards, 2007), teaching in Higher Education (Fanghanel, 2006), pupil learning (Edwards, 2005a; Roth and Lee, 2007), teacher education (Edwards, 2005b; Roth and Tobin, 2002; Yamagata-Lynch and Haudenschild, 2009), examinations and educational practice in higher education (Havnes, 2004), and student learning in undergraduate courses (Barab et al, 2002; Russell and Yanez, 2002; Ball and Wells, 2006) .

Barab et al (2002) have used the CHAT framework to understand student learning in an astronomy course for undergraduates where they have been developing technology-rich participatory environments for learners to engage in constructing accurate understanding about scientific phenomena over a two year time period with different groups. They have specifically focused their attention on the relations of the subject and the object and how object transformation lead to deep scientific understanding in subjects (students) while being mediated by the tools, rules and division of labour. This study specifically illustrates how the conceptual tools in activity theory could be made useful to understand the teaching learning interaction and the outcomes achieved by the students.

I find that the study by Russell and Yanez (2002) is more closely related to my study because it analyses student learning in an undergraduate course without any intervention by the researchers and focussed on how individual students were affected by and acted on their context with the help of their tutor to learn expansively. However, Russell and Yanez have focussed on a single module taught in one semester and how the students learned expansively in it by paying attention to individual students. In contrast to that, in my study I am focusing on student learning both at the collective and the individual levels over the entire period of an undergraduate course.

The Cultural Historical Activity Theory also has limitations. Among the unresolved problems of this theory are whether the activity system is looked at from the perspective of the individual or collective subjects and how the different nodes of the activity system are defined (Davydov, 1999; Ashwin, 2009). I shall discuss these issues further, and how they are being addressed in this research, in the methodology chapter where I discuss the analytic framework of this research in more detail.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the existing research on student learning in undergraduate education has specifically contributed to understanding how students are affected by the learning context and how they respond to the context in specific ways according to their perceptions of the context. One of the unexplored aspects is how students act on their context in relation to the contextual demands and their

expected and valued outcomes. Therefore, in my study I decided to explore both these areas.

I have critically examined the strengths and weaknesses of existing research and clarified my ontological and epistemological beliefs, before moving into examine the usefulness of socio-cultural theories of learning to explore my research question. In this review I have inferred that the theoretical frameworks of approaches to teaching and learning, academic literacies and communities of practice are useful to explore how students are affected by the context. However they are not useful to address the question 'how students act on the context to change it to achieve desired outcomes'.

I have also argued and elaborated in the chapter, how the cultural historical activity theory and the concept of expansive learning provide a better framework to understand student learning as a change process where students are engaged in an active meaning-making process while being mediated by social interactions and the material tools. I have also examined how the present research fits with the existing research carried out on student learning in undergraduate education using a CHAT perspective.

My ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin this research are closely related to critical realism and I admit that the 'truth' claims that I make in this research are fallible, contestable and tentative. The truth that emerges in this research

is dependent on the theoretical framework that guides this research, the forms of discourse used by me, the participants and time.

In the next chapter, I shall explain how I have further developed my analytic framework and methods to explore the research problem clarified in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0   Introduction:

This chapter further illustrates and substantiates the research process, methods and measures taken to ensure ethical standards, minimise errors and enhance credibility of the findings.

There are four key areas addressed in this chapter. I begin this chapter by clarifying the research process and explaining the methodological implications of using the 'activity theory' to address my research questions. Secondly, I move on to the details of the research design and the strategies of inquiry. Thirdly, I present methods of data collection and analysis. Finally, I shall discuss the issues of validity, reliability and credibility of the findings.

3.1 The research process and the methodological implications of CHAT

I have chosen to use the qualitative approach in this research. The overall purpose of this type of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their world, and their experiences in their natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 2009). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world:

> ...It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or

interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.4)

Qualitative researchers recognise the construction of multiple realities by the participants, the close relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the importance of studying the phenomena in their natural setting. In this research, I have attempted to represent the phenomenon of student learning in the undergraduate course using the meanings brought to the situation by the students and their lecturers.

Three interconnected, generic activities characterise the value laden process of qualitative research. As illustrated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

> They go by a variety of different labels, including theory, method and analysis, and ontology, epistemology and methodology. Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, racial, cultural, and ethical community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally-situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways. That is, the researcher collects empirical materials bearing on the question and then analyses and writes about those materials (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.21).

Because of this, qualitative researchers need to explain their ontological and epistemological positions and substantiate the methodological processes that they adopt. They also need to address the questions of "why am I conducting this research? Who am I conducting it for? What are my beliefs and needs? What do I expect the research to do?"

In this thesis, I have addressed the above issues in Chapters 1 and 2. I have explained my personal background, motivations, beliefs and expectations from this research in

Chapter 1. I have also explained my ontological and epistemological assumptions in Chapter 2. Accordingly, I am viewing student learning in the undergraduate course, as individual sense-making in a socio-cultural context, and the learner as a unique human being, who is capable of interpreting the context in relation to his/her own past experiences, values, beliefs and expectations and of taking action to achieve desired outcomes by acting on the context while being mediated by the context. Therefore, student learning is a change process affected by the interactions of individual and contextual factors and I have argued that CHAT provides a good framework for understanding this change process. In the next subsection, I will discuss the methodological implications of the CHAT framework for this research in more detail.

3.1.1 Methodological implications of CHAT for this research

The research question that I intend to address in this thesis is "how do students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?" To address this question, I have conceptualised student learning in the undergraduate course as an 'object-oriented, collective, and culturally-mediated human activity or activity system. The minimum elements of such a system are the subject, object, mediating artefacts (signs and tools), rules, community and division of labour.' (Engeström, 1999, p.9)

Engeström (1993) distinguishes three basic principles for analysing and interpreting data using activity systems theory:

> First, the collective activity system can be taken as the unit of analysis, giving context and meaning to seemingly random individual events. Second, the activity system and its components can be understood historically. Third, the inner contradictions of the activity system can be analysed as the source

> of disruption, innovation, change and development of that system, including its individual participants (Engeström, 1993, p.65).

Accordingly, in this research the collective activity system of student learning is considered as the unit of analysis and it needs to be studied giving attention to the historical development of the activity system and its different elements. Moreover, it is necessary to pay attention to identify tensions or inner contradictions in the context by studying it over a longer period. In Chapter 1, I have analysed the historical development of the undergraduate course and discussed how the course structure has changed over the past few decades in relation to the social and economic demands of the country. I have also collected data over the entire four year time duration of the undergraduate course to understand the changing nature of the activity system over time.

The concept of inner contradiction needs further elaboration at this point. Contradictions arise within the activity, between different elements, and between the activity and related or surrounding activities. Engeström (1987) distinguishes four levels or layers of contradiction that can be identified in the analysis of human activity as depicted in Figure 4.
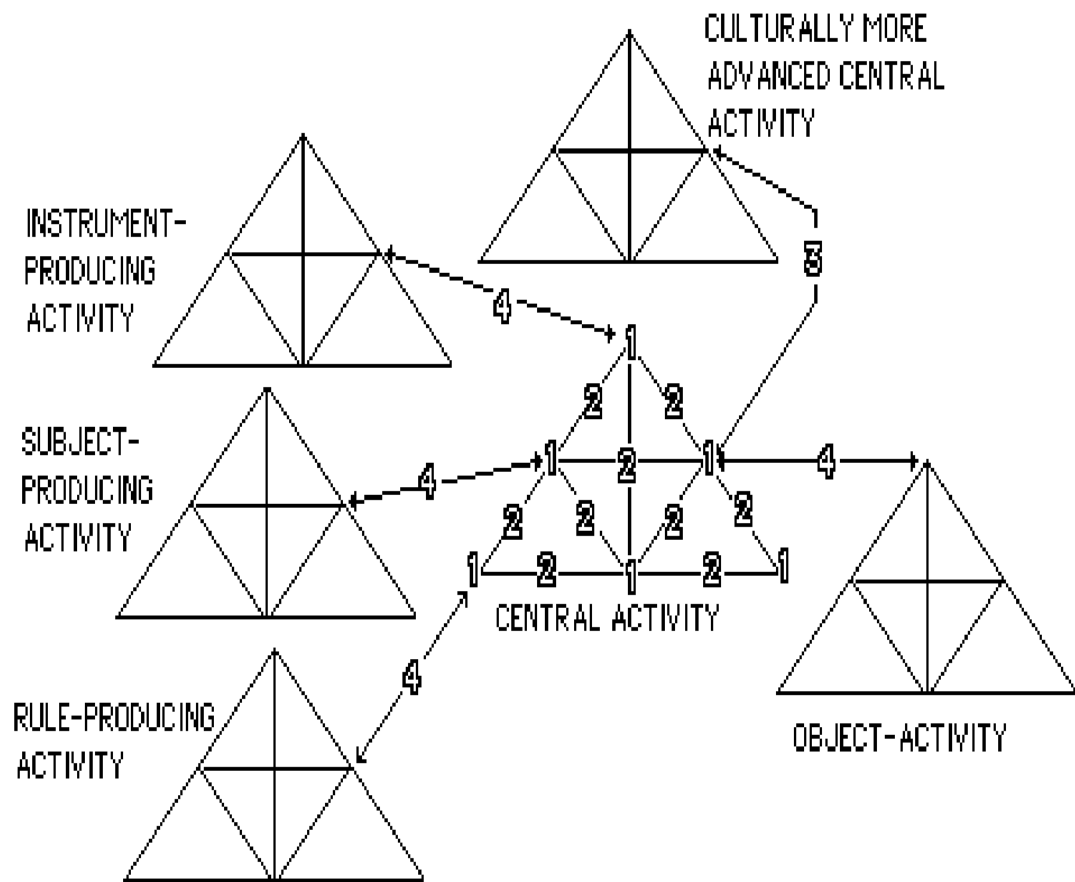
Figure 4: Four levels of contradictions within the human activity system
(Source:Engeström, (1987))

1. The primary contradiction of activities in capitalist socio-economic formations lives as the inner conflict between exchange value and use value within each corner of the triangle of activity.
2. The secondary contradictions are those appearing between the corners. The stiff hierarchical division of labour lagging behind and preventing the possibilities opened by advanced instruments is a typical example.
3. The tertiary contradiction appears when representatives of a culture (e.g. teachers) introduce the object and motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity.
4. The quaternary contradictions require that we take into consideration the essential 'neighbour activities' linked with the central activity which is the original object of our study. (Engeström, 1987, p. 96)

Identification of contradictions within and between the activity systems is important because they not only indicate disturbances and conflicts but also opportunities for innovation and change (Engeström, 1987).

In his later writings Engeström (1999, 2001) introduces two other principles of activity systems. They are multivoicedness and the possibility of expansive transformations. These principles also imply certain methodological requirements in the analysis of activity systems. According to Engeström, multivoicedness is a result of multiple view points, interests and traditions of different participants of the activity system. Multivoicedness is further increased in networks of activity systems. It is both a source of trouble and innovation. Moreover, activity systems evolve through relatively long cycles of qualitative transformations. Expansive transformations in activity systems occur 'when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity' (Engeström, 2001, p.137). Therefore activity systems need to be studied over longer time periods.

The principle of multivoicedness and the need to conceptualise the unit of analysis in terms of a 'culturally mediated, collective object oriented activity in its network relations to other activity systems' (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999, p.10) implies certain methodological requirements.

- Since the activity system is the unit of analysis, the analyst has to construct it 'as if looking at it from above and at the same time through the eyes and interpretations of multiple different participants of the activity' (p.10).

- Goal-directed, individual and group actions are considered as relatively independent subordinate units of analysis. Individual actions can be analysed and understood only when they are interpreted against the entire background of the activity system. Neither actions nor activities can be analysed and understood without a back and forth movement between them (Engeström, 1999, 2000).

Therefore, in the design and analysis of this research I have paid attention to the following methodological implications:

- To consider the entire activity system of student learning in the undergraduate course as the unit of analysis

- To construct the activity system using the views of multiple different participants, which include both students and their lecturers, and the other data collected through observations and documents, while developing dialogic relationships with the participants.

- To collect data over the entire time span of the undergraduate course

- To attempt to understand the emergent contradictions in the activity system.

- To study the individual actions in relation to the analysis of the collective activity context.

In the next section I shall discuss the research design and the strategies of inquiry.

3.2 Research design and the strategies of inquiry

> A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical material (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.25)

I have discussed the theoretical assumptions that guide this research and their methodological implications in this section. In the next section my purpose is to discuss the process of evolution of this research or its natural history (Silverman, 2010) and to explain how the overall design of this research evolved in relation to the theoretical framework of activity theory and the emerging needs identified in the research setting.

3.2.1 Research Design

Qualitative research is a data driven, emergent, and inductive process (Patton, 2002; Mason, 2002; Holliday, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Although I have described the research process so far as a flawless step-by-step process that starts from clarifying my ontological and epistemological assumptions and their methodological implications, in practice one does not always start the process in the same way and follow the steps as in a cooking recipe. In practice, it is a back and forth movement between data and theory and a messy affair (Plummer, 2005).

Research is not a linear process and the best approximation of the actual process that evolved during this research is depicted in Figure 5. When I started this research in the year 2004, I prepared a detailed research proposal, which guided my data collection in Phase 1 and it has helped me to obtain partial funding from the Sri

Lankan government. However, as indicated in Figure 5, I did not follow that design (design1) passively throughout because of the 'exploratory, fluid, and flexible, data-driven and context sensitive' (Mason, 2002, p.24) nature of qualitative research.

Design Phase 1

Initial research questions

Data collection and Analysis

Literature review

Develop theoretical framework ⟶ Redefine research problem

Strategies of inquiry ⟵ Modify research questions
(1. Reconstruction of the course as an activity system
2. Case studies of individual students)

Design Phase 2

Data collection and analysis Phase 2

Further analysis, discussion of findings in the light of further literature

Conclusions, implications and recommendations

Figure 5: The research process

As depicted in Figure 5, I started with an initial set of research questions and a design (Design1) that I prepared with the help of a preliminary review of literature. Initially, I was interested in studying the relationship between student learning and assessment in undergraduate education. My initial research question was "**how does assessment affect student learning in the undergraduate course"?** To address this question, the following sub-questions have been set.

1. What are the students' experiences of assessment and learning?

2. What variations are there in the experiences of the students in relation to their personal and socio-economic backgrounds?

3. How do students coming from different backgrounds respond to the assessment demands?

4. What impact does the assessment process have on their learning?

I subsequently collected data using multiple methods that included observation of classroom teaching and learning, interviews with students, focus group interview with a group of non-sample students (students not included in the interview sample), and documents (see Table 1).

Table 1: Design for data collection (Phase 1)

Sources	Methods	General focus
Students	Interviews, Focus group interviews.	Family and socio-economic background, past and present experiences of learning and assessment, expectations, thoughts, feelings, goals, aspirations, views and reflections about what and how they learn in the course (Research Questions 1,2,3 and 4)
Classroom teaching and learning	Observations	How is teaching learning and assessment done? Students' participation in classroom interactions and assessments, responses, feedback from lecturers during lectures, classroom interactions, (Research questions 1,2 and 3)
Review and analysis of Documents	Analysis of texts in assignments Question Papers Assessment criteria	How is the assignment task interpreted and approached; how is it presented and the content organised? Sources used, Lecturer's feedback, grades, (Research Questions 1 and 2)
Lecturers	Interview	Background, expectations of student learning, Assessment criteria, Evaluations of students' responses, problems, reflections Research questions 1, 3 and 4

Preliminary analysis of data in Phase 1 revealed that students' learning in the undergraduate course is a complex phenomenon, which is affected not only by assessment demands but also a number of contextual and individual factors. Therefore, to capture the meaning of the data collected in phase 1 of the study, I felt

that I needed to extend the scope of the research to study the factors affecting student learning in the particular undergraduate course. After reviewing further literature on student learning and on the philosophy of social science, I have decided to use activity theory as the theoretical framework and to change my focus from "assessment learning relationship" to "**how do students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes**". Accordingly, I have redefined my sub-questions to include the following:

1. What are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?

2. How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?

3. What are the valued outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at the individual level?

The process of identifying sub-questions was informed by both the theoretical framework of the activity theory and the emerging needs of the research setting. The study focuses on the collective activity of student learning and also on individual actions of expansive learning within that activity context, as reflected in the third sub-question above.

During the second phase of the research, I constructed Design 2 (see Figure 5) according to the emerging needs of the research setting and the conceptual framework of activity theory that I have used in this research. I was also able to incorporate the data collected in Phase 1 to the overall design evolved during the research because, in

both phases my focus was basically on what and how students learn and what factors affect their learning. The general focus of data collection in phase 2 was students' and their lecturers' views on teaching, curriculum and assessment practices (as well as the community) and their impact on student learning during the four year course. Moreover the phase 2 also focused on collecting further data for developing case studies of selected individual students.

3.2.2 Strategies of inquiry

As I explained in Section 3.1.1, the use of the activity theoretical framework required me to conceptualise student learning as a culturally mediated collaborative object-oriented activity and to consider the entire activity system as the unit of analysis. Therefore, first, I had to reconstruct and analyse the undergraduate course as an activity system. Furthermore, to analyse variations among students in achieving expansive learning, and to identify the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level as indicated in the third research question, I needed to use case studies as a second strategy. Therefore, I employed two strategies of inquiry to 'put paradigms of interpretations into motion' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.25) and to collect and analyse empirical materials in particular ways. In the next two sub sections I shall detail these two strategies of inquiry.

3.2.2.1 Reconstruction and analysis of student learning in the UG course as an activity system

In this research I have conceptualised student learning in the Psychology course as an activity system. Accordingly, I have reconstructed the psychology course as an

activity system using the views of the participants and my own observations. This has helped me to identify the contradictions or the dilemmas that emerged in and between different elements of the activity system which are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It was also useful to identify the collective actions used by the students to respond to the dilemmas faced by them that are discussed in detail in section 5.1,1 and 5.1.2 in Chapter 5.

The basic elements of an activity system are object, subject, mediating artefacts (signs and tools), rules, community, and division of labour (Figure 6). To understand this structure it is necessary to further elaborate the nature of its various elements.

The motive of an activity is to transform an object into outcomes (Engeström, 1987). Activities can be distinguished from each other according to their objects. An object can be a material thing, or a less tangible thing like a plan, or a totally intangible common idea (Kuutti, 1996). The 'object' is shared for manipulation and transformation by the participants of the activity (Engeström, 1987; Engeström and Miettinen, 1999; Kuutti, 1996). According to Engeström (1987) the object and the motive themselves undergo changes during the process of an activity. Object is not similar to objective. It can also be defined as what is being modified by tools (Edwards, 2005a). In this particular activity system of student learning, I have defined the object as 'what the students expect from learning in the undergraduate course'. Accordingly, I decided that their collective purpose is the object of the activity of student learning.

By definition, tools carry with them the history of the relationship of subject and the object and they mediate the relationship between subjects and the object (Kuutti, 1996). In this particular case, I have defined the tools in a broad sense as the curriculum, teaching and assessment used in the course.

Tools (curriculum, teaching, assessment)

Subjects
(Students)

Object ⟹ **Outcomes**

Rules

Community
(The lecturers)

Division of Labour
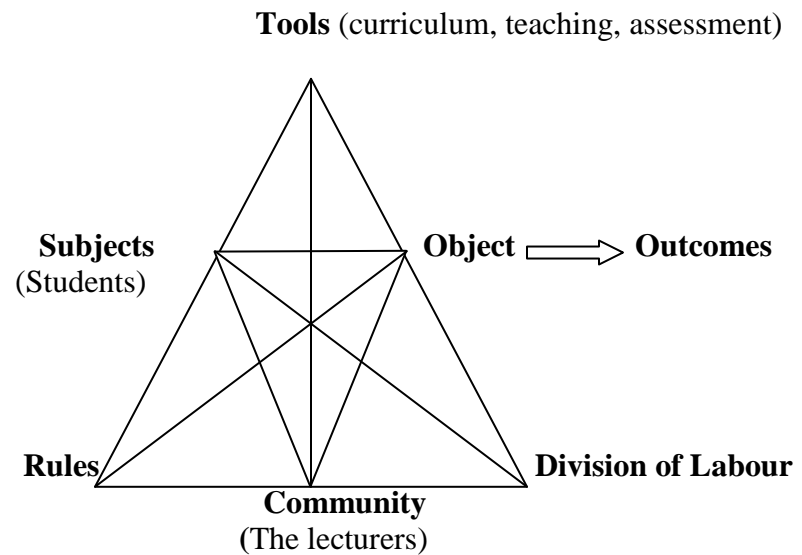
Figure 6: The Undergraduate course as an activity system

Engeström (1987) introduces a third component 'community' (or those who share the same object for manipulation (Kuutti, 1996)) to this structure, which leads to establish two new relationships. These two new relationships are between subject and community, and between object and community (Kuutti, 1996). As depicted in Figure 6, 'division of labour' mediates the relationship between object and community. The division of labour is the explicit and implicit organisation of a community in relation to the motive of the activity. The relationship between subject and community is mediated by rules. Rules are explicit and implicit norms, conventions and social relations within a community. Both rules and division of labour are historical

formations and they are open to further development (Kuutti, 1996). In the undergraduate course the community mainly consists of lecturers who teach the particular course because they share the object with the students for manipulation. The division of labour is mainly among lecturers for teaching different components of the course and between particular lecturers and their students in classrooms. The rules consists of institutional norms and rules that control teaching, learning and assessment practices as well as student and teacher behaviour in general, and also the norms and rules in classroom settings.

The problem with the second generation activity theory has been its insensitivity to cultural diversity (Cole, 1988). According to Engeström (2001), the third generation of activity theory deals with these challenges by conceptualising its basic unit of analysis as a system that minimally consists of two interacting activity systems (Figure 7).

In the third generation activity theory, the object is depicted as an oval indicating that 'object-oriented actions are always, explicitly or implicitly, characterised by ambiguity, surprise, interpretation, sense-making and potential for change' (P.134). The object is conceptualised as a moving target. According to Engeström :

> The object moves from an initial state of unreflected, situationally given 'raw material' (Object 1: eg. A specific patient entering a physician's office) to a collectively meaningful object constructed by the activity system. (Object 2: eg. The patient constructed as a specimen of a biomedical disease category and thus as an instantiation of the general object of the illness/health), and to a potentially shared or jointly constructed object. (Object 3**:** eg. A collaboratively constructed understanding of the patient's life situation and care plan). The object of activity is a moving target, not reducible to conscious short-term goals (Engeström, 2001, p.136).
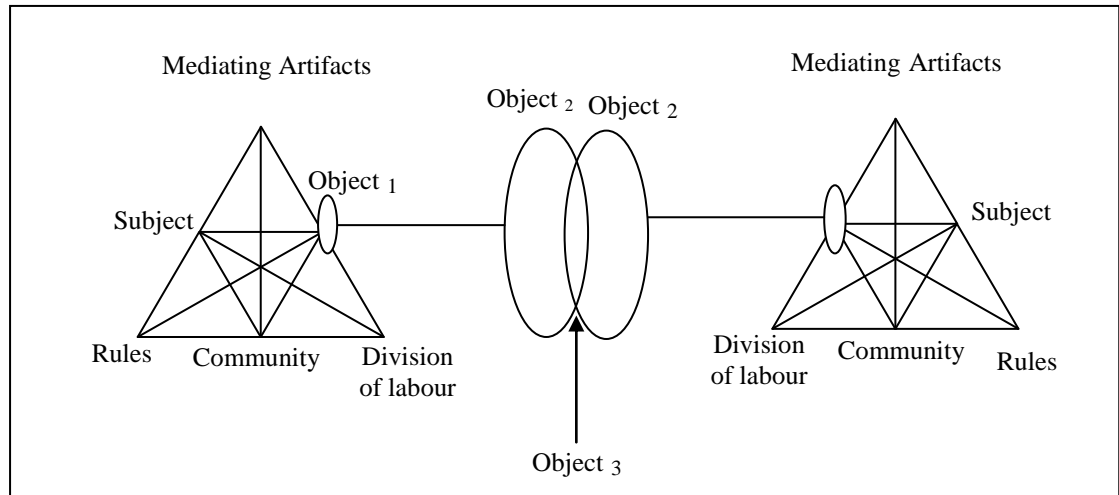
Figure 7: The third generation of activity theory (Source: Engeström, Y. (2001)

"Context" is the unit of analysis of activity systems (Engeström, 1993; Nardi, 1996). Cole (1996) traces the Latin root of the term context as contexere, which means "to weave together". He argues that when context is viewed in this way it cannot be reduced to 'what it surrounds'. It is a qualitative relation between a minimum of two analytical entities or threads:

> ... the combination of goals, tools and setting (including other people and what Lave, 1988, terms "arena") constitutes simultaneously to the context of behaviour and ways in which cognition can be said to be related to that context (Cole, 1996, p.137)

The third generation activity theory defines the unit of analysis as a network of at least two interacting activity systems (Cole, 1990; Engeström, 2001). Context is not a container where the interaction takes place (Nardi, 1996) but the dynamic activity which weaves together people, their goals and tools in complex networks (Cole, 1990). Ashwin (2009) argues that it may be fruitful to conceptualise the teaching-learning interaction in higher education as a network of two interacting activity systems of students and academics as in Figure 7. However, the problem with this type of conceptualisation is its consideration of student learning as a result of a mere

interaction between students and academics. Students in undergraduate education also interact with other activity systems and their learning is affected by those other activity systems (Russell and Yanez, 2002). Therefore, to understand student learning over the entire period of the undergraduate course, it is more appropriate to conceptualise it as a dynamic activity that weaves together people, their goals and tools in complex networks as suggested by Cole (1990). Within an activity system approach, the researcher has to construct the activity system depending on the goals of his/her research (Russell, cited in Ashwin, 2009). Therefore, in my analysis I define the context or the unit of analysis as the activity system of student learning which operates in a network of interacting activity systems as depicted in Figure 8.
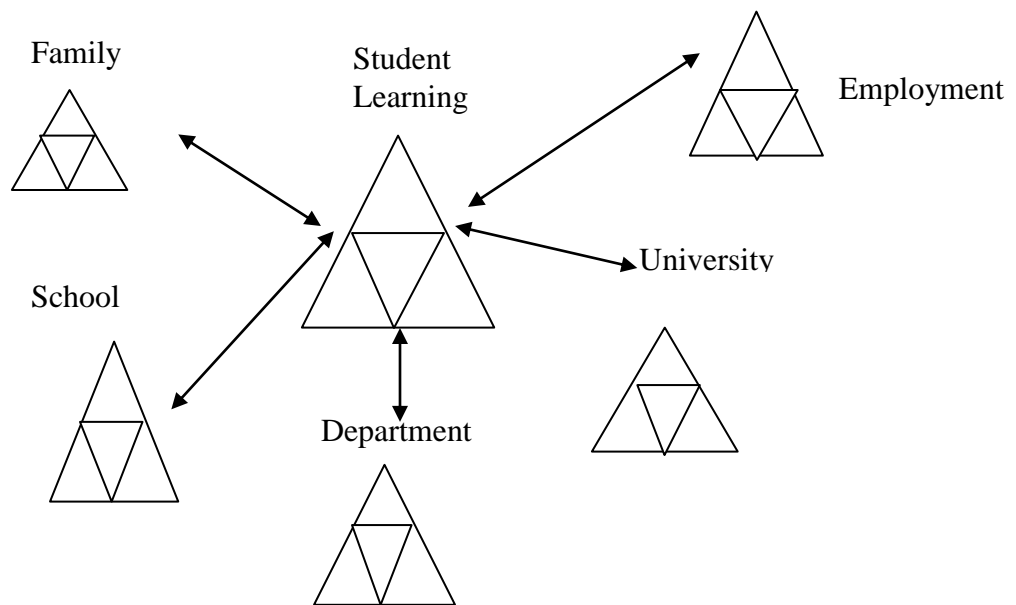
Figure 8: Activity system of student learning as a network of interacting activity systems which implied by the students in their first interview

It is necessary for the activity system of student learning has to be constructed using the views of multiple different participants of the activity system which include the students and their lecturers, and my own observations. Therefore, I have collected

data from both students and their teachers and have used multiple methods of data collection.

3.2.2.2 Case studies of selected students

This study focuses on both the collective activity of student learning and the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level. As suggested by Engeström (1999) to understand individual actions we need to analyse the collective activity and study the individual actions in relation to the activity context. Therefore, in addition to the analysis of the collective activity, I have used case studies of selected students as a second strategy of inquiry to study the variations in students' achievement of expansive learning at the individual level.

Merriam (2009) defines case study as 'an in-depth description and an analysis of a bounded system' (p. 40). A case in this sense can be a single person, a programme, an organisation or a group, or a specific policy. Therefore, the 'boundedness' is a useful concept in specifying the case (Stake, 2008). It is possible to compare two or more cases but each case study has to be a thorough inquiry into a single case.

To understand the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level, I decided to select a 'theoretical sample' of three students. According to Eisenhardt (2002), in theoretical sampling 'cases may be chosen to replicate previous cases or extend emergent theory, or they may be chosen to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types' (p.12). In this research I selected three cases which

included students with the most elaborated reported outcomes, moderately elaborated outcomes and the least elaborated outcomes for this analysis.

I had been careful throughout the data collection process, about the necessity for me to select a small number of cases for the final analysis based on some criteria that I would decide towards the end of my data collection and analysis. For this purpose, initially I selected 6 students from the interview sample of 15 students, as a tentative sample for case studies on which I have collected an adequate set of rich data using interviews, reflective accounts, observations and documentary review for in-depth study. Finally, I chose three students from this small sample of students, on the basis of their reported valued outcomes. The criterion used for selecting this final sample was the level of elaboration in the reported outcomes. One student each from the three categories of highly elaborated, moderately elaborated and least elaborated outcomes was selected for detailed case studies (presented in Appendix 3) and subsequent cross-case analysis which is presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis. The three cases were;

1. Rev. A, who had the most articulated views on his experiences of learning in the course and reported most elaborated views about outcomes (see details in Table 12 , p.249);

2. Sisie, who reported moderately elaborated, views about outcomes (see details in Table 12, p. 249) and

3. Mali, who reported a very narrow range of valued outcomes (see details in Table 12, p.249).

These students were included in the interview sample and I interviewed them three times at different intervals of the course. Each interview lasted for $1\text{-}1^{1}/_{2}$ hours. Moreover I collected reflective accounts from them in the final semester and focused on them in my classroom observations.

Following the steps suggested by Eisenhardt (2002), I firstly established a clear focus for my case studies. My focus was '**How** and **what** the particular student was learning in the undergraduate course and what factors affected his/her learning?'

Yin (2008) suggests that case studies are particularly strong in investigating "how" and "why" questions. My purpose to use case studies of students was to understand why there are variations among students in achieving expansive learning. Therefore my case studies are 'instrumental case studies' (Stake, 2008). According to Stake (2008) in an instrumental case study the researcher attempts to illustrate 'how the concerns of researchers and theorists are manifested in the case' (p.128). I was particularly interested to identify the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level by comparing individual case studies. With this focus in mind I collected data using in-depth interviews with individual students, observation and written accounts of students over a 3-4 year time period.

One of the weaknesses in case study strategy is the lack of universally accepted requirements for conducting case studies. However, as suggested by Stake (2008), the case study research is reflective and the researcher tries to understand meanings, and

relate them to context and experience. The researcher develops the case study by interpreting reflectively and revising descriptions and meanings of what is happening (Stake, 2008). Hence, in this research I have finally developed three case studies by interpreting reflectively the meanings of students' accounts and my own observations. The case studies which are developed using the above data are attached to this thesis in Appendix 3.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

In this study, I collected data in two phases. However, in the final analysis I combined the two sets of data to explore the three sub-questions that I identified. The overall design for data collection thus emerged in this research can be summarised as in Table 2.

Table 2: The overall design that emerged in the research process

Research questions	Data sources	Methods of data collection	Justification
1. What are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?	Students	Interviews at the beginning of the 2nd year and at the end of the 3rd and 4th year with 15 students**	Provided students' accounts of their past and present experiences, values, beliefs and future expectations.
2. How do the students collectively and individually respond to the	Students	Focus group interviews (FGI) with non-sample* students (5 students)	FGI with non-sample students provided an additional point of view about the issues emerging from interview data.

demands in the context?			
3. What are the valued outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at the individual level?	Documents	Students' and their lecturer's reflective accounts on the experiences of advanced personality studies seminars in the final year (17 students' accounts**+1 teacher account)	Supplemented interview data and provided an additional perspective on the purposes, processes and outcomes of student learning in the particular course component.
		Students' written assignments, notes for presentations, hand outs, feedback comments**	Facilitated further exploration of how students interpreted their assignment task and how they responded to the assessment requirements.
	Lecturers	Interviews (4)	Provided data on lecturers' perspective about the purposes, processes and problems of student learning in the course.
	Classroom teaching and learning	Observations (4 courses) **	Supplemented interview and other data and added an additional perspective on the emerging themes. Observational data in particular, provided insights on classroom context, individual student and teacher behaviour, actions, norms, rules, interactions, social relationships and division of labour.
	Documents	Student Handbook, Syllabi and question papers**	Observational data and documents in particular, helped to develop a systemic view of the

			activity system and provided supplementary data on the context to develop case studies.

Note: *: Students who were not included in the sample for interviews (n=15, N=28) but following the same course.

   **: The data were used for the reconstruction of the activity system as well as for the development of case studies of selected students.

3.3.1. Methods of data collection

The activity theoretical framework I adopt in this research and the research questions that I have developed require me to use the reconstructed activity system of student learning as the unit of analysis and to conduct case studies of individual students. Both these strategies require multiple methods of data collection as highlighted in Table 2. To analyse the activity system using the participants' views and the systemic view and by developing dialogic relationships with the participants, I used data collected from semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, observations, artefacts and the review of documents. The data collected from focus group interviews, observations, documents and artefacts provided additional dimensions to the interview data. To develop case studies of individuals I used interview data of selected students, classroom observations, their reflective accounts and documentary analysis.

Furthermore the important events and issues emerging from such data were subsequently used to obtain the views of the interviewees. In the next sub section, I shall discuss how and why I used each of these methods in this research while paying attention to their strengths and weaknesses.

3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews

My ontological and epistemological assumptions about social reality, which I have clarified in Chapter 2, allowed me to assume that students' experiences of learning can be known by developing trusting relationships with students and by talking interactively with them in interviews.

Researchers in social sciences interview people to 'find out what is in and on someone else's mind' (Patton, 2002, p.341). They have to use interviews because they cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions of other people or behaviours that have taken place in the past. They also cannot observe how people attach meanings to their experiences and actions or how they organise their worlds (Patton, 2002). Therefore, in this research I have used interviews to get an understanding of how the students interpret their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course.

However, as pointed out by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) experiences of other people are not directly accessible to the researchers. For Clandinin and Connelly studying experience means studying the stories that people tell. Experience is the stories people live:

> People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify
> them, and create new ones…stories…lived and told, educate the self
> and others, …such as researchers, who are new to their communities.
> (Clandinin and Connelly,1998, p.155)

The students' accounts of their experiences need to be treated as stories that they lived, affirmed, modified and created in the interview situations. The interview data cannot be treated as literal descriptions of the respondent's reality (Dingwall, 1997).

The research interview is a social, interpersonal encounter (Cohen et al, 2000). The conversation between the interviewer and interviewee is not a reciprocal interaction of two equal partners. The interviewer plays a dominant role by defining the situation, introducing topics for conversation, steering the conversation through further questions and holding the monopoly of interpretation (Kvale, 2006).

Therefore, students' and teachers' accounts generated from interviews depend on how the interviewer and the interviewee perceive the situation and on the interaction taking place at the time. Thus, the interviews do not take place in a social or political vacuum, and factors such as age, gender, and hierarchical relationships could influence the inter-subjective construction of social reality (Melia, 1997). As argued by Dingwall (1997), an interview is a situation in which interviewees have to demonstrate their 'competence' in the role which the interviewer expects them to play. The data generated through interviews are 'social constructs created by the self-presentations of the respondent, and whatever the cues conveyed by the interviewer about the acceptability or otherwise of the account being presented' (Dingwall, 1997, p.21).

Despite the problematic nature of interview data, I had to rely on them as 'narrative stories of experience' to understand student learning. I think that Melia (1997) provides a possible way out of this problem. She suggests that:

> ..we can see the interview as a means of gaining insight into a world beyond the story that the interviewee tells, a means of getting a handle on a more complex set of ideas than the ones that the interviewee is ostensibly talking about. This is not to say that the interviewer moves into the territory of the paranormal and can somehow see through the data to the things otherwise

concealed. However, it does mean that a researcher with an interest in, and open mind about, a particular topic can, with practiced care, take an analysis beyond its face value (Melia, 1997, p. 34).

Melia (1997) argues that in her study of student nurses, she took the analysis beyond the face value, by 'moving on from the nurses' accounts to 'become a discussion of nursing as a specific occupational group with different approaches to the question of profession: a move from interviews about the student nurse's world view of nursing to a discussion of nursing as a profession' (p.34). Similarly, in the case of the undergraduate students' and their lecturers' accounts, I have transformed them to a discussion of learning as individual sense-making in a partially given, partially constructed context, while being affected by the contextual demand and responding to those demands collectively and individually. As argued by Melia (1997) the best we can hope for is to tell a 'plausible story' out of the data collected in the interviews.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1998), the study of personal experience is simultaneously focused into four directions: inward (the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, reactions, moral dispositions and so on), outward (existential conditions, environment or reality), backward and forward (temporality or past, present and future). They suggest that 'to experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way' (P.158).

In my interviews I have asked questions pointing out to all four directions mentioned above. These questions invited the students to describe their feelings, hopes, reactions (inward experiences), classroom or learning environment, life in the halls of residence or as a non-residential day students (outward experience), past, present and future

goals, expectations, and experiences (backward and forward). I have used semi-structured interviews (see Appendices, 4 and 5 for interview schedules for students and their lecturers). The interview schedules contained more-or-less structured open questions and issues to be explored. I used the guides flexibly and adapted the order of topics and wording of the questions to suit each interview situation.

I have also been concerned about the power differences the students might feel in the interview situations where I as an interviewer and a lecturer in the university interviewed them about how and what they are learning. One of the advantages for me in this situation was the fact that neither I nor the other lecturers of my department were involved in teaching undergraduates at the time. I revealed this fact to the students when I introduced myself as a lecturer from the Department of Education of their university and a research student who was reading for a PhD.

Before I started interviewing students in the second semester of their second year, I observed one course of the same group of students for one whole semester. I used this period to get to know many of the students by having informal interactions with them as and when time permitted. Furthermore, to help the students to feel free to talk with me, I used to have an informal chat with them over a cup of tea before I began the actual interview. I think these measures have had at least some impact on the way the students perceived me as a person and a researcher rather than a mere lecturer in their university.

I have also been careful to be non-judgemental, sensitive and respectful to the respondents during the interview (Merriam, 2009) and to develop and maintain

trusting and friendly relationships with the students and their lecturers throughout the whole period.

I also had two focus group interviews (FGI) with a group of students who were not interviewed individually. A focus group is 'an interview with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic' (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). According to Patton (2002), FGI provides data which is socially constructed within the interaction of the group:

> ...in a focus group, participants get to hear each other's responses and make additional comments beyond their original responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of the others. (p. 386)

Hence, the purpose of using focus group interviews in this research was to get an additional point of view from a group of students (who did not participate in individual interviews) at the interactive level (see Appendix 6 for FGI guide).

3.3.1.2 Observations

I started my data collection by observing classroom teaching and learning of one of the courses which were followed by the students in the 1st semester of their second year of the undergraduate programme. The relationships that I developed with the students and their lecturers and the information gathered during this period helped me to familiarise myself with the setting and to understand the context (Merriam, 2009). I have also used the data generated in observations to select the sample of students for subsequent field work and to identify specific incidents and behaviours as points of

discussion in subsequent interviews. Observations also helped me to explore further what is reported in interviews (Patton, 2002). I have observed two course units in the second year and one each in the third and fourth years of the course. Each course unit was roughly of 40-45 hours duration and evenly distributed over a 15-week period. The focus of my attention in these observations was individual and group actions and interactions within the particular, physical, social and educational settings.

However, as the sole researcher it was not possible to observe everything. To make my observations manageable I used a few 'sensitising concepts' (Patton, 2002). 'A sensitising concept, is a starting point in thinking about the class of data of which the social researcher has no definite idea and provides an initial guide to her research' (van den Hoonaard cited in Patton, 2002, p.278). In my observations, my initial sensitising concepts included aims and objectives of the lessons, methods to motivate students, delivery method/style, pace, student-lecturer relationships and interactions, peer interactions, tools used in teaching and learning, formative assessment practices, communication of expectations, assessments, classroom culture, routines, authority patterns, competition/cooperation among students and decision making. However, in actual observations, I had to amend this list according to the demands of different classroom situations as well as to the evolving analytic framework.

In my observations, I attempted to observe and record the nature of the physical setting, the participants, their activities and interactions, conversations, 'subtle factors such as informal and unplanned activities, non-verbal communication, unobtrusive measures such as physical clues and what does not happen' (Patton, 2002, p. 295) and

also my own behaviour, feelings and thoughts. I tried to write down the utterances of the participants as direct quotations or at least a summary of what is said or discussed. I was also careful to record my own comments in the running narrative within brackets.

I had been systematic in observing classroom teaching and learning. However, I cannot claim that I had a true and accurate picture of what happened there for a number of reasons. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. Subjectivity and interaction between the researcher and the researched are inevitable in the process. The observer and the observed are interdependent and this interdependency may influence the behaviour of both parties. Therefore, as suggested by Merriam (1998), the question in this situation then, 'is not whether the process of observing affects what is observed but how the researcher can identify those effects and account for them in interpreting the data' (Merriam, 1998, p. 103).

In my research, I see my role as an 'observer as participant' (Merriam, 2009), because the participants were aware of my activities and they knew that my primary role was data gathering and participating in the group was secondary. I interacted closely enough with the members to establish an 'insider's identity' (Patton, 2002) without participating in the core activities of either the students or the lecturers.

I think my presence as an observer in the classroom may have affected the behaviour of teachers, at least initially. For them, I was not only a mere researcher but a lecturer from the Department of Education, responsible for educating teachers at the

postgraduate level. They also knew that I was interested in understanding students' learning.

I initially felt that at least some of the lecturers might have tried to make the impression of being systematic, organised, tough, or friendly etc., with students. However, I had been in the field long enough (3 hours per week for 15 weeks) to learn that they consistently behaved in those ways. I cannot rule out the possibility that my presence did affect their interactions with the students and the way they taught in the class, their use of a variety of techniques in student assessments, or feed-forward in giving assignments, or oral feedback to the whole group, or written feedback. Therefore, in my interviews with them I made a deliberate effort to discuss and explore the reasons that they attributed to such actions.

I felt that my presence as an observer, at least initially, did not have much effect on the students, because, they were confined to the passive role of note taking in each of the three course units that I had observed in their second and third years. However, in the final module, students had to play a very active role. They had to make presentations to the whole group, organise and conduct group activities as well as lead small group and whole class discussions. Their lecturer assessed the work they had done at the same time. Therefore, I felt that they, at least the key actors in each session, were more concerned about doing their work properly than paying attention to my presence. On the other hand, by that time my presence in their classroom would have been a very familiar aspect of their classroom experience.

Even under these circumstances, I know it is possible that the students had been affected by my presence. It is possible that the students who kept silent or were not eager to contribute to whole class discussions due to shyness or whatever reason, or those who wanted to impress the audience by taking the floor frequently, were affected by my presence. When I interviewed the students in my sample, I later learned that some students had kept silent because, they had not wanted to hear 'somewhat embarrassing' comments made by their lecturer, when he felt that the student spoke too much or failed to look at the issue at hand more critically. Such students might have felt doubly embarrassed by my presence and that may have contributed to their continued silence in the sessions. Therefore, I cannot say that my presence as an observer had no effect on the climate of the setting or the behaviour of the participants.

3.3.1.3 Review of Documents

Documents are an easily accessible and available source of data. They refer to a range of written, visual, digital and physical material that can be used in a research study (Merriam, 2009). In this research, I have used both available documents and researcher-generated documents to supplement data collected from interviews and observations. Such data provided descriptive information about the context and also additional information on the relevant aspects not covered by the interviews and observations. The documentary data was used as part of the analytic process of inductively building categories and themes.

Documents are stable, unobtrusive and relatively more objective than other forms of data (Merriam, 2009). However, one of the limitations inherent in documents is that they have not been developed for research purposes and therefore they may be incomplete from the researcher's perspective (Mason, 2002; Merriam 2009).

I have also used researcher-generated documents in this research. According to Merriam (2009), researcher generated documents 'are prepared by the researcher or for the researcher by the participants, after the study has begun' (p.149). In this research, I have requested the students and the lecturer who taught the advanced personality studies course in their final year to write their reflections about their experiences in that particular course. I provided for them a few questions that I was particularly interested in them to focus on in their reflective comments. (See Appendix 6 for details of questions).

3.3.2 The Sampling process

I used two main criteria in selecting the particular undergraduate course for this study. First, I wanted to follow the experiences of the same group of undergraduates over a period of 3-4 years. As a lone researcher, it was more practical to study a group of students following a 'special degree' course in one subject than a group of students following 'general degree' courses with different combinations of subjects. Second, I thought that I needed to have some familiarity with the subject matter taught in the course. Therefore, I selected the students following a special degree course in Psychology as this was a subject I specialised at the postgraduate degree level.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I collected background data (see Appendix 7) from every student enrolled in the 'special degree' course in that year. There were 28 students including 4 Buddhist monks and 24 female students in the Sinhala medium course and 3 students in the English medium course. In this study I focussed on students following Psychology in the Sinhala medium.

In my study I generated data using multiple methods, which included semi-structured interviews; observation of teaching and learning, reflective accounts and focus group interviews. Therefore, all the students who enrolled in the 'special degree' course in Psychology in the Sinhala medium in that particular year participated in my research at some point. The total number of students who participated in this study over the 3-4 year period of data collection was 28. Table 3 indicates the composition of the student population by the medium of instruction, gender and civil status.

Table 3: The distribution of students according to medium of instruction, gender and civil status

Sinhala medium (N=28)					English medium* (N=3)				
Gender		Civil status			Gender		Civil status		
Male	Female	Monks	Unmarried	Married	Male	Female	Monks	Married	Unmarried
4	24	4	23	1	2	1	1	0	2

Note: *- English medium students participated in this research when they attended the course on advanced personality studies with the Sinhala medium students in their final year.

As indicated in Table 3, the majority of students were female and unmarried. Of the six males five were Buddhist monks. The age of the students in their second year ranged from 22-26 years. All students started university after completing the highly competitive General Certificate of Education (GCE) (Advanced Level) examination.

127

Only 2 % of students who sit for the GCE (A/L) examination get the opportunity to go to universities in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the students had to earn a Grade Point Average (GPA) of more than 3.1 in their first year in that particular year to be selected for the 'special degree' course in Psychology. Thus, the particular group of students selected for this study was a kind of an elite group in relation to their achievements in examinations. These students also represented diverse characteristics in relation to their socio economic background. Table 4 summarises the background characteristics of students selected for the interviews.

Table 4: Background characteristics of the sample of students participated in interviews

Pseudonym	Age In 2004	School type	Father's Occupa-tion	Monthly Family Income (Rs.)	Father's Education Level	Sex	Marital status	GPA 1st Year
Rev. B*	24	Pirivena	Farmer	3000-5000	GCE(O/L)	M	S	3.56
Rev. A*	24	Pirivena	Farmer	3000-5000	GCE(A/L)	M	S	3.46
Sanda	25	U-NS	Farmer	5000-10000	GCE(A/L)	F	MA	3.72
Anu	23	U-NS	Rtd. Teacher	3000-5000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.47
Kumi	23	U-NS	Teacher (Deceased)	5000-10000	Post Grad.	F	S	3.48
Ahinsa	23	U-NS	Prison Officer	>15000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.51
Sisie	25	U-NS	Electrical Super-intendent	>15000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.21
Dilki	23	U-NS	Consultant	>15000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.42
Sangita	23	R-NS	Pensioner (Deceased)	5000-10000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.21
Supuni	24	R-NS	Barber	3000-5000	GCE(O/L)	F	S	3.57
Priya	22	R-NS	Bus Conductor	5000-10000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.17
Darshi	22	U-1C	Rtd. Post Master	5000-10000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.20
Mali	24	R-1C	Farmer	5000-10000	GCE(O/L)	F	S	3.61
Ama	23	R-1AB	Driver	3000-5000	GCE(A/L)	F	S	3.6
Abeya	25	U-1AB	Farmer	<3000	GCE(O/L)	F	S	3.34

Note: Pirivena: Buddhist Centres of learning, Primarily for Buddhist monks

U-NS: Urban National Schools: Schools located in Municipal or Urban council areas, which are controlled by the Central Ministry of Education

R-NS: Rural National Schools: Schools located in Pradeshiya Sabha areas, which are controlled by the Central Ministry of Education

U-1AB: Urban Type 1 AB: Schools located in Municipal or Urban council areas, with GCE(A/L) Science stream

U-1C: Urban Type 1C: Schools located in Pradeshiya Sabha areas, with GCE(A/L)
         Arts/Commerce stream
R-1AB: Rural Type 1AB : Schools located in Pradeshiya Sabha areas, with GCE(A/L)
         Science stream
R-1C: Rural Type 1AB : Schools located in Pradeshiya Sabha areas, with GCE(A/L)
         Arts/commerce stream
S- Single   MA-Married   M-Male   F-Female

*-Buddhist monks

I have used a 'maximum variation sample' (Merriam, 1998) of 15 students from those who consented for interviews (see Table 4). Maximum variation sampling involves identifying and recruiting those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest of the study. There were 2 monks and 13 female students in the sample. The sample of students represented different districts, rural/urban locations, rural/urban schools/ pirivenas, different types of schools, lowest to highest range of GPA obtained in the first year examination, their father's level of education or occupation and their monthly family income. Table 5 and 6 set out the variations in socio-economic background and the academic past histories of the students selected for the interviews.

Table 5: Socio-economic background of the students (Interview Sample, n=15)

Monthly family income (Sri Lankan Rupees)			Father's occupation				Urban/Rural background	
Less Than 5000	5000-15000	More than 15000	Daily wage-earner	Farmer	Govt. Servant	Other	Urban	Rural
5	7	3	4	5	4	2	3	12

As indicated in Table 5, the majority of students (12/15) in the sample were from rural low-income families. The students also had different academic past histories.

They had attended different types of schools and private tuition classes[6] to prepare for their GCE (A/L) examination (see Table 6).

Table 6: Academic history of the students (Interview sample, n=15)

Type of institution							The nature of private tuition (PT) received at 'A' levels			
NS		1AB		1C		Pirivena	Large groups	Small groups	Individual	Did not attend PT
U	R	U	R	U	R					
6	3	1	1	1	1	2	11	2	1	1

Key: NS   -National Schools
       1AB   -Schools with GCE(A/L) Science stream
       1C   - Schools with GCE(A/L) Arts and/or Commerce streams
       U   -Urban
       R   -Rural

As indicated in the table, the majority (8/15) of students went to university from urban schools. All but one student attended private tuition classes of different types, to prepare for the GCE (A/L) examination. As reported by the students, they received additional guidance and training to sit for the GCE (A/L) examination in private tuition classes. The majority of students went to university (10/15) in their first attempt and the rest in their second or third attempt.

The above characteristics of the sample of students used in this study indicate the diversity of background of the undergraduates in this particular course. Table 7 sets out an overview of the lecturers in the interview sample. These lecturers were interviewed after observing the courses that they had taught to the particular group of

students. The lecturers varied according to their academic background and also according to the years of experience in teaching.

Table 7: The sample of lecturers

Lecturer	Designation	Teaching Experience	Highest Academic qualification
T_1	Lecturer (probationary)	2 yrs	BA (Hons.)
T_2	Lecturer (probationary)	5 yrs	MSc
T_3	Temporary Assistant lecturer	3 yrs	BA (Hons.)
T_4	Senior lecturer	1 yr	PhD

Two of the significant features of the sample of lecturers were the limited number of years of experience and the range of different academic qualifications that they had.

3.3.3 Gaining access and ensuring ethical standards

As argued by Merriam (2009), conducting the research in an ethical manner is an important requirement for ensuring the validity and reliability of research findings. Throughout this research study I have been aware of whether my actions and behaviour have harmed the participants' physical, mental and social wellbeing in any way. I have followed the guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and adhered to the ethical requirements (Appendix 8) of the University of Nottingham.

Before I began my fieldwork in June 2004, I formally approached the Head of the relevant department and explained to him the purpose of my research and intended

activities and sought his written permission to conduct my study on student learning in the Psychology course. I also had discussions with the lecturers who were responsible for teaching the courses in psychology to students following 'special degree' course in their second year at the time, about my intended research activities with them and their students. I had obtained informed consent from every lecturer whose classes I observed and whom I later interviewed. Prior to starting my classroom observations, I had met the students as a group, introduced myself and explained the purpose of my study and intended research activities for the next 2-3 years and sought their cooperation. I also gave them a consent form where they had to indicate whether they liked to participate in my research activities and if so, their preferred activities for participation. Everybody consented to being observed in the classroom and everybody, except a very few, consented to at least one or more other activity.

Merriam (1998) argues that ethical guidelines only provide help in dealing with some of the ethical concerns likely to emerge in qualitative research. Ethical issues that might not be included in such guidelines may arise in different stages of the study but need careful attention and fair decisions by the researcher. Therefore, the responsibility for completing and disseminating a study in an ethical manner lies with the investigator (Merriam, 1998).   I agree with this point and I took great care to conduct this research in an ethical manner at every stage.

As I have already mentioned above, I had obtained informed consent while respecting their right to withdraw, privacy and disclosure (BERA, 2004) from all the participants

in this research before I collected data from them (See appendices 9 and 10 for informed consent forms given to the students and their lecturers). I have also taken care to keep the information confidential. I used pseudonyms to denote different respondents and have been careful not to reveal the identities of the respondents or those of other people that they referred to in their responses, to anybody. I was particularly careful to understand whether my actions would cause any harm to any participants and whether I was violating their privacy (Mason, 2002), while conducting and writing this research study. I also explained to the lecturers and the students that the purpose of this research was to study how and what the students learn in their undergraduate course and clarified to the students that the findings of this research would not affect them or the present course, but they might highlight some implications for policy, practice and research on student learning in undergraduate education in the future.

However, I could not check with the three students with whom I conducted case studies whether they agree to my characterisation of their lives in the case stories (Appendix 3) that I have written. This was due to a practical reason. By the time I completed the case stories the students have already left the university after graduation. Nevertheless to help preserve the anonymity of the respondents I have deleted some of the personal information included in the original case studies.

3.3.4 Data analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous process (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Silverman, 2010). Merriam (2009)

suggests that 'without ongoing analysis, data can be unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed' (p.171). Ongoing analysis helps the researcher to test and refine the hunches and working hypotheses emerging during data collection. However, data analysis does not end with the completion of data collection. It becomes a more intensive process after all the data has been collected (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research involves both synthesis and analysis. It is a process of both taking things apart and putting things together. Stake (2010) explains,

> As qualitative researchers, we try to be especially sensitive to what are wholes, things that resist being taken apart, but still we analyse them. And sometimes we put the facts together into new wholes, into new interpretations, into a new patch (Stake, 2010, p.134).

In this section, my intention is to elucidate how these processes of analysis and synthesis are used in this research.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992, 2007) make ten important suggestions to help researchers to make analysis an ongoing part of data collection. These include; 'force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study; to make decisions concerning the type of study you want to accomplish, develop analytic questions, plan data collection sessions according to what you find in previous observations, write many observer's comments as you go, write memos to yourself about what you are learning, try out ideas and themes on participants, begin exploring the literature while you are in the field, play with metaphors, analogies and concepts, use visual devices' (Bogdan and Biklen, p. 161).

I have followed most of the above suggestions in this research. I entered the research setting armed with a set of research questions which was later refined according to the emergent needs of the setting and the relevant literature. It has helped me to narrow the data collection and to focus on relevant data. I also carefully recorded the hunches, feelings, reactions, initial interpretations, speculations and working hypotheses, thoughts and questions about the setting, people and activities. These notes helped me to plan the subsequent data collections and for further analysis at the end of the data collection.

3.3.4.1 Analysis of the activity system of student learning

To address the research question 'How do the students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands in the undergraduate course and their own valued outcomes?' I needed to analyse both contextual demands and individual actions. According to the activity theory, individual actions are subordinated to the collective activity and therefore the analysts have to construct and analyse the activity system first and then the individual actions. To construct the activity system, I had to take into consideration the students' and their lecturers' views and data collected from observations and documents together. Therefore, in the data collection I made it a point to test the emerging view of the activity system and its characteristics from the perspective of the students and the lecturers. For example, when it emerged in the ongoing analysis that there seemed to be a contradiction in the object or the collective purpose of the activity system, I sought clarifications from both students and their

teachers as to how they viewed their purposes at different points in time of the course and why, in the subsequent interviews.

The process that I adopted in my data analysis consisted of the following steps derived from the suggestions made by Miles and Huberman (1994), Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Merriam (1998, 2009):

- Transcription

- Organising data

- Category construction

- Sorting categories and data

- Identifying patterns, themes and theorising.

Step 1: Transcription

All my taped data from students' interviews were in the Sinhala medium because the students preferred to have their interviews in their mother tongue. I transcribed them on my own and they were anonymised by allocating each student a pseudonym. The field notes and the interviews with the lecturers were in the English medium. I also transcribed the interviews with the lecturers on my own and they were also anonymised in the process. All transcribed data, students' and their lecturers' reflective accounts and the field notes were word processed and stored in a computer with backup files stored independently. The whole process of transcription and word processing helped me to thoroughly familiarise myself with my data.

Step 2: Organising data

For easy retrieval, I gave an identity code indicating who and what was involved, when and where it was collected/done to each interview transcript and other documents. The narrative data was given page numbers to make it easy to trace back units of text to their original context. A separate file was manually maintained to store the memos and notes which recorded insights and hunches about what was going on in the research setting that came to my mind throughout the research process.

Step 3: Category construction

According to Merriam (2009), the practical purpose of data analysis is to answer the research questions and the process is a highly inductive and comparative activity. The method of analysis I have employed in this research is drawn from the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) used for developing grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss. As pointed out by Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers widely use the constant comparative method in their analyses without building grounded theory. I started my analysis with interview transcripts of students and by identifying 'chunks' of data that were relevant to my research questions. I selected these 'units of data' while paying attention to the two criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The criteria were;

i.   The unit should include information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information;

ii.   It should be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself – that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional

information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out (p.345).

The process of category construction began with reading the first interview transcript. As I went through the transcript I wrote down notes, comments, observations and queries in the margins. After going through the entire transcript I looked at them again to check whether those comments or the codes that go together could be grouped in some way to arrive at more encompassing categories. I made a running list of these categories, which was fairly long, on a separate sheet. Then, I took the second transcript and followed the same procedure while bearing in mind the first set of categories that I had identified from the first transcript. I made another separate list of developing categories using this second transcript. Finally, I compared the two lists and merged them into one master list of categories. This tentative set of categories, which was further refined as I went along with categorising the data set, was subsequently used to identify recurring patterns of data in the whole data set.

Step 4: Sorting categories and data

The tentative set of categories derived at the end of the above process was used to sort all the data. Separate folders labelled with different category names were used to store each unit of data that belonged to specific categories. The units of data were cut and put into the file manually, after attaching identity codes containing the respondent's name, number of the interview (1, 2, or 3), the page and line numbers.

Step 5: Identifying patterns, themes and building theories

Sorting data into categories helped me to describe the data and to interpret them to some extent. However, to become more theoretical I had to be engaged in a deeper thinking process to make inferences, develop models or generate theory. In the words of Miles and Huberman (1994) I had to move up :

> ...from the theoretical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape. We're no longer just dealing with observables, but also with unobservables, and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue' (Miles and Huberman,1994, p. 261).

According to Merriam (2009) thinking about data helps us to develop theory that explains 'some aspect of practice and allows a researcher to draw inferences about future activity', (p.188). Thinking about and comparing concepts and data helped me to identify patterns and themes as summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Initial categories, patterns and themes that emerged in the analysis of the activity system

Initial categories	Patterns	Themes
Nature of the object or the collective purpose.	Dual nature of the collective purpose	Primary contradiction in the collective purpose
Views on the object	Changing views about the object/collective purpose	Understanding the collective purpose is a gradual process
Views on the curriculum, teaching and assessment.	Changing understanding about teaching, curriculum and assessment	Understanding teaching, curriculum and assessment is a gradual process

	Mismatches between expectations and realities of teaching, curriculum and assessment.	Tensions or contradictions between the collective purpose, teaching, curriculum and assessment in classrooms where teaching was based on transmission approaches
Maximising grades, Competition vs. collaboration Mimicking Mastery.	Collective responses to assessment demands	Tensions emerged between institutional assessment practices, teaching, curriculum and the collective purpose in classrooms where teaching was based on social constructivist approaches.
Following additional vocational courses Utilising opportunities to enhance employability skills	Collective responses to the need to enhance employability	Collective responses to the contextual demands
Improved self efficacy Self awareness Understanding others Interpersonal skills Employability skills	Reported outcomes Increased action possibilities Identity transformation Managing interpersonal relations	Indications of expansive learning at the individual level at varying degrees

Finally, I have used the themes identified in the analysis of the activity system and the findings of cross case analysis to build a model to explain student learning in the undergraduate course. In the next section, I explain the process of analysis of case studies.

3.3.4.2 Analysis of case studies

One of the key steps in case study analysis is within-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 2002). Here, the researcher has to construct detailed case study reports for each case. These reports are 'simple, pure descriptions'. However, they play a key role in generating insights. They help the researcher to become familiar with each case as a single unit and to identify unique patterns emerging from each case before searching for patterns across cases. So, in this research I developed detailed descriptive write-ups of the three cases, using the three sets of interviews I had with each of them at different intervals of their course, my own observations and their reflective comments.

Within-case analysis informed by the concept of expansive learning (Edwards, 2005a; Roth and Lee, 2007), helped me to identify five categories to compare the cases. According to Eisenhardt (2002), cross case comparisons 'force the researchers to go beyond initial impressions by using structured and diverse lenses' (p. 19). They help to improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory that fits closely with the data.

The next step was to 'compare systematically the emergent frame with the evidence from each case in order to assess how well or poorly it fits with the case data, (p.20). In this thesis, I have compared the emerging five factors that affected expansive learning at the individual level and the evidence from each of the case studies that supported, or otherwise, the effects of those factors. Then, I have compared the emerging findings with the related literature. As argued by Eisenhardt (2002), linking emergent findings to existing literature enhances internal validity, generalisability and the theoretical level of theory building from case study research.

The final stage of Eisenhardt's model for building theories from case studies is reaching closure which is marked by 'theoretical saturation'. Theoretical saturation is the point where incremental learning is minimal because the researchers are observing phenomena seen before (Glaser and Strauss cited in Eisenhardt, 2002, p.26). In this research, theoretical saturation is achieved after comparing the three cases which had been selected on the basis of the nature of the reported outcomes. The three cases represented a range of outcomes which were categorised as most elaborated, moderately elaborated and least elaborated.

3.4   Issues of validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are scientific criteria used to evaluate the quality of quantitative research. These criteria are not directly applicable to qualitative research because it is based on a very different set of assumptions about the nature of reality. According to Murphy and Dingwall (2005), there is much debate on the appropriateness of such criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research and the need to use alternative criteria that are compatible with its antirealist and relativist assumptions.

There is no simple, straightforward set of criteria to judge the truth claims of qualitative research, but the likely truth of research findings can be made by taking into account the efforts taken by the researchers to minimise error and to enhance the quality of the findings (Murphy and Dingwall, 2005). In this section, my purpose is to explain the measures that I have taken to limit the error and to enhance the quality of the findings in this study.

3.4.1 Ensuring credibility, dependability and transferability

There are several strategies to enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Silverman, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggest the terms credibility, dependability and transferability to evaluate qualitative research, which correspond to the terms of internal validity, reliability and external validity respectively, in quantitative research.

Credibility is assessed in terms of whether the findings are credible given the data presented. The literature in this area suggest a number of strategies to enhance credibility, which include triangulation, respondent validation or member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, negative or discrepant case analysis, reflexivity and peer review (Merriam, 2009; Silverman, 2010).

In this research, I have ensured adequate engagement with data collection by using multiple methods and sources to collect data over a 3-4 year period and by employing a relatively large sample (15/28 students) of maximum variation. However, I did not use triangulation because of the analytical limitations of the approach, which results from its' underlying assumption 'that it is useful to conceive of an overarching reality to which data gathered in different contexts approximate' (Silverman, 2010, p. 134). I also did not use respondent validation for a similar theoretical reason. I believe that the feedback from respondents cannot be taken as direct validation or refutation of the researcher's inferences. As Fielding and Fielding (cited in Silverman, 2010) insist:

'such processes of so-called 'validation' should be treated as yet another source of data and insight' (Fielding and Fielding cited in Silverman, 2010, p. 278). Since the researcher interprets the data from a theoretically informed position, his/her interpretations can be different from those of the participants.

I have been careful to use a reflexive approach throughout this research. Reflexivity is 'the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, the human as instrument' (Merriam, 2009, p.219). Throughout this thesis, I have clarified my assumptions, past experiences, motivations and expectations from this research as well as the world view and theoretical framework used in this research to allow the readers of this thesis to better understand how I arrived at the findings.

I have also adopted an 'audit trail' to ensure dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) which corresponds to 'reliability' in quantitative research. Dependability is concerned with whether the findings are consistent with the data collected. To ensure dependability of the findings, I have explained in detail in this thesis, how the data was collected, how categories were derived in data analysis and how the decisions were made throughout the research process. I have maintained a detailed record of the process in a file manually maintained by me to store the memos and notes written by me throughout the research process.

One of the strategies to ensure transferability of the findings (or the external validity or generalisability in quantitative research) is '*thick description*'. At present, the term 'thick description' refers to a description of the setting and the participants of the study, as well as detailed descriptions of the findings with adequate evidence

presented in the form of the quotes from participants' interviews, field notes, and documents' (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). In this thesis, I have explained in sufficient detail the characteristics of the undergraduate course, the students and their lecturers. I have also used quotes from the participants' interviews, their reflective accounts and the field notes to substantiate my findings.

Hence, in this research I have taken adequate measures to ensure the quality of the findings by employing measures to maintain ethical standards and enhance credibility, dependability and transferability.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have clarified the research process, strategies of inquiry, research design and methods of data collection and analysis as well as the measures that I have adopted to ensure ethical standards, validity, reliability and the credibility of findings. In the next two chapters, I shall present the analysis of data and the findings. In Chapter 4, I shall focus on analysing the context of student learning in the undergraduate course and in Chapter 5; I shall focus on how the students respond to the contextual demands and act on the context to achieve expansive learning.

Chapter 4: Complexities in the evolving context of students' learning

4.0   Introduction

I have argued throughout the introductory chapters of this thesis that to better understand student learning in undergraduate education, there is a need to study how the student learning is affected by the contextual factors as well as how the students act on the context in their pursuit of achieving valued outcomes. Accordingly, the specific question that I am focusing on in this longitudinal qualitative research is, "how do the students regulate their learning in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?"

To address the specific question mentioned, in more detail, the following sub-questions have been set.

1. What are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?

2. How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?

3. What are the valued outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect the expansive learning at the individual level?

I shall present my findings in relation to these three sub-questions in two chapters and in this chapter (Chapter 4) I address the first of them, i.e., **what are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?**

The purpose of this analysis is to understand, mainly, the students' interpretations of their purpose of learning and experiences of curriculum, teaching and assessment processes; the tensions and problems in the context; and the complexities arising from the attempts at innovation and change over the four year time duration of their undergraduate course. Four main themes emerged in the analysis of data in relation to the above question. They are:

- Students' changing view of their purpose of learning and the inherent tension or contradiction in it.

- Students' changing understanding of the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices.

- The tensions arising from the mismatches between expectations and realities of learning in classrooms where teaching was based on transmission approaches.

- Tensions arising from the attempts to change and innovation.

Initially, the students appeared to have had a vague idea about their collective purpose of learning, which were confined to finding employment after obtaining a degree qualification and to learning the subject. However, their view of the purpose or the object of the course had became more elaborate over time through the mediation by social relationships and the cultural tools used in the course such as teaching, curriculum and assessment. By the time they had reached their final year the shared or collective purpose of learning reflected their needs to enhance employability, personal development, and enrichment of life. The collective purpose of the students embodied the multiple needs, interests, and beliefs of the multiple different participants of the network of interacting activity systems of the student learning activity which included students' families, the university, the department and the

147

employment market. The collective purpose of the students was also characterised by an inherent tension or a primary contradiction (Engeström, 1987, 2001), which was in the form of **learning to enhance employability vs. learning for the intrinsic worth of education.**

Students' understanding of the curriculum, teaching, assessment and learning practices was also a gradual process which was mediated by the social relationships, tools used in the course and their past experiences of education. Students' changing view of their purpose also affected the way they viewed teaching, the curriculum and assessment practices used in the course where the teaching had been predominantly based on transmission approaches (Brophy, 2002).

By the time they reached their third year, they were concerned about;

- the emphasis on theoretical knowledge in the curriculum,

- the lack of opportunities for improving practical skills;

- the lack of interaction between students and their lecturers in the classrooms;

- and the lack of feedback in assessment for improving learning.

These mismatches between students' expectations and their experiences of realities in teaching, curriculum and assessment practices, gave rise to secondary contradictions or tensions between their collective purpose and those mediating processes or tools. In the final year, when one of the lecturers attempted to bring in innovations to teaching, assessment and curriculum practices, further contradictions or tensions emerged between institutional practices of assessment and the collective purpose, teaching and curriculum of the particular course. The institutional assessment

practices which emphasised its grading and selection function at the expense of its function of improving learning affected the way the students viewed their purpose and engaged in the curriculum teaching and learning processes in this particular component of the course. The lack of dialogue between the lecturer and the students about how and what they learn in the course during its implementation was also another problem that affected students' learning.

Therefore, the student learning in the undergraduate course is a complex change process which is mainly affected by the competing demands arising from the collective purpose or the object and the institutional practices of assessment. The root causes of these tensions are tied to the historically evolving characteristics of the collective purpose, teaching, curriculum and assessment practices and also to the past histories of education of the students. Moreover, the above demands arise as a result of the multiple different assumptions, expectations and beliefs of the different participants of the interacting network of activity systems, which included the students' families, past schools, department, the university, the employment market, and the more advanced activity of higher education. Therefore, this analysis of the experiences of the students in the undergraduate course provides evidence to conclude that the students' learning in this course is a change process which is affected by a number of interacting individual and contextual factors. This chapter discusses these findings in detail using the empirical evidence and research in higher education.

Students, collectively and individually responded to the contextual demands identified in the analysis in interesting ways. Finally they have achieved expansive learning in different degrees as a result of a complex interaction between both contextual and individual factors that I will discuss in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

In the current chapter, I present my findings under four main sections, which include,

- the students' changing view of their purpose of learning;

- students' understanding of the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices;

- tensions between expectations and realities of learning

- and tensions arising from attempts to bring about innovation and change

4.1 Students' changing view of the purpose of their learning

In this study, I asked the students what they thought about their purposes at different times of the course. Two main themes emerged in the analysis of their responses. The first, is that their understanding of the purpose of learning or the object that they shared for manipulation and transformation (Engeström, 1987; Engeström and Miettinen, 1999; Kuutti, 1996) is a gradual process which is affected by their own socio-cultural background and mediated by teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment as well as social relationships that they had with their peers, seniors and the lecturers. The second is the conflicting values embodied in the collective or the shared purpose which gave rise to the primary contradiction in the object. In this

section, I shall discuss these two themes by analysing the data in the light of literature on higher education in Sri Lanka and in other countries.

4.1.1   Students' understanding of their purpose is a gradual process

I want to get a good job, which gives me enough to support my family… my sister's education. Everybody has sacrificed his or her bit to send me here. So I want to get a good job to support my parents.

– Priya (Interview 1)

I do not expect a job or any status as such. I heard a lot about psychology from TV programmes. I simply like to learn more about it.

- Rev. B (Interview 1)

Students' views suggest that they went to university to gain qualifications to find employment and to develop disciplinary knowledge. However, finding a job after completion of the degree programme seems to be the intention of the majority. A recent study done in the UK also reports that students viewed that acquiring a degree qualification as a key factor affecting their future employment (Tomlinson, 2008).

When the students started the university and participated in the academic programme and interacted with their lecturers and senior students, they reported that they recognised the opportunities or the affordances in the context and formulated specific targets to achieve. For example, when the students interacted with their seniors and attended lectures in the first semester of the first year, they became aware of the affordances in the context and the values held by the university community such as, the possibility for earning a first class degree, joining the staff as a lecturer, and specialising in a subject that they are interested in. The students stated that they soon

became interested in getting selected for the 'special degree' programme. A typical response was:

> Only target was to earn good grades to get selected to specialise in Psychology.   - Ama (interview 1)

Thus, the students' original purpose seems to have changed by that time, from earning better grades, to getting selected for 'special degree' programmes where students had to compete with each other for the limited number of places available. They reported that they had focused more on assessment and the ways of maximising their grades as in the following extract:

> I: So, you had a target then?
> Sanda: Yes I thought about the GPA. I wanted to get 5 A s somehow or the other.

When they viewed the purpose or the object of the undergraduate course differently, they tended to view and interact with other elements such as curriculum and assessment differently.

It was also interesting to note that the students' view of the object of the course became more elaborate in their third year and in the final year. Selected comments cited below suggest that they had realised that the course had not only been useful to gain a qualification to get a job, but also to provide them with useful knowledge and competencies to become new people or to enrich their lives in many ways.

> *I think that even if we don'*t get a job at the end, at least it is useful for life. I can use that knowledge and understanding to bring up children, *to face the life's problems successfully and to live with others.*
>   -Mali (Interview 2)

> I think it helps to understand others. Something like child psychology is useful in life. For example, the knowledge of Freudian psychology would help to bring up a child of good personality. -Saku (Interview 2)

> I see a close resemblance in what is discussed in psychology and in Buddhism. In learning Buddhism we concentrate only on what the Buddha taught. But here I feel I would be able to do something by combining the ideas of Buddhism and those of other philosophers and psychologists. I also think that counselling is not very much relevant to a Buddhist priest like me. But I like to use the ideas I get from the course in my dhamma (Buddhist doctrine) sermons. On the other hand I would like to learn about my life. So I like learning this subject. -Rev. A (Interview 2)

The students do not appear to be motivated merely by utilitarian needs, but also by social, cultural and intellectual needs that are linked to their socio-cultural backgrounds. In a more recent study in the UK, Hernandez-Martinez et al (2008) have identified four different kinds of aspirations described by students in undergraduate education, which included becoming successful (becoming somebody); personal satisfaction (personal interests and enjoyment); vocational (clear vocational/career pathway); and idealist (realisation of a dream, aspiring to a different future). They also found that these aspirations are strongly associated with the socio-cultural backgrounds of the students. Students in my study also have expressed comparable views regarding their engagement with the undergraduate course, while emphasising the needs for enhancing employability, self-development and enrichment of life.

The analysis of the students' comments further suggests that the students' personal circumstances, motivations, past histories as well as teaching, curriculum and assessment that they experience in the psychology course, and also the social relationships have affected their changing views of the collective purpose of learning psychology. Therefore the students' understanding of their object or the collective

purpose of learning is a gradual process which is affected by their socio-cultural background and mediated by tools used in the course such as teaching, curriculum and assessment as well as their own motivations and social relationships.

Becker et al (1968) in their longitudinal study on students' academic life at Kansas University in the USA also found a similar kind of gradual change in students' purposes. They claim that at the time of entry, the students had 'generalised goals' which are formed at a rudimentary level and these goals became more elaborated and precise when they went through the college. At the end, the students acknowledged college as a place in which 'one grows up and achieves the status of a mature adult' (Becker et al, p. 31).

Students' changing purposes symbolise their own motives to transform their identities as students to adults who are capable of facing future challenges and/or taking up new courses of action. As I shall discuss in detail in the next chapter, the students' ability to set new goals (or goal formation) at different intervals of time in the course in this way had been useful for them to learn expansively. In the following subsection, I discuss the primary contradiction in the collective purpose of learning which is emerged in the analysis.

4.1.2 The primary contradiction in the collective purpose of student learning

Although at the entry point the majority of students expressed the view that they expected to get a degree and then a job, most of them had later questioned the relationship between the degree qualification and its' usefulness for ' learning to do a job'. As one student articulated:

154

There I see a small problem. It is not small in the sense- I mean that is a significant problem. Not only in psychology but also in any subject what you learned in the university is not very important when you go out. But we need a degree qualification for everything. In my case I can use that knowledge for my life. Otherwise it is not useful for me for a job. However, since we live with others wherever we go, this knowledge has a practical value.   - Rev. A (Interview 3)

On the one hand they intend to learn psychology, because they feel that the knowledge of psychology enriches their lives and broadens their intellectual capacities as well as the ability to live a successful life. On the other hand, they want to be eligible to find employment after completing the degree programme. Therefore, two competing value systems confront their purpose or the object of the undergraduate course. This situation is conceptualised in the activity theory as a primary contradiction. Primary contradictions occur when the subjects encounter more than one conflicting value system attached to an element of the activity system (Yamagata-Lynch and Haudenschild, 2009). According to Engeström (1987), the primary contradictions of the activities arise as the inner conflict between 'exchange value' or value acquired by being exchanged and the 'use value' or usefulness of a product or a service. Identification of contradictions helps the practitioners to focus their efforts to understand the root causes of the problems. Therefore, contradictions are considered as the driving forces behind change and innovations, which eventually bring about developments in the activity systems (Engeström, 2000).

The degree qualification has a use value, which enriches life, and it also has an exchange value, which helps the students to find employment. On the one hand the students expect to enhance their 'employability' or the 'suitability for appropriate

employment' (Yorke and Knight, 2007, p.158). For this purpose they need to increase the exchange value of their learning by acquiring skills, understandings, and personal attributes that make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations as suggested by Yorke (2005). Accordingly, the students are interested in **learning to enhance employability.** On the other hand they expect to broaden their knowledge of psychology to understand themselves and others, to apply such knowledge to life situations, and to fulfil a host of other psychological, social, cultural and intellectual needs. Therefore, they are also interested in **learning for intrinsic worth of education.**

The collective purpose of students' learning not only reflects the different values, beliefs and expectations of the students, but also those of their lecturers. There seem to be similarities and differences among the definitions of purposes of learning made explicit by the students and their lecturers. The four lecturers, whom I interviewed during the course, expressed specific views on what they expect the students to learn in the psychology course. Their own past education, work experience and the particular views that they had on the subject discipline of psychology appear to affect the way the lecturers define the purpose of students' learning. For example, one of the lecturers who had completed his higher education in Canada and in the USA expressed the view that, the purpose of the course should be to develop psychologists:

> In America to be called a psychologist, you have to have a PhD in psychology and some of my colleagues in Colombo think that it should *be the case in Sri Lanka, which I don't agree with, because, you have* to take the context into consideration. So, I think, a basic degree in *psychology should be enough to call somebody, a psychologist. ...I* think our 'special degree should focus on practical issues. It should

> *not be a theoretical degree, only, because, most of them don't go into* graduate school.   T4 (Interview)

The lecturer takes both American and Sri Lankan contexts into consideration and points out the need to develop psychologists with practical knowledge through the 'special degree' programme. In contrast to the above view of developing professional psychologists and focussing on practical issues, another lecturer, who had about five years of experience as a lecturer in the UG course, particularly emphasised the need for the students to internalise the theoretical knowledge and see the relevance of such knowledge to develop their own personality and life in general. She articulated her view as follows:

> I always stress the point that they need to see the relevance of this subject to their life. In my lectures, I often try to get their ideas on how applicable is the theoretical points are to their own lives. I invite them *to express their own examples….Psychology is related to life. So, they* need to think beyond the exams.   - T2 (Interview)

Thus the different lecturers seem to define the purpose of student learning based on their beliefs, assumptions, expectations and past experiences. The students' views on their purpose also included the need to learn practical skills and the ability to see the relevance of psychology to life. There appears to be a mediating effect of the views of the lecturers upon the views of the students who indicated that they want to incorporate psychological knowledge into their own lives. Moreover, there were a few students who said that they were intrinsically motivated to learn psychology, because, they liked the subject and wanted to learn more about it. However, in the

responses of the lecturers, this type of purpose was not included. Otherwise, the students' responses, more or less resembled the lecturers' views of the object of the course. Thus, the object of the course, collectively defined by the students and their lecturers seem to be a multi-voiced formation (Engeström, 2001) which embodies different motives, beliefs and expectations of different participants.

Tools

Students

Learning to enhance employability
 Vs.
Learning for the intrinsic worth of education

Community
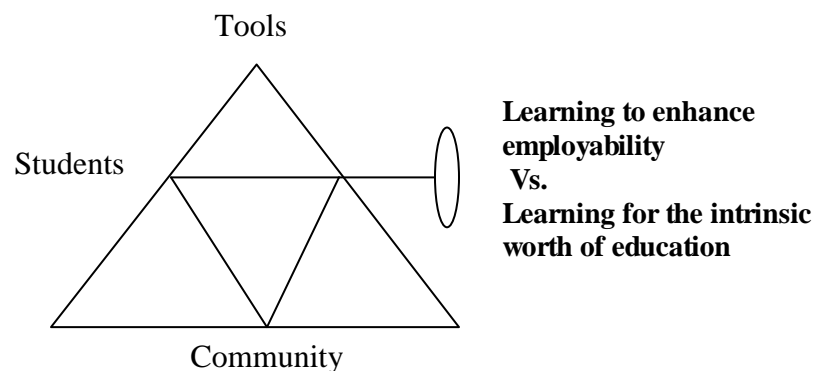
Figure 9: Primary contradiction in the object

The collective views of the lecturers also reflect the dual nature of the purpose of student learning, which emphasises the need to enhance the employability and also the need to enrich life. Thus, the object of the activity system or the collective purpose of student learning seemed to be characterised by a primary contradiction in the form of **learning to enhance employability** (exchange value) vs**. learning for the intrinsic worth of education** (use value) as depicted in Figure 9.

Further analysis of policy documents and academic literature on purposes of higher education suggests that the primary contradiction in the collective purpose of student learning is associated with a similar kind of contradiction in the object of the activity system of higher education which I shall discuss in more detail below.

At present, governments around the world are concerned to ensure that higher education makes the greatest possible contribution to 'human capital' (Yorke and Knight, 2006, 2007). It is argued that advanced economies will succeed when they make the best use of their resources of knowledge, by creating and maximising their use of human capital. Moreover, it is believed that effective higher education is indispensable for success in the knowledge societies and its role is redefined to include the following:

- Contribute to research- the development of new technologies, products, concepts and social practices
- Preparation of students for careers and the development of specialist expertise in them
- Contribute to continued professional development and other forms of lifelong learning (Yorke and Knight, 2006).

The above set of purposes emphasises the economic value of higher education and urges it to focus more on utilitarian needs while undermining the goals of liberal education which prepares 'people to exercise positive freedom to understand the choices they have; to make choices; and pursue their chosen paths in a social world' (Bridges, 1993, p. 45). In contrast to the above purposes, academic literature in higher education also emphasises the needs to provide a 'general education experience of intrinsic worth in its own right' (Atkins, 1995, p.26), which helps to develop a critical human being (Barnett, 1997), personal engagement (Mann, 2001), social inclusion and student development which includes both intellectual and moral development (Yorke, 2003). Thus, different stakeholders emphasise different aspects as purposes of higher education depending on their conflicting beliefs, assumptions and needs of

them while the debate goes on as to whether the focus on skills is a challenge to the traditional notion of a liberal education (Bridges, 1993; Barnett, 1997) or not.

In the Sri Lankan literature, the purposes of higher education are not highlighted separately or clearly. However these purposes are mentioned in the policy documents as intentions or recommendations (see National Education Commission (NEC), 1996a; Standing Committee in Humanities and Social sciences (SCHSS, 2002)). For example, the NEC (1996a), states in broad terms that the graduates of Sri Lankan universities should be able to cater to the economic needs of the country (p.24). It further specifies five recommendations for the curriculum developers as follows. University education should:

1. Produce people who are highly trainable and are quick and effective in the acquisition of knowledge and skills;
2. Train a person to be a self-directed learner
3. Build up a person's self-confidence to make him courageous to face new problems, and tackle them resourcefully,
4. Provide human resource needs for agriculture, fisheries, tourism, shipping, and aviation, international transactions; to serve internal requirements, banking, communications, education, recreation, etc., and to provide maximum value addition to local resources.
5. Enable the concepts of 'further education' and 'life-long education' in the university curricula through the use of appropriate educational strategies to give effect to these concepts. (NEC,1996b)

The same report also points out the need to develop vocational skills (communication and information management, leadership, social skills necessary to interact with peers and superiors (in organizations), skills in using English language and national languages) in graduates and to include core curricular areas of Sri Lankan studies, health, ethics and human values in the university curricula. The recommendations of the NEC (1996a) and the NEC (2010) indicate close affinity to economic and social

needs of the country while the SCHSS (2002) recommendations extend further to include students' self development, cultural and moral development and sensitivity to environmental issues.

Even though the exact terminology is not used, the purposes implied in the above sets of recommendations and the vocational skills resemble to some extent the Key Skills specified in the Dearing Report (1997) and the purposes specified by Atkins (1995). The Sri Lankan policy documents(NEC, 1996a,b; NEC, 2010) also emphasise 'skills' while paying some attention to the aspects relevant to providing a 'general education of intrinsic worth' thus reflecting the competing sets of values embodied in the collective purpose or the object of higher education. Therefore, the object of higher education is a 'multivoiced formation' (Engeström, 2001) which embodies different 'motives' of multiple participants and characterised by a primary contradiction in the form of **emphasis on employability skills vs. emphasis on providing a general education of intrinsic worth**. Therefore, what is reflected in the students' and lecturers' collective purpose of student learning seems to be associated with the contradictory nature of the purposes of higher education which are defined and valued by other stakeholders such as policy makers, employers, and the academia. The activity of student learning in the 'special degree' course in psychology is an evolving cultural historical formation which has its own history embedded in its object, tools, community, rules and division of labour. The undergraduate course existed before and will continue to operate in the future with different participants and perhaps with different objects. It also does not operate in isolation as a separate entity. It operates

as a network of interacting activity systems as depicted in Figure 10. These different interacting systems affect different nodes of the student learning activity. For example, the object of student learning is linked to the object of higher education. Therefore, the contradiction in the collective purpose of student learning is not independent of the contradiction in the object of the interacting activity of higher education which is also a cultural historical formation.
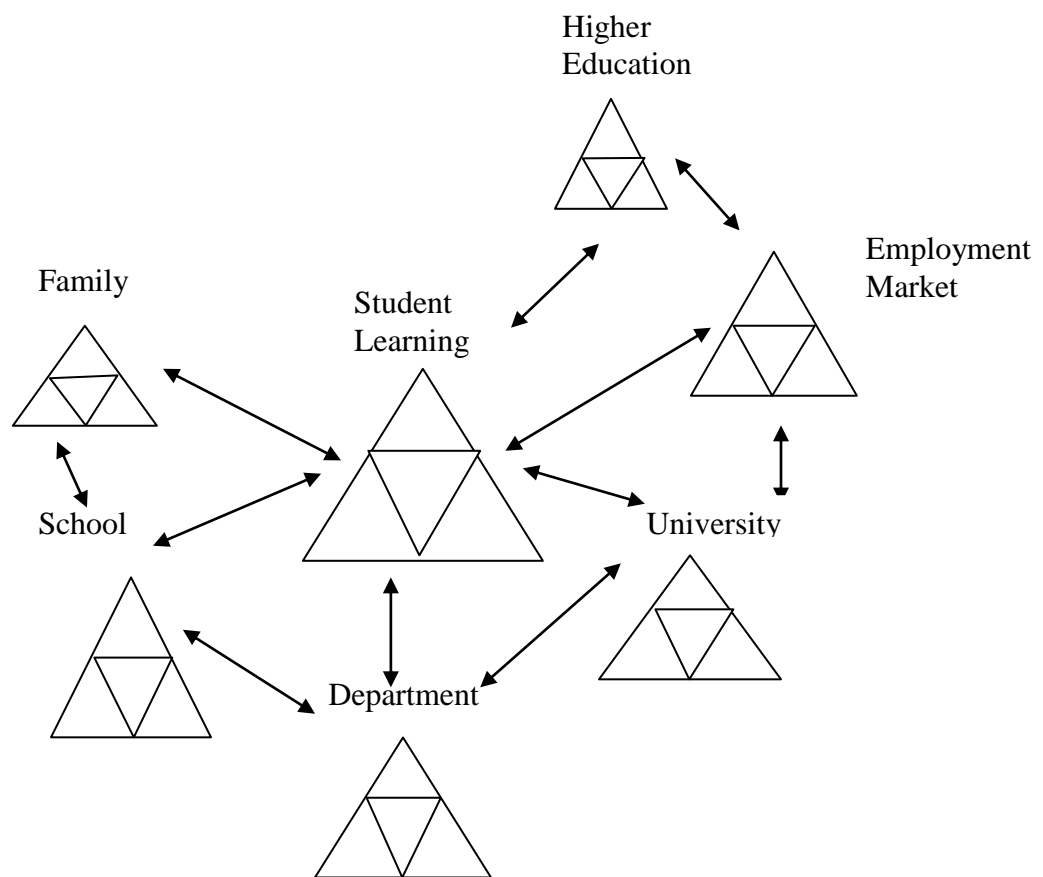
Figure 10: The Activity system of student learning as a network of interacting activity systems

In this section I have analysed the students' and their lecturers' views on the collective purpose or the object of students' learning activity. It has emerged that students' understanding of the purpose is a gradual process affected by their own socio-cultural background and mediated by teaching, learning, curriculum and

162

assessment as well as the social relationships that they experience on the course. Students encounter a tension or a primary contradiction collectively in their purpose in the form of **learning to enhance employability Vs. Learning for the intrinsic worth of education** which appears to be a reflection of the primary contradiction in the object of the interacting activity system of higher education. The tension that appeared in the collective purpose motivated the students to act on the context using affordances in and outside university to achieve expansive learning as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

The conflicting and competing values reflected in the collective purpose of students learning tend to affect how the students view teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment practices of the course. Similar to their understanding of the collective purpose their understanding of the tools or the curriculum, teaching and assessment used in the course was also a gradual process as I discuss in the following section.

4.2 Students' understanding of the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices

A particular feature of the undergraduate course was that during its first three years, teaching was predominantly based on transmission approaches (Brophy, 2002) where the teachers used the lecture method to impart knowledge and written examinations and assignments for assessment. In the analysis of the students' interpretations of their experiences it emerged that the students' understanding of teaching, curriculum

and assessment processes in the course is also a gradual process as in the case of their understanding of the collective purpose of learning.

While the course was being implemented, students not only had their views about their purpose changed, but also expressed strong views about how the contents and processes which included curriculum, teaching and assessment (tools) and social relationships (community) have affected their learning.

4.2.1 Understanding teaching, curriculum and assessment as a gradual process

Many students reported that initially they had no idea or just a vague idea about what they were expected to learn in the course. Some typical responses were as follows:

> I: When you were selected to the *'special degree'* programme in psychology, what sort of things did you want to learn?
>
> *Supuni: We didn't know a lot about this subject then. I didn't know* how to explain, I knew that I liked the subject. But I had no idea what would be taught or how we could apply that knowledge etc.
>
> I: Ok. What do you think about learning that subject now?
>
> Supuni: I think we know more now. In the 1st year we did only the *history of psychology. We didn't* know that many aspects of our society have a psychological bearing. Now we see that we can use psychology in any profession or trade. Psychological knowledge is applicable to life and to many things in society.   (Interview 3)

> It became clear only in the final year after learning psychology for four years in the university. At the beginning I could not decide that I would learn this or that.   Rev.A (Interview 3)

The students' comments suggested that they gradually understood the course contents, their relevance and applicability to their own needs, life situations and society over the course period.

Similarly, the students' views about teaching have also been changed over time and with the implementation of the course. In their first year in the course, students tended to compare the experiences of teaching that they had had in schools with those in the university. At first, the students reported difficulties, especially in making notes and comprehending lectures, as well as adapting to the new demands in the teaching learning process in the university. However, they had identified the requirements later and began to value the freedom to explore more about what had been given in the lecture. One student articulated this position:

> Teaching is all right. It is their style here. Notes are not dictated. We have to find out on our own. We cannot change their style. However, I think it is ok. We also need to think, search for knowledge, ourselves. We get something from the lecture and we should be able to explore further. Therefore, I think it is ok.   Sanda (Interview 1)

The students appeared to socialise gradually into the culture of teaching and learning in the university over time. A similar situation was reported by Merrill (2001) who studied teaching and learning in universities from the perspective of adult students and their lecturers in a university in the UK. She observed that the culture of the department, the teaching style of the lecturers and the rigours of their academic study affected learning experiences of those adult students at the university. To survive and to become a successful undergraduate they had to go through a socialisation process to learn the ropes (Merrill, 2001).

165

As in the case of curriculum and teaching in the first year, students had difficulties in adapting to the assessment requirements over the years. In their first year, students reported that they had difficulties because continuous assessment and the techniques used such as written assignments and presentations were new to them. The majority of students reported that the continuous assessment had helped them to keep in touch with the subject matter and at the same time induced mental stress among them. As one student articulated:

> It is good that we have tests frequently. We keep in touch with the *subject. But it is a little stressful. For example we'll have* end semester exam next. And when we start the next semester within a few weeks we would get assignments to do and while we are doing them we would have mid-semester examinations. When that is finished next you have end semester examinations. Therefore all the time you are under some stress. But on the other hand it is better to have many assessments than to have just one exam at the end and be idle for a long time.
>
> -Sisie (Interview 1)

In contrast to the above view, other students expressed the view that the assessment system was good and it served their purpose of earning a good degree:

> When an assignment is given I am the one who submits it first. I submit at least 3 days ahead of the deadline. I had super A s (A) for both Philosophy and Psychology in the first year. I think this is good. It is good to have mid-exams, where you can study a little by little. That is not a burden for me. I am used to studying the content given on a daily basis. I am focusing only on this. Therefore it is not at all a burden for me.   –Ama (Interview 1)

The above extracts suggest that different students treat the assessment system as a challenge and also as a means to achieve a desired goal of obtaining good grades. The students' view of the object or the purpose also seems to affect the way they view and interact with assessment and learning in the undergraduate course. Further analysis of

students' views on assessment sheds light on the difficulties and frustrations experienced by the students of the particular course where the marking criteria had not been available for the students and the written feedback was minimal. They reported that they were frustrated because of the lack of feedback and guidance to write critical essays. As one student articulated:

> *In writing assignments we… copy from books. We never write our own* ideas. We are not taught how to write using our own ideas and thoughts. We just copy from books and give the assignments to our lecturers to mark. After that they give us grades. We get about ten assignments per year and...finally there will be graduates who are good at copying books. -Sanda (Interview 1)

The student's comment suggests that her identity as an undergraduate and finally as a graduate has been threatened by the lack of feedback and guidance in writing assignments. It also suggests that the continuous assessment used in the course is not being used for formative purposes to improve student learning.

Previous studies (Lea and Street, 1998; Higgins, 2003) indicate that even in situations where written feedback is provided, students face difficulties in understanding and utilising feedback due to the language of feedback, which contains terms such as 'academic argument' and 'critical analysis', tacit assumptions used by the lecturers in assessing students' work, the mismatch between students interpretations and the lecturers' intentions and power relations between the assessors and the assessed. To help the students to understand what is expected from them at university it is necessary to provide opportunities for dialogue between students and their lecturers (Higgins, 2003).

The above analysis makes it clear that the students' understanding of curriculum, teaching and assessment practices used in the course is a gradual process. As argued by Trowler and Cooper (2002), at the departmental level, teaching learning regimes (TLR) are developed as a result of the academics' long-term engagement with these tasks together. TLR is:

> 'a constellation of rules, assumptions, practices and relationships related to teaching and learning issues in higher education'. In the process of these interactions academics 'both construct and enact culture, many aspects which are invisible to them because they become taken for granted' (Trowler and Cooper, 2002: 222).

Therefore, the students cannot be expected to understand and adapt quickly to the requirements of teaching, learning and assessment practices at the university as it is a gradual socialisation process (Merrill, 2001).

The students also reported mismatches between their expectations and the realities that they experienced in relation to teaching, learning and assessment as well as social relationships. In the next section I shall discuss these mismatches and tensions in more detail.

4.3 Tensions between the expectations and realities of learning.

In the analysis of students' views on their experiences of curriculum, teaching and assessment in the first three years of the course, there emerged mismatches between students' expectations which were based on their collective purpose and the realities that they had experienced in curriculum, teaching and assessment processes. The tensions that arose from these mismatches are known as secondary contradictions in

the activity theory. Secondary contradictions arise between different elements of the activity systems because they are open systems (Engeström, 1987). Generally they arise as a result of a clash between a new element introduced from outside and the old elements of the activity system (Engeström, 2001). The students' collective purpose of learning embodied their need to enhance employability and also the need to have a good education of intrinsic value. However, the provisions of curriculum, teaching and assessment which had been based on old traditions were insufficient to meet the demands arising from such a collective purpose. As a result, secondary contradictions or tensions emerged between the collective purpose and the curriculum, teaching and assessment processes used in the course.

In the following three subsections, I shall present these contradictions or the tensions that emerged in the analysis of the students' and their lecturers' views in relation to their expectations and actual experiences in curriculum, teaching and assessment in the course.

4.3.1   Curriculum and learning

By the time they reached the third year, the criteria, which the students reported that they had used to assess the worth of the curriculum, tended to be related to their view of the collective purpose (object) at the time. The students' views implied that they had assessed the difference between the expected and the actual curriculum that they experienced. They complained about the lack of opportunities in the curriculum for developing practical skills needed to become a psychologist. One of the students

expressed a more articulated view than those of the others, highlighting the need for providing opportunities for the students to develop both practical and conceptual skills, which would enable them to 'do something independently':

> One thing that I feel is that we need to have at least in one paper (course) some practical activities. This subject (psychology) should produce someone who could talk effectively, and be able to do something when you go out. We feel that we are limited to learning from books and feel that we are unable to do something in that sense. So, I hope, to change this situation we need to have opportunities for practical activities to enable everybody **to do something independently**. (Rev. A, Interview 2)

The student was referring to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), in this case: the need to feel that one is competent to act as a psychology graduate. He was not referring to getting some training to do a job, but skills '**to do something independently'**, which may require conceptual skills or practical skills, or both.

According to the students' comments, the course was progressing without much attention being paid to the kind of graduate that it was producing; even without paying attention to the expected purposes of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka (NEC, 1996a,b ; SCHSS, 2002), which were cited earlier in this chapter. The students appear to face a tension or a contradiction in the form of a mismatch between what they expect from the course and what they really experience through the curriculum of the course.

The lecturers also collectively expressed the view that the course should provide more practical experiences for the students. As one lecturer articulated:

....There are a lot of opportunities for the students, with a practical thrust from the second year, when they are taken as special students, through our assignments or extra activities, to prepare them to work as psychologists when they leave. ...actually having some real know-how, rather than just book knowledge and certificates.   -T$_4$ (Interview)

Both students' and the lecturers' views seem to indicate a contradiction or a tension between the curriculum, which delivers theoretical knowledge and the collective purpose, which emphasises the need to enhance employability and therefore expect the curriculum to include practical skills. Thus, the secondary contradiction or the tension between the curriculum and the collective purpose of the course that emerges at this point is in the form of **emphasis on theoretical knowledge vs. lack of concern for practical knowledge** in the curriculum**.**

Traditionally, university curricula were not confined to narrow vocational training (Lambert et al, 2007) or to developing practical competence of students. However, higher education around the world has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. As argued by Lambert et al (2007), the emphasis on the 'knowledge economy', the 'learning society' and the 'information age' have been linked to the emergence of an 'instrumental education' which prioritises the human resource development for economic success rather than for personal achievement, growth and fulfilment and social good as its purposes (Lambert et al, 2007). The concern that investment in higher education should increase the stock of human capital for national economic development has led to the expectation that higher education should foster the learning outcomes valued by employers (Knight and Yorke, 2003: Bridges, 2000).

The policy recommendations of higher education in Sri Lanka (NEC, 1996a; NEC, 2010) also reflect the same concerns. Priority given to the outcomes valued by employers and emphasis on skills in those recommendations also seem to be reflected in the views of the students and their lecturers in the present study. As argued by Bridges (2000), the danger here is that the emphasis on 'practical skills' by the students and the lecturers and also by policy makers might 'shift the balance from 'understanding' to 'skills', from 'knowing that' to 'knowing how' and more particularly, to applying knowledge in a social context' (p. 45) and thereby narrowing down the purposes of undergraduate education. So, the above contradiction or the tension is not confined to the particular course but to higher education in general. It points out to a problem that needs to be addressed by the systems of higher education, universities, subject departments, individual lecturers and the researchers who are engaged with improving student learning and providing a good higher education.

4.3.2   Teaching and learning

Two important issues that emerged in relation to teaching and learning in the first year and beyond were the lack of interaction between students and teachers and the abstract nature of the contents delivered in lectures. In the first year of their course, students had to follow lectures in some of the subjects in large groups. One student articulated how the lack of interaction between lecturers and students affected their learning as follows:

> There were about 800 students in the hall. The lecturer taught *sociology and when it was finished he left the hall. He didn't know* whether the students understood the lecture or not. History was also *the same. Students won't talk even in a discussion class*. There are

> problems but the lecturers are not aware of them. Students in the back rows did not listen to the lecture. They passed chits and some even sang songs.   -Darshi (Interview 1)

However, the lack of interaction between students and their lecturers seems to have been a concern of the students, even in their third year of the course where there were only 28 students:

> I think it is better if they (lecturers) are close to the students. Psychology is a subject that deals with people. So interaction between lecturers and students is important. I think they should talk with us.
>   Sanda (Interview 2)

As stated earlier, the other issue referred to by the students was the abstract nature of the subject content delivered in lectures. One student articulated:

> It was difficult to recall or internalise. A subject like test and measurement is far from our experiences. I disliked it. But if they show us the practical relevance of that subject it would have been easier. They just taught theory.   - Anu (Interview 2)

Students' views reflected their concerns about the relationship between theory and practice as well as the relevance of the content to their purposes. They also suggested that the students were affected by the quality of teaching that they experienced. The lecturer who taught this particular component was a temporary lecturer, who had just completed her first degree with a first class in the previous year. Since these new-comers had not been given any form of induction training in teaching; they often lacked the competencies of effective teaching.

The students also appear to have realised the need to incorporate practical and personal knowledge of teachers in teaching. A typical response was:

173

> I see a difference. The way they (lecturers in a Diploma course in counselling psychology conducted by an outside organisation) teach is different. Our lecturers do not practice counselling. But they (lecturers in the Diploma course) are professional counsellors. They have a lot of experience in the field. They share those experiences with us. They relate facts with practical examples in society. So, learning there is more enjoyable.
>
> <div align="right">Rev. A (Interview 3)</div>

In other words they expected to share practical and personal knowledge rather than just taking down theory and abstract concepts. This expectation was also related to their collective purpose of learning. Students were not only acquiring knowledge, but also expecting to understand the deep meaning of what had been learnt. Relevant practical examples and personal experiences of lecturers facilitated the process. Therefore, there appeared a mismatch between students' expectations and actual ways of teaching in the form of a tension or a contradiction between their collective purpose and teaching that they had experienced in the course.

Different lecturers also expressed different views about teaching and learning. Teachers' own past experiences and their views on effective methods of teaching have affected these different views. For example, recently graduated, less experienced teachers appeared to have more concerned about effective ways of presenting content knowledge. A typical response was:

> I use about 2-3 methods. I explain things using the white board and sometimes use the OHP. I also use handouts and question and answer, kind of interactions with the students.   -T_3 (Interview)

In contrast to the above view, a lecturer with experience as a practicing counsellor/psychologist expressed the view that he was more concerned about the process rather than the imparting of content knowledge.

> I am more process-oriented. They are being taught content. I also did some content. But I think that is the easiest part for them to get. They *can easily get from Internet or whatever…The way I am teaching is the way I learned. So, I really,… when I went to America and Canada,* especially postgraduate, it was like I am waiting to go to the class. So *interactive…As you can see I like to talk. So, t*hey will give you opportunity to define your own opinion, do all those explorations for yourself and these things were things that I was doing by myself alone. *But now you have given a forum where other people, like you can…* You know you can bounce with your ideas and see how it matters. So, this is my way of learning.   -T₄ (Interview)

I believe that the lecturer's approach to teaching was shaped by his past experiences of learning. He expects the students to take responsibility for collecting information, developing an opinion and sharing those views with others to deepen understanding. Therefore, there are differences among the views of the lecturers about teaching which are based on different value systems that they believe in. These different values and expectations included in the views of the students and their lecturers gave rise to a secondary contradiction or a tension between the collective purpose and teaching in the form of **interactive sharing of theory and practical knowledge vs. Imparting theory and abstract concepts**.

Students' preference for formal and interactive lectures was also reported in studies carried out in other countries (Sander et al, 2000; Hativa and Birenbaum, 2000). As reported by Hativa and Birenbaum (2000), students' most preferred approach was characterised by a clear, well-structured and interesting presentation of materials by the lecturer. Furthermore, students' preferences of a teaching approach depended on

175

their reported motivations and learning strategies. Students with high intrinsic goal motivation and low extrinsic motivation, preferred instructors who promotes critical thinking, self-regulation and effort investment while students with high extrinsic motivation characterised by learning for the sake of grades preferred instructors who give clear and structured information (Hativa and Birenbaum, 2000). In this particular case, the students' preference for interactive sharing of practical and personal knowledge was based on their goal motivations reflected in the collective purpose as discussed in the above.

In the next subsection I shall discuss the tension arising from the mismatch between the students' expectations and realities of assessment.

4.3.3   Assessment and learning

In their first year students had to compete with each other to get selected for the 'special degree' programme in the next year. As highlighted in the guidelines given to the students, they had to earn a good Grade Point Average (GPA) in their first year to get selected:

> Students are allowed to choose their subject of specialization provided that they have the required level of GPA for that subject. Different subject departments based on the number of places available and the demand for the subject determines the <u>cut off level</u> of GPA (emphasis added) (Faculty of Arts, 2003/04).

The students soon became interested in gaining good grades after they came to know about this requirement. However, some students reported that they considered

assignments and presentations used for assessment as aids to learning. Some typical

responses were as follows:

> *I think the assignments are good. If those were not there, I wouldn't* read additional books. If something was taught in the class we would only read our notes. Therefore assignments are good.
>
> <div align="right">Priya (Interview 1)</div>

> When we write assignments we read at least a few books. We go to the *library, because we have to do the assignments. If we don't read* books, it is useless to be in the university. It is a must and it is important.
>
> <div align="right">Rev. A (Interview 1)</div>

The students' comments suggested that they valued the opportunities that they had for

reading books and collecting facts from other sources to develop a deeper

understanding of the subject. However, in contrast to the above views, some other

students expressed the view that even though the assignments helped them to learn

more and learn better, they were less important than examinations. One student

articulated this preference for examinations as follows:

> Exams are easy. You just have to study the lecture notes. It is true that assignments help us to gain extra knowledge but that knowledge is not useful for examinations. It is just another extra activity.
>
> <div align="right">-Ama (Interview 1)</div>

This student's comment reflects an instrumental approach to get better grades by

cramming down the lecture notes and concentrating more on examinations which

contributes 80% of marks for the final grade. Moreover, I believe that as a result of

the weaknesses in the assessment system that I mentioned earlier, such as the lack of

feedback, clarity and transparency in marking and grading, the students have

considered assessment solely as a means to acquire good grades and ultimately a good degree. Thus they have naturally become interested in gaining good grades.

This situation did not change much in their second and third years. By the time they reached their final year, a few students had already achieved their targets of achieving a first class. Others were also interested in obtaining the required number of 'A's and 'A-'s, to achieve a second upper or a first class as suggested in the following extract:

> I had a GPA of 3.26 at the end of third year. This year I have to get a
> *GPA of 3.3. I need five more 'A's for a first class. I don't know*
> whether I could achieve that. But it is my target now.
> -Sangita (Interview 3)

The students worked towards achieving good grades rather than focusing on improving their learning. Evidence presented in the above quotes suggests that the students' ways of viewing assessment was also associated with how they viewed their collective purpose. If their purpose was to gain a good degree then, they tended to view assessment as a means to earn good grades. If they valued both gaining a good degree, learning to enrich life and developing a deep understanding of the subject discipline they would concentrate on both aspects as implied in the comments of Priya and Rev. A that I cited at the beginning of this section.

As in the case of teaching and learning, different lecturers expressed different views about assessment and learning. The lecturers who had graduated from the same university expressed more or less similar views while the lecturer who had studied in the US had a contrasting view. Lecturers who graduated from the same university reported that their purpose of assessment was to find out whether the students had

learned what is taught. They also reported that they used criteria to mark the assignments and examination scripts. Although these criteria were not shared with the students and detailed written feedback was not given, they said that they would have explained to the students the strengths and weaknesses of their work, if they had sought such information from the lecturers. They further reported that they had decided to use a variety of methods of assessment with a view to developing different skills in students, and rewarding those who possess different skills and qualities like creativity:

> We want them to develop their skills. How to write, how to organise *flow of ideas, paragraphs......how to summarise something in a diagram or table… Then, how to include ideas taken from books and other sources… everything matters. Spellings, sentence construction* are also important.   -T$_3$ (Interview)

Lecturers seemed to be interested in knowing whether the students had mastered the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they had intended the students to master. The other lecturer expressed a contrasting view:

> I think what we need to encourage is thinking, because these people are going to be leaders in society. So, especially because of their exclusiveness, rather than on grades, we really need to help them to be more open and evaluative. ... what I am trying to do is, expose them to *things that help them learn. ...my assignments require a lot of work. As* a group they have to find information, they need to know how to use their skills, to process groups and so on. To me, when they do that, that itself is enough. I also think that we are penalising them, by *comparing them to the 'best' group to the not so best group, because* even the worst group need to do a lot of work. I have not seen any group that have not clearly done a professional kind of job. ..They are *very competitive. ...I used their competitiveness for their advantage.* –T$_4$

As a relatively newcomer, at the time of this study, the lecturer has had his own views about assessment which were nurtured by his different set of experiences in the US higher education system. The philosophy of the particular lecturer was very different to that of the other lecturers. The lecturer viewed assessment as a means to improve student learning, while the others viewed it as a means to test whether the students understood the contents taught in lectures or to demonstrate the skills of writing. They also viewed the purpose of assessment as selection, grading and classification. Therefore, the views of teachers were also divided between, assessment for improving learning versus assessment for grading and classification. Therefore, different values and expectations of the students and the lecturers gave rise to a tension between assessment and the collective purpose in the form of **assessment for improving learning** vs. **assessment for grading and selection**.

This is in fact the fundamental contradiction in assessment. As argued by Lave and Wenger (1991) this is due to commoditisation of learning:

> The commoditisation of learning engenders a fundamental contradiction between the use and exchange values of the outcome of learning, which manifests itself in conflicts between learning to know and learning to display knowledge for evaluation. Testing in schools and trade schools (unnecessary in situations of apprenticeship learning) is perhaps the most pervasive and salient example of a way of establishing the exchange value of knowledge. Test-taking then becomes a new parasitic practice, the goal of which is to increase the exchange value of learning independently of its use value. (p. 112)

Hence, assessment can be detrimental to learning if it is done merely to increase the exchange value at the expense of its use value. In fact this fundamental contradiction in assessment is being addressed by the researchers and practitioners in higher education by focusing on the formative function of assessment. As argued by Murphy

(2006), to use assessment for improving learning two requirements need to be met. First, the learning goals need to be aligned with the assessment goals. Second, assessment should provide the learners with constructive feedback on how they are progressing in their learning. However, as reported by the students of this particular undergraduate course, they rarely receive written feedback on their assignments and examinations. Therefore the continuous assessment used in the psychology course did not serve a formative function of improving students' learning.

As revealed in the review of research on assessment by Black and William (1998), formative assessment does improve learning. However, as argued by Yorke (2003), the distinction between summative and formative assessment is not sharp in higher education. Students are expected to learn from whatever feedback is provided and therefore it is simultaneously formative and summative because the grade awarded contributes to the final grade. Summative assessment in relation to a curriculum component can act formatively if the students learn from them (Yorke, 2003). However, in this particular case the students only got a grade and most of the time they were given it in the next semester or at the end of the current semester. Therefore, continuous assessment served only a summative function in this particular situation. To use assessment to improve learning it is necessary to conceptualise it as a formative practice, where the lecturers have to be involved in 'negotiation of the task and quality criteria of a particular piece of work or performance through a continuing dialogue with groups of students' (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003, p.483).

All but one lecturer viewed assessment from a measurement perspective and their views appeared to be nurtured by their past experiences of learning and teaching. Institutional practices of allocating a greater proportion of marks for examinations and not publishing expected standards or marking criteria also undermined the formative function of assessment. As a result students have also had a scanty notion of the usefulness of assessment for improving learning as reported in other studies (MacLellan, 2001). Thus, the historically accumulated characteristics or historicity (Engeström, 2001) of the lecturers (community) and assessment practices (tools) also affected student learning in the course.

3. Emphasis on theoretical knowledge vs. —— **Curriculum**
   Emphasis on practical knowledge

2. Interactive sharing of theory and practical knowledge vs.
Imparting theory and abstract knowledge —— **Teaching**

1. Assessment for grading and selection vs.—— **Assessment**
Assessment for improving learning

Object

Students

Community

Learning to enhance
employability
vs.
Learning for intrinsic
worth of education

**Figure 11: Tensions between the object and tools in the activity system
where transmission approaches to teaching are used**

Note: The curved arrows indicate the tensions between the object and tools

182

The overall picture emerging from the analysis in this section can be summarised as in Figure11. The mismatch between students' expectations arising from their collective purpose (object) and the realities of curriculum, teaching and assessment that they experience gave rise to the tensions between the object and the tools (1, 2 and 3) as depicted in Figure 11. When teaching, curriculum and assessment practices are mainly based on transmission approaches hence students may get limited opportunities to express and share their own ideas and to develop both practical and thinking skills that contribute to the enhancement of employability. Also the development of deeper understanding of the subject is limited. Since the students are collectively interested in both enhancing their employability skills as well as obtaining a good general education of intrinsic worth, their learning is affected by the tensions arising from the mismatch between their expectations and realities that they experience on the course. These tensions motivated the lecturers and the students to take actions collectively and individually to change the situation. In the next section I shall discuss innovations and change attempted by one of the lecturers and the complexities arising from them.

4.4   Tensions arising from attempts to bringing about innovation and change

As discussed in the above, both students and lecturers were concerned about the lack of opportunities in the psychology course for practical experiences and training by the end of the third year. To address this felt need, one of the lecturers introduced some innovations in the courses in "counselling psychology" and "advanced personality studies" that he had taught in the final year. These innovations affected the students

by developing tensions or contradictions between the existing institutional assessment practices and the innovations in curriculum and teaching practices introduced to the particular components. The case of the course on Advanced Personality Studies (APS) that I shall discuss in this section is particularly illuminating in this regard.

The course on APS contained multiple innovations in relation to the curriculum offered, teaching methods and assessments. The lecturer used a social constructive approach (Brophy, 2002) to curriculum and teaching in these two courses. The key assumption in these approaches to teaching is that, 'learning involves negotiating understandings through dialogue or discourse shared by two or more members' (Brophy, 2002, p. ix). Unlike in the other courses, the lecturer and students collectively defined the curriculum of this course by deliberating on the topics for seminars. Instead of the lecture method, group presentations, role plays and small group and whole class discussions were used as teaching methods by the students and their lecturer. Assessment included a written assignment, presentations and an end semester examination, but the nature of the written assignment and presentations was quite different from the usual assessment tasks used in the undergraduate course. In the analysis of the students' views on the purposes, curriculum, teaching and assessment in this particular course there emerged tensions between the institutional assessment practices and the collective purpose, curriculum and teaching processes as discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.4.1 The collective purpose and assessment

Different students emphasised different aspects about the purposes of the APS course in the interview that I had had with them during the course. Many students reported that the course had been an opportunity to develop practical skills of presentations, group facilitation and participation in discussions', and also critical thinking. As one student articulated:

> Students had a lot of freedom to search for knowledge, in an area of their liking and to express their own views on it. I think everybody should have an independent view. It can either be right or wrong in the *others' eyes. However, the important thing is* to express this view.
> -Rev. A(Interview 3)

In contrast to the above view, some other students particularly expressed the view that their purpose in participating in the course is to use the contents of the discussions to answer questions in the examination:

> The main reason for participation in these sessions is that the content discussed in the sessions is necessary to answer the questions in the examination. Otherwise there was no special reason.
> -Supuni (Reflective account)

Thus, the students' understanding of the collective purpose of this particular course component had been affected by assessment practices on the one hand and on the other hand by their need to get a good general education of intrinsic worth.

According to the lecturer, the purpose of the course was personality development of students by improving self-awareness, critical thinking and skills in presentations and group facilitation. The object according to the lecturer was well thought out and elaborated. It also has been shaped by his own beliefs, experiences, professional

knowledge that he had gained as a practising counsellor as well as a psychologist. It embodied the lecturer's motive of facilitating students' personality development in relation to counselling practice:

> Their personality development was one of my goals, because you *know you can't really think of a client's personality development first,* without really knowing and examining and going through your own personality development. So they have to address questions like *'gender' those things are very pertinent to their own personality. I don't care if they think men are superior to women. But they need to* first look at the context and then decide. That is ok. Most of the time they have just absorbed it from the down side and just accept it. So, *that shouldn't be…especially in an academic environment.* -T$_4$ (interview)

He further clarified his stance by emphasising self-awareness rather than knowledge:

> …So in my course, especially in counselling we always talk about the awareness. Because your values are going to influence how you do *your job. …If you want to be a psychologist then you have to really* examine your values.   -T$_4$ (interview)

In the actual implementation of the course the lecturer reiterated these purposes, as and when he found it necessary.

The comparison of the views of the students and the lecturers on the collective purpose of the course indicates a mismatch between the two. The lecturer emphasised employment-related skills, counselling skills, critical thinking skills and self-awareness. He did not specify a purpose in relation to examinations but the majority of the students had been interested in learning for examination success as discussed in the above. The lecturer had emphasised the intrinsic value of learning while the students had been interested collectively in both intrinsic (need to develop skills and

186

understanding) and extrinsic (need to do better in examinations to obtain better grades) values of learning. The students at this point were confronted with two different sets of values implicated in their collective purpose of learning and the institutional assessment practices. Therefore, there arose a contradiction or a tension between the institutional assessment practices and the collective purpose of learning in the particular component in the form of **learning for developing understanding and skills vs. learning for success in examinations.**

One reason for this tension can be that the students' had historically developed needs, beliefs, expectations and dispositions towards learning. The rewards system based on a norm-referenced assessment and assessment practices based on behavioural theories and scientific measurement (Shepard, 2000) and the beliefs, expectations and experiences nurtured by teaching, curriculum and assessment, which had been based on transmission approaches (Brophy, 2002) used in schools and in the first three years of the university course, seem to have affected the students' emphasis on examinations and extrinsic rewards. At this point, I think it is useful to examine the characteristics or the assumptions behind transmission and social constructive approaches to teaching and learning.

Table 9 sets out the differences between the two approaches. As per the table, the two approaches differ from each other in the following ways:

i)   their assumptions about the nature of knowledge,

ii)   the roles of the teachers and students,

iii)   the nature of interaction between them,

iv)   what is learned by the students in the process.

Table 9: The differences between transmission and social constructive approaches to teaching and learning

Transmission approaches	Social construction approaches
Knowledge as a fixed body of information transmitted from teacher or text to students	Knowledge as developing interpretations co-constructed through discussions
Texts, teacher authoritative sources of expert knowledge to which students defer.	Authority for constructed knowledge resides in the arguments and evidence cited in its support by students as well as by text or teacher; everyone has expertise to contribute
The teacher is responsible for managing students' learning by providing information and leading students through activities and assignments.	The teacher and students share responsibility for initiating and guiding learning efforts.
The teacher explains, checks for understanding, and judges correctness of students' responses.	The teacher acts as a discussion leader who poses questions, seeks clarifications, promotes dialogue, helps group recognise areas of consensus, and of continuing disagreement.
Students memorise or replicate what has been explicated or modelled.	Students strive to make sense of new input by relating it to their prior knowledge and by collaborating in dialogue with others to co-construct shared understanding.
Students work mostly alone, practising what has been transmitted to them in order to prepare themselves to compete for rewards by reproducing it on demand.	Students collaborate by acting as a learning community that construct shared understandings through sustained dialogue.

Source: Adapted from Brophy (2002, p. x)

The students who had been exposed to the social constructive approach to teaching and learning for the first time in their course appeared to have found the teaching and curriculum practices conflicted with their familiar assumptions and expectations nurtured in transmission approaches to teaching, learning and assessment based on scientific measurement. This conflict also reflected in their views about curriculum and teaching in the advanced personality course as discussed in the next two sub sections.

4.4.2 Curriculum and assessment

The 'Advanced Studies in Personality' is a course offered in the second semester of the final year. The curriculum of this particular course unit was changed with the initiative of the lecturer and through the participation of students. The lecturer had organised the course as a series of student presentations. Students and the lecturer had deliberated and agreed upon ten different topics for their presentations at the beginning of the course. A total of three hours per week was allocated for this course. A two-hour time period on Tuesdays was used for students' presentations. The lecturer used the remaining one-hour on Wednesdays to discuss issues arising from the previous day's discussions. In the two-hour session, students in groups of three had to make a presentation and lead a discussion on a topic that they had chosen from the ten topics agreed by the whole group at the beginning of the course. Thus, the students and their lecturer attempted to construct the curriculum collaboratively in this particular course.

The lecturer explained the rationale for the change in the curriculum by pointing out that the students had studied theories of personality in many courses offered in their previous years. He stated that he had decided to use the time allocated for the course to develop employment-related skills as well as critical thinking skills using student centred methods. He also expressed the view that he believed the students would benefit by incorporating personality development and counselling, because most of them have the intention of becoming counsellors. However, the analysis of the students' views indicates differences between the lecturer's intentions and the interpretations of the students.

Initially almost all students expressed enthusiasm over these innovations. A typical comment in was:

> In this course we had to find our own topic and teach that to other students. It is not like waiting to receive knowledge from the lecturer when he is teaching. We had to find out the content. We have learned to work in teams, presentation skills. We had to work hard and I think it is good. Abeya (Interview 3)

The students appeared to be happy about the freedom given to them for the selection of contents and the method of delivery, which compelled them to search for knowledge and work in teams. Unlike in the teacher-centred methods in transmission approaches the students had to be actively involved in constructing the curriculum.

Students in their reflective comments further elaborated that the course had helped them to widen their knowledge (7/17), to develop critical thinking (7/17), presentation skills (4/17) and counselling skills (3/17).

Of the students (7/17) who reported that the course had helped them to widen their knowledge, five indicated that their sole purpose in participation in the course was to acquire knowledge for examinations. These students' views suggested that they considered their participation in group discussions as a means of accessing and acquiring knowledge from others. One student articulated this view as follows:

> Here we discuss things in groups. That is very good. I think even in our exams we usually write our own ideas. But when we discuss in *groups we can incorporate other students' views into our answers. So,* I think it helps me to write my answers in novel ways. – Ama (Interview 3)

The above comment suggests that the student viewed knowledge as a 'thing' to be acquired rather than a process that involved developing interpretations co-constructed through discussion (Brophy, 2002). In my opinion, this particular view of knowledge is nurtured by the students' continued experiences in participating in courses mainly based on the lecture method and the assessment processes dominated by examinations, which test whether the students had acquired the knowledge imparted in lectures as implied in the following extract:

Mali : I think we learned only about 10% of it. Sir, talks about lot of things. *But we feel that we don't know anything... like. I like if he explains theory first. Then he can introduce practical activities. He doesn't take theory seriously. When we do only practical activities we don't get* adequate knowledge.

I : So, how does it affect your learning?

Mali : In other courses most of the lecturers allowed us to write notes and then we could use them to prepare for examinations. I think it is better, *but here, in this class we don't have anything to read for exams.*

- (Interview 3)

The student's view suggests that she considered knowledge as an entity to be acquired and stored for later use in examinations. She quantifies and compares the 'knowledge' that she was able to acquire in the class and the amount of knowledge that she should have acquired. She also expresses her preference for the lecture method and note taking, which makes the preparation for examinations easier. Thus the students' views of the curriculum innovation were based on their beliefs and assumptions about 'knowledge' and the role of the teacher. Many other students (6/15) shared this view, when they reported that they expected additional input from the lecturer. These assumptions contrasted with the assumptions of social constructivist teaching (Brophy, 2002) and aligned more with those of transmission approaches that are highlighted in Table 9.

As indicated at the beginning of this section, in this particular course the students are required to be independent of the lecturer, to select the topics and contents for discussions, method of delivery, and assessment. However, the familiar examination-dominated assessment processes where 80% of total marks was assigned to examinations, required the students to collect information and memorise them to be used in the tests. Thus, many students finally expressed the view that they should have adhered to the given curriculum rather than to the collaboratively constructed one. As one student articulated:

> I think it is a weakness that we failed to discuss the topics given in the syllabus of advanced personality and focus on topics suggested by the students. It is not clear for me, whether the purpose of this change was *to develop students' abilities in presentations or to change the teacher'*s method of teaching. -Rev. A (reflective comments)

Here the students expressed their concern about abandoning the given syllabus or the curriculum and focusing on a curriculum collaboratively constructed by the students and the lecturer. The students also appear to be confused about the actual purpose of the course, while it was in implementation. Thus, there was a mismatch between the lecturer's reported intentions and the students' understandings of those intentions. Students' initial enthusiasm on freedom to choose the contents, methods and assessments appeared to have faded away towards the end of the course nearing examinations. Thus, there emerged a tension or a dilemma between curriculum and assessment in the form of **independence for constructing the curriculum** Vs **dependence on given curriculum**.

4.4.3   Teaching and assessment

The methods of teaching used in this particular course unit were students' group presentations, small group and whole group discussions. Despite their concerns about the lack of a set of notes for preparing for examinations students reported that the methods of teaching used in the course had helped them to develop skills in presentations and critical thinking:

> We had to explore facts on the discussion topics, to think from
> different perspectives, to make arguments and counterarguments and
> to use the previous knowledge we already had in these discussions.

> Sama (Reflective comments)

Thus, the student's comment suggested that she valued the opportunities that she had to be engaged in critical thinking. However, some other students reported drawbacks in this method of teaching. These weaknesses included the lack of teacher input at the

beginning of the sessions and students' inadequate preparation for presentations. Minimal teacher guidance in instruction is now considered as less effective and less efficient (Kirschner et al, 2006) where the learners do not have sufficient prior knowledge to provide 'internal' guidance. As reported in the previous sub-section, the lecturer assumed that the students had sufficient prior knowledge about personality theory and counselling to use that knowledge to discuss the issues relevant to counselling practice. But some students seemed unable to incorporate what had been discussed in the class into an integrated whole as highlighted in the following extracts from reflective comments and the focus group interview:

> It is doubtful whether we have gained adequate subject content. Now *we can't remember the facts presented in some sessions. So we have to* collect facts on them for the examination. That is a burden.
>
> <div align="right">Indu (Reflective comments)</div>

> There are many other things in it. It is good that the students are directed to study the topic. But at the beginning the teacher should guide the students. Then the students can do the activity according to that guidance. That was not there. Therefore the subject content that we received was not rich enough at times. It is useless when we bring this and that to the presentation and present everything.
>
> <div align="right">Rev. P (Focus Group Interview)</div>

However, in contrast to the views of the above students, a few students reported that they recognised that the curriculum and the methods of teaching used by the lecturer, assumed a different role from the students:

> We get a lot of facts from the lectures. The lecturers give all the theories and facts. Here, we were asked to refer books, but I could not read them. We searched the knowledge that we needed to make our presentation. But in other days we just came and listened to others. That is a weakness on our part. If we wanted we could have come

prepared for discussions by reading the necessary material. We know *that is how we should have done. But it didn't happen.*

<div align="right">Rev. B (Interview 3)</div>

Thus, contrary to the assumption of the lecturer, students had lacked the commitment to be fully engaged in the task assigned for them, to seek knowledge from different sources and come prepared to contribute to the class discussions. As mentioned earlier, the lecturer had wanted to use student-centred teaching to develop critical thinking skills among students and had assumed that the students had sufficient prior knowledge about personality theories to discuss the issues identified for analysis. However, as it emerged in the analysis, many of the students had preferred teacher-centred methods of teaching. This may be due to their familiarity of having an examination-dominated assessment system and also possibly due to the lack of motivation to take up the additional roles assigned to them. Therefore, the students' preference for methods of teaching tended to be dependent on their own goals, motivations and past experiences as well as the demands of institutional assessment practices which emphasised grading and selection.

As it emerged in the analysis of students' responses in the reflective comments, interviews, and focus group interviews, on the one hand the students valued the opportunities provided in the course to develop their presentation skills, critical thinking skills, and counselling skills. On the other hand they had been concerned about the lack of a clearly organised set of facts in the form of a lecture note to prepare for their examinations. Their preference for the lecture method and inputs from the lecturer was as a result of this particular need. Therefore, the collective

views of the students reflected a tension or a contradiction between the assessment system, which had been based on behavioural approaches and the social constructive teaching methods used in the course in the form of **developing skills and understanding vs. a**cquiring a body of knowledge to be used in examinations. The tensions between assessment and other elements of the activity system so far discussed in this section are depicted (1, 2 and 3) in Figure12.

1. *Independence for co-construction of curriculum vs* **Curriculum**
   Dependence on given curriculum
                                                              1

   Assessment for grading and selection vs. **Assessment**
   Assessment for improving learning

                                              2   3

2. *Developing skills and understanding vs.*
   Acquiring a body of knowledge **Teaching**

Object   3. *Learning for developing*
                      understanding and
Subjects   *skills*
                         Vs.
                   Learning for success in
                   examinations

Community

Figure 12: The tensions between the institutional assessment practices and the object, curriculum and teaching

The institutional practices of examination-dominated assessment affected the way students collectively viewed their purpose of learning as well as how they engaged with the curriculum and teaching used in this particular component of the

196

undergraduate course. The assessment practices had had a backwash effect on teaching, learning and curriculum as reported in the study by Havnes (2004) on the relationship between examinations and educational practices. The findings of this study also support the view that it is insufficient to conceptualise the relationship between assessment and learning as an interaction between two factors (Havnes, 2004). Assessment affects the other elements of the learning environment by creating tensions between it and those other elements as I discussed in the final section of this chapter. Therefore the effects of assessment on student learning have to be studied together with its effects on the other elements of the learning environment.

Students' familiar assumptions internalised throughout their past educational experiences regarding the roles of students and teachers in classrooms where transmission approaches dominated, seemed to have been challenged in the social constructivist methods used in the APS course. The assessment practices had been based on behavioural theories while the curriculum and teaching had been based on social constructive theories. The tensions or the dilemmas that appeared between assessment practices, curriculum and teaching were also due to the historically developed characteristics of those elements which were based on different theoretical traditions. Hence, the history of the students and also curriculum, teaching and assessment practices affected the student learning in the UG course.

Another issue emerging from this analysis is the lack of dialogue between students and their lecturer about how and what they will learn in the course during its implementation. According to the lecturer's view, he did not expect to impart a

content to be used for answering examination questions. He wanted the students to develop process skills by actively engaging in whole class and small group discussions, presentations and questioning. The students, although they reported that they valued the opportunities to develop skills of presentation, team work and critical thinking, were worried about lack of content knowledge in the form of a lecture note to be used in examinations. However, neither the lecturer nor the students conveyed their concerns to the other or discussed about the purpose and the processes used in the course during its implementation. Mann (2003), in her study of a higher education classroom also found a similar situation where there were mismatches between students' and their lecturer's experiences of teaching and learning. She suggests that to improve student learning it may be necessary to align 'intentions, experiences and actions of teachers and students through dialogue and negotiation in the classroom' (p.223). Similarly, the above findings also highlight the need to provide opportunities in the classrooms to discuss and negotiate the lecturer's and the students' concerns as well as the purposes and processes used in their courses.

Findings of the present study also support the widely acknowledged view that 'assessment directs learning' (Crooks, 1988; Biggs, 1998; Shepard, 2000; Murphy, 2006). However, these findings also assert that assessment is not the only demand that affects student learning. Students' collective purpose of learning, which is characterised by the expectations to find an employment after graduation and to receive a good education of intrinsic worth is also an increasingly important factor that affect student learning.

The above findings provides evidence to conclude that the context of students' learning in the undergraduate course is a historically evolving dynamic system affected by a number of interacting individual social, cultural and historical factors.

4.5 Conclusion

The analysis of students' experiences of the undergraduate course over the four year time period provided evidence to conclude that the students' understanding of their purposes, and curriculum, teaching and assessment practices is a gradual process mediated by those practices, social relationships and their own past educational histories. Students faced competing demands arising from their collective purpose as well as from the institutional assessment practices over the four year duration of their course. So, assessment is not the only demand that affects student learning in undergraduate education. Students' needs to acquire employability skills and a good education of intrinsic value which are reflected in their collective purpose also affect what and how they learn.

Tensions emerged first, between the collective purpose of students and the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices of the course in classrooms where teaching had been based on transmission approaches. In contrast to that, tensions emerged between the institutional assessment practices based on a measurement paradigm and the collective purpose, teaching and curriculum in the APS course where teaching had been based on social constructive approaches. The assessment

practices had had a backwash effect on teaching and curriculum practices of this particular course component.

In addition to the above mentioned competing demands arising from the collective purpose and the assessment practices, the students' past experiences had also affected the way they viewed and engaged with teaching, assessment and the curriculum processes. Furthermore, there had been mismatches between the assumptions, beliefs and expectations of the students and their lecturers about the purposes as well as the teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment processes used in the course. So, the lack of dialogue between students and their lecturers about what and how they learned during the implementation of the course was another problem that emerged in the learning context.

The above findings suggest that student learning in the undergraduate course is a historically evolving dynamic process which is mediated by a number of individual, social, historical and cultural factors.

In this chapter I have analysed how the students' learning is affected by the contextual demands. In the next chapter I address the question of how the students use affordances (opportunities) in the context to respond to the contextual demands and how their collective actions to change their object or the collective purpose and the context have in turn helped them to achieve expansive learning. Moreover, I shall discuss the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level.

Chapter Five: Students' strategies for achieving expansive learning

5.0   Introduction

In the previous chapter, I concluded with supporting evidence that the students in the particular undergraduate course were subjected to competing demands arising from its collective purpose and also from the institutional assessment practices. In this chapter, my specific purpose is to discuss how the students collectively and individually responded to these demands using the affordances in the context and how they achieved expansive learning of varying degrees by attempting to change their object and the context. This chapter addresses, in particular, the final two research questions of my study. These are:

- **How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?**

- **What are the outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at the individual level?**

It emerges in the analysis that the students in this particular course were pulled in two different directions due to the competing demands arising from its collective purpose (object) and the assessment practices. Students collectively responded to these demands in many interesting ways. Their dominant collective actions in response to the demand arising from the institutional assessment practices for earning good grades included maximising grades, engaging in interpersonal competition and mimicking mastery. In response to the demand for enhancing employability, their

dominant collective actions were enrolling in different vocational courses conducted by the university and also by outside organisations, and utilising the affordances in the context for developing their 'practical skills'.

The analysis of students' reported outcomes suggests that the students have achieved expansive learning at varying degrees by the end of the course. Students and their lecturer's collective attempts to change their collective purpose (object) and the context have, in turn, transformed the identities of students by increasing their action possibilities. This process of expansive learning is facilitated by the opportunities that the students had in the course in their final year to interact with different people in a variety of settings, using different tools such as one-to-one interactions, negotiations, group activities and discussions, role plays, simulations and self and collective reflections.

Cross case analysis of the stories of three students who achieved first class degrees, as well as varying degrees of expansive learning, suggests five interacting cognitive and affective factors that affect expansive learning. These interacting factors are: the *student's* past history of education, goal setting, motivation to transform the identities, ability to mobilise individual, cultural and social resources, and their views about the object and tools used in the course. These factors do not operate within individuals in isolation but they interact with each other in unique socio-cultural contexts of learning of each individual. Therefore, the differences among the individuals' levels of expansive learning ultimately depend on how those individual

factors operate within the socio-cultural contexts of each individual. Therefore, I argue that an analysis of student learning in undergraduate education, using the activity theory, helps us to understand it as a dialectical change process of expansive learning. This process involves a complex interaction of both contextual and individual factors, as presented in the new model for understanding student learning in undergraduate education, which I shall present at the end of this chapter.

In this chapter, I provide evidence to support the above argument in four main sections. First, I discuss how the students collectively responded to the competing demands arising from the object and the assessment practices (Section 5.1). Second, I move on to analyse students' reported outcomes to explore whether they provide evidence of expansive learning. Third, I shall discuss how the students' engagement with the innovations helped them to achieve expansive learning (Section 5.2). Finally, I use cross case analysis of the stories of three different students who appeared to have achieved different levels of expansive learning to identify the factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level (Section 5.3) and suggest a new model for understanding student learning in undergraduate education by synthesising the key findings of this research (Section 5.4).

5.1 Taking action whilst being pulled into two different directions

It emerged in the analysis presented in chapter 4, that students in the psychology course had been confronted by two interconnected dilemmas pertaining to the institutional practices of assessment and the collective purpose (object) of the course (see Figure 13).

Assessment for earning good grades

Learning for intrinsic worth of education

Students' collective actions

Learning to enhance employability

Assessment for Learning
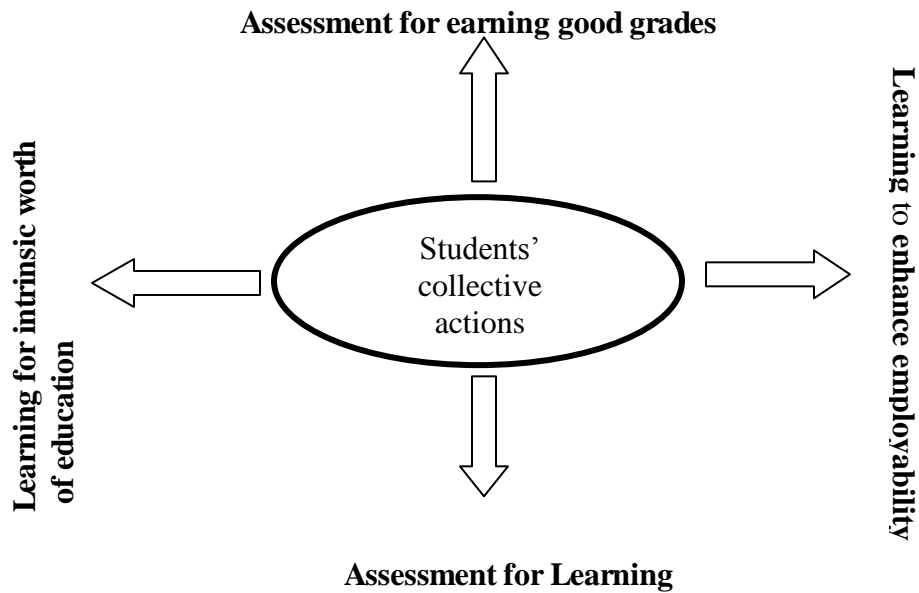
Figure 13: The dilemmas pertaining to the object and assessment that affect students' collective responses

The competing values embedded in the assessment practices as well as the collective purpose of the undergraduate course depicted in Figure 13 pull the students in two different directions. Students' collective actions tend to be geared towards the polars, which they valued and found affordances in the context. When they realised that the assessment system provided affordances to earn a good degree by achieving better grades in examinations, they concentrated more on examinations than on other things, as I detailed in chapter 4. Similarly, when they faced the problem of the lack of concern for developing 'practical skills' on the course, the students collectively looked for strategies to enhance their employability. In the following sub-sections, I shall discuss these emergent collective actions of the students, enacted in response to the above mentioned demands.

5.1.1 Collective action to earn good grades

The continuous assessment system and the degree classification system used in the University have tended to affect student learning in many ways. The students viewed the continuous assessment as a vehicle to achieve good grades that ultimately allowed them to earn a first class or a second class upper division pass. As discussed in the previous chapter, in their first year they appeared to be in a pursuit to maximise grades to get selected to follow the 'special degree' course. In the remaining three years also, they seemed to be in pursuit to achieve good grades to earn or secure a good degree. A typical response which further illustrates this situation is:

> For a first, twenty *'A's* are necessary. But for an upper second you need altogether twenty *'A's and 'B+'s. I need only two "A" s more to achieve a second upper. I need that. I don't expect anything below that. If you can't* get at least a second upper it is useless to do a *'special degree'*.
>
> Darshi, (Interview 3)

The students' need to obtain a good degree classification appeared to be related to their belief that earning a better degree would give them a competitive advantage in their pursuit of finding employment after graduation. A similar situation is reported in a study done in the UK, where the students expressed their need to obtain better credentials to enhance their employability (Tomlinson, 2008). To obtain a good degree by getting good grades, the students in the present study have used a variety of strategies that included maximising grades, competition and mimicking mastery to achieve desired results. These strategies that emerged in the analysis are discussed in the following sub sections.

5.1.1.1 Maximising grades:

Students tended to use a variety of strategies to maximise grades (Becker et al, 1968; Gibbs, 2006), which included behavioural, cognitive and constructive strategies. One student articulated how she used such strategies to earn better grades as follows:

> In a lecture we only get a rough sketch of a lesson. When I was in the 3rd year I have borrowed notes and relevant books for the 4th year from a senior student who was friendly with me. She had a first class and passed out last year. She gave her notes, past papers and assignments to me. Suppose we have done a lesson on language development I would prepare a separate lesson using the l*ecturer's and the senior Akka* '[7]s note and facts collected by *reading the books in the library. ...I do not rely on the lecture note. I study* the note that I have prepared for the exam and include practical examples in the answers and assignments. I think I get good grades because I include something more than what is in the lecture note.   Dilki (Interview 3)

The extract suggests that the student has set a goal to get good grades and has used social relationships and the affordances in the context to earn better grades by demonstrating in her assessment tasks, her knowledge and understanding developed using sources or tools other than the lecture note. Students also reported self regulation strategies (Pintrich, 2004) that they used to obtain better grades in examinations as in the following extracts:

> *...As a strategy I wanted to get away from friends. I felt that I did less work* when I was with friends. There was no control; we went for things other than studies such as film festivals, musicals etc.. I used excuses to get away from my friends and went to the reading room.
>
> Priya, (Interview 3)

> I do not even send letters home, during study leave when I am preparing for exams.   Supuni,(Interview 1)

206

Thus the students appeared to use self-regulation strategies which are 'systematic efforts to direct thoughts, feelings and actions, towards the attainment of one's goals (Zimmerman, 2000). These strategies included control of context, time, cognition and affect (Pintrich, 2004) as reflected in the students' comments cited above.

Another strategy the students reported was guessing the marking criteria used by different lecturers and responding accordingly. A typical response was:

> I : From his written feedback, were you able to learn something?
> Sisie : I think so. He expects us to substantiate practically what we say. We have to give evidence or examples to support what we *write. Then he becomes 'satis' (satisfied). Therefore we tend to write that kind of things. .....Even for the exam. We und*erstand from the things that our lecturers say, that they give marks *according to the number of pages… But sir is not like that. We* understand that from what he says. Then we do not try to write a lot.
> I : Then how would you write for him?
> Sisie : Then we have to focus on the content. We have to cover what we want to say briefly. But we have to give examples.
>
> (Interview 3)

The above extract suggests that the students use whatever clues that they get from the lecturers to understand what constitutes 'valid knowledge within the particular context' (Lea and Street, 1998). However, it is a complex process for the students to understand and respond to both implicit and tacit assessment criteria used by different lecturers even in the same discipline as discussed by Sadler (1989) and in previous research (Higgins, 2003; Lea and Street, 1998).

5.1.1.2 Mimicking mastery or achieving mastery:

In an in-depth analysis of one of the written assignments by the students and the responses elicited in the interviews, there emerged the possibility that the students had been able to guess the marking criteria used by the lecturers from the clues that they had got from lecturers in classroom situations and hence mimic the required responses even without mastering the necessary skills. The following extract suggests this possibility:

> I : So, to what extent do you think that the feedback is useful?
>
> Kumi : When I look at the assignment again I feel that oh!, this should have been written like this..So it is useful. We can get an idea how to do the next assignment. Now we know how to *answer the sir's questions. From the things he writes on the* assignment we could guess the kind of answer that he expects.
>
> I : Then, what kind of answer do you think he expects?
>
> Kumi *: He expects, for example if we take counselling he looks at… our attitudes and social factors … how do they affect it? So we* need to cover all these things. So, for example, it is better to discuss how the other things around it affect the theory, than to say that there is a theory likes this and therefore such and such things can happen. So, we write like that. We now know how to *write answers to sir's questions (She laughingly added).*
>
> (Interview 3)

To understand this phenomenon better, I decided to conduct a further analysis of an assignment submitted by the students in the "advanced personality" course in their final year. One of the innovative features of the assessment process used in the advanced personality course, which I discussed in detail in the last chapter, was the written assignment, which had required the students to keep a self-reflective journal about their own personality changes over the semester, and finally to write an essay

on how their life experiences and the course experiences affected their personality development. According to the lecturer:

> *The assignment required the students to 'develop' their 'own'* personality theory, based on their reflections about class presentations as well as their overall day-to-day awareness (emphasis in the original).

<div align="right">-T4 (reflective comment)</div>

Thus, the lecturer expected the students to reflect upon their day-to-day experiences including classroom experiences and to analyse their own personality. The assignment required the students to use higher order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, analysis and synthesis as well as creativity. At this point, it would be interesting to see how the students interpreted the task, how they went about it and what they learned in the process. Interesting findings about the way the students have written their assignments emerged through further analysis.

In this analysis, I used the constant comparative method suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Repeated comparisons within the same, and between different, assignments of different individuals helped me to identify seven categories of actions used by the students in different degrees and their properties or defining characteristics. Then, I again went through the assignments of each student to check whether he/she had used the particular actions and created a frequency table. See Appendix 11 for a copy of the resultant table of this last step. Using the data in that table, I devised Table 10 which indicates the number of students who used different actions in writing their assignments and the defining characteristics of each action.

Table 10: Students' actions and the skills involved in them

Action	Defining characteristics	Number of students used the action
Self-disclosure	Students disclosed aspects of their personality in terms of feelings, psychological traits, emotions, habits, experiences and values.	15
Questioning and arguing	Questioning about theoretical concepts and ideas related to personality and/or the topics discussed in the classroom. Attempting to take a position by contesting other positions and substantiating own position.	14
Analysed the relationship between own values and personality	Disclosed own values and discussed how those values affect their behaviours actions and thoughts or feelings.	14
Relating theoretical concepts in the discussion of own personality	Students related theoretical concepts and ideas in discussing own personality traits, values and actions.	14
Analysis of the effects of class discussions on their personality	How the classroom processes affected their behaviours, attitudes, identities and also weaknesses in their own personalities.	7
Analysis of the effects of other course experiences on personality development	Effects of experiences gained in engaging in work project and prevention programmes on their personality.	3
Developing own theory of personality	Made a statement about what s/he understood about her/his personality through this analysis or stated an own definition about personality.	8

According to Table 10, students seem to have considered collectively that was important to engage in four key actions in their assignments. These actions included: self-disclosure which was used by all 15 students; questioning and arguing (used by

14/15 students) which are necessary in critical thinking; the analysis of own values and personality (14/15) and relating theory to the self-analysis of personality (14/15).

Different students had used these actions at different levels. The students interpreted the assignment task in their own unique ways while collectively focusing on the four key actions mentioned above. An interesting relationship emerged between the students' patterns of response and what their lecturer repeatedly emphasised in the class discussions. According to my observation notes, the lecturer repeatedly emphasised the same actions as and when necessary in the discussion classes as indicated in the following extracts:

> *'You have to be aware at least of your own values and question* how *they might affect your practice of counselling'.*

> *'You have to question whether the Western theories are directly applicable to the Sri Lankan context.'*

> *'You have to be aware of your own position in relation to the issues* such as gender, social and cultural practices and how they might *affect your practice.'* (Observation notes)

In the discussions, the lecturer modelled some of these behaviours, when it was opportune. For example, in the discussion of 'the broken family and personality development', he asked the students 'what is an ideal family in the Sri Lankan context?' As emerged in the analysis of students' reflective comments, such questions appeared to stimulate at least some students to think and read more to find an answer of their own. At the same time, the lecturer's reiterations of the importance of self-reflection, questioning and critical thinking might have affected the way they had written the assignment. The lecturer, in the interview that I had had with him after

marking the assignment, expressed his doubts about the possibility of students mimicking mastery:

> *But in reflection papers I don't know. May be they are so intelligent-* they know what I expect from it. So, even the reflection paper may reflect their perception of me. And they may write according to what they know that I am going to give good grades for. So, therefore I *don't know exactly whether they agree with some of the things I say or* they really had a real shift in the way they are looking at things or whether they just figured out what I needed. (T$_4$-Interview)

Against this backdrop, it is difficult to infer that all students were merely mimicking the responses that they had thought would meet the expectations of the lecturer. Similarly, it is also difficult to ascertain whether all students had learned the required skills for the sake of learning. Therefore, what this analysis suggests is that there is a possibility of students mimicking mastery to earn better grades. All but one student had received an 'A' for the assignment, as indicated in the Table in appendix 11. This kind of scenario is also discussed by Gibbs (2006) as 'faking good' where students 'attempt to present themselves and their work as if they know and understand more than they actually do, for the purpose of maximising grades'. (P.25).

The students appeared to be involved in active meaning making while being shaped by the context and at the same time involved in shaping it (Higgins, 2003). Students in my study have been affected by the institutional practices of assessment and had use the affordances in the context to achieve their own goals. In the next subsection I shall discuss another collective action used by the students for obtaining good grades.

5.1.1.3 Competition versus cooperation and collaboration

Students reported in their interviews that they believed that the faculty controlled the number of good final degree classifications awarded in their subject discipline. Therefore, they tended to be in a highly competitive attitude to obtain better grades than the rest. When I asked the students whether they had '*kuppi classes'* (an informal term used by students to describe the classes conducted by more knowledgeable peers for others), the students responded that there was no such thing in the Faculty of Arts. One student articulated the conflicting and contrasting nature of their competitive attitudes towards assessment and the collaborative ways of living in the halls of residence as follows:

> I : Do your friends help you?
> Supuni : No such special support. Here there is no such thing as cooperation in studying. ..it is bad for me to say such things about my friends. But there is such a thing. Studying is individual all the time. Other times we live as a group. They are ready to help at any time. If I need money they would give or I can borrow even a dress for a special occasion. We share meals etc. But it is different in study situations.
> I : So, what do you think is the reason for such situation?
> Supuni : Class. Everybody expects to get a first. They want to beat others by at least one mark.
> I : So, the competition is to top the batch?
> Supuni : To be a staff member. Five of us have already achieved first classes and the competition is still continuing. Then the competition is to get a staff position. Everybody is worried about the possibility of beating others in exams.

The competitive structure of the assessment and rewards system and the limited opportunities to find good employment seem to induce individualism rather than collaboration for learning. According to Crooks (1988), competitive assessment structures, similar to the one that is operating in this context, determine the success or

failure of students by their performance relative to other students. Individualistic assessment structures reward students on the basis of their own work, independent of the work of other students while the cooperative structures make the students work together in groups, and make judgements of success based on the overall achievements of each group. Crooks (1988) further indicates that competitive structures involve negative interdependence because success for one student reduces the chances that other students will succeed. In individualistic structures there is no interdependence among students while there is a positive interdependence among students in cooperative structures.

According to Crooks (1988), the superiority of cooperative structures over competitive and individualistic structures in promoting student achievement has not been established by research. However, the cooperative learning structures have been found to be beneficial in increasing cohesiveness among the students involved, encouraging helping and within-group tutoring behaviours, especially when group rewards are based on the performance of all the individual group members.

Astin (1987) claims that in higher education, cooperative structures promote mutual trust, both among students and between students and teachers. They also provide a favourable environment for effective feedback, while fostering interpersonal skills that are needed in the community. As I have discussed in this section, the competitive assessment structure operating in the particular undergraduate course promotes values and outcomes that are contrary to those highlighted in policy documents (NEC, 1996a), such as team work, leadership and love for learning, and ideals of higher

214

education which included critical reflection or reflexivity and meta-cognition (Barnett, 1990).

The assessment practices used in the course appear to have exerted opposing pressures on students to learn better and to obtain better grades. Students have collectively tended to respond to the situation by using affordances in the context and adopting strategies to maximise grades, competition and mimicking mastery to obtain a good degree. This kind of backwash effect of assessment on learning has been widely acknowledged in previous research (Crooks, 1988; Biggs, 1998; Havnes, 2004).

So far, I have discussed how the students have responded to the demands arising from assessment practices used in the course. In the next section I shall present how the students collectively responded to the other inter-connected demands arising from their collective purpose which is characterised by their need to enhance employability.

5.1.2 Collective action to enhance employability

The term employability is defined by Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) in the UK as:

> a set of achievements-skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their occupation which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2005, p.221).

The students in my study, at least initially, did not seem to view employability in such a broad sense. They appeared to define it as possessing certain practical knowledge, skills, and paper qualifications as indicated in the following extracts.

> The degree improves your status. It gives you educational qualifications to get a job. It is also a privilege enjoyed by a minority in society.
>
> Saku (Interview 1)

> Our seniors are now doing jobs. When they follow only this course and go for a job they find that they lack practical knowledge. Theory is not enough. They ask us to learn the practical aspects. So, I feel we are handicapped in that sense.
>
> Priya (Interview 2)

Students reported that they expected their degree programme to include practical training components where they could gain practical experience and skills. Policy documents on higher education in Sri Lanka (NEC, 1996a, b; SCHSS, 2002) also do not seem to define the term employability specifically, but expect graduates to acquire certain qualities and skills. Among these qualities and skills are; strong communication skills, information technology skills, the ability to work in teams, cultural and moral sensitivity, a result-oriented outlook, conceptual, analytical and critical thinking, an appreciation of the need for continuous learning, self-discipline, flexibility and the ability to make decisions.

Yorke and Knight (2007) interpret 'employability in terms of suitability for appropriate employment. They argue that it is quite different from actually getting an appropriate job, which is dependent on factors such as the state of the economy and patterns of discrimination in the labour market. They point out the need to view the

term employability not only in terms of what employers claim to be seeking when hiring new graduates, but also in the light of research into human learning, self-theories, efficacy beliefs, metacognition, practical intelligence and self-regulation. Accordingly, they specify four broad student attainments required in relation to employability as follows:

- Evidence of powers of understanding, typically in the form of a good first degree

- Both general and subject specific skills and the capacity to use them appropriately in context;

- Efficacy beliefs and other personal qualities; and

- Metacognition

The students do not seem to have such sophisticated views about the term employability but strongly express the view that their degree programme should prepare them for the world of work.

> We were used to *'shape the paper' (to prepare for examinations and to* get good grades). There we focused only on what the teacher taught and perhaps to add more facts to that using the library and /or internet and passing the exams. That was it. But if we want to learn more about our subject and to make practical use of that knowledge, then it is a different thing. Passing exams is one thing- and practical knowledge does not count in the exams. So it is not a problem for getting good grades. But when you have to use this knowledge, then you need practical training.
>
> Rev. A (Interview 2)

The discussion so far about how the students viewed and defined the issue of employability provides evidence that they have a strong need for enhancing

employability. It emerges in further analysis that they responded to this need basically in two ways, i.e., by enrolling in different vocationally-oriented courses and utilising affordances in the context to enhance practical skills.

5.1.2.1 Enrolling in different vocationally-oriented courses

As discussed in Chapter 4, the majority of students in the sample were concerned about securing employment after the completion of the degree programme. They were of the view that possessing only a good degree will not be sufficient to find a job and therefore they need to acquire additional qualifications:

> I : What do you expect from following all these different courses?
> Priya : They are additional qualifications to the degree. We need them to get a job
> I : Why did you want to do a HRM course?
> Darshi : It is also related to psychology. Other thing is that we need to increase the number of qualifications to get a job.

Limited opportunities in the job market and the high rate of unemployment among graduates (Usvatte-aratchi, 2004; World Bank, 2009) have affected the students' ways of responding to the situation. A similar scenario prevailed in the country in the seventies and Dore (1976) in his study named the phenomena as diploma disease. He used the term to indicate the qualification escalation where students were interested in gaining higher and higher qualifications with the hope of getting a job. Now the situation has changed slightly and the students believe that developing certain kinds of skills and acquiring parallel and even unrelated sets of additional qualifications would enhance their employability. Almost all students in my sample have followed a "diploma in counselling" course conducted by a non-governmental institution to

obtain an additional qualification. Similarly, most of the students who were resident in the university had followed a certificate course in human resource development conducted by a government institution responsible for the development of youth. When I asked the students, about the purpose of following the HRM course they expressed the view that since HRM is related to organisational psychology, following such a course would enhance their eligibility to find related employment. In addition to these two courses, they had also followed certificate/diploma courses in human rights education, conducted by the Centre for Human Rights Education of the same university with the hope that they would also enhance their eligibility to get a job. They reported that they had also followed short-term courses to enhance their IT skills and English language competency. So the time spent in the university appeared to have been a time to collect additional qualifications and acquire 'practical skills' to enhance employability.

However, as argued by Usvatte-aratchi (2004), one reason for high unemployment is the slow growth of the private sector, which is considered as the 'engine of growth' of the economy of Sri Lanka. As a result, the economy is unable to absorb the educated workforce and use it for further development of the economy. Therefore, further research which considers not only educational but also the wider socio-economic and political factors that have influenced the employment of graduates is necessary to understand the implications and consequences of the emergent trend among students, discussed above. The other emerging collective responses of the students to the

demand for enhancing employability, was to use the affordances in the context to develop skills. In the next sub-section I shall discuss this emerging strategy.

5.1.2.2 Utilising affordances in the context to enhance 'practical skills'

Students began to talk about the need for acquiring 'practical skills' from their third year onwards. They seem to have defined 'practical skills' to denote both generic skills and specific employment related skills as implied in the following extracts:

> *When we go out we cannot be confined to theory. ………We need to* know how to apply theory in work situations. If we get training on that it would be easy. In the advanced personality course, sir does not teach theory but he questions how the particular theory applies in a given situation. Then we try to think critically and it helps.
> Sisie (Interview 3)

> *I am trying to improve the practical side. ...We do not understand how* to do counselling yet. So, we need to improve the practical side.
> Darshi (Interview 2)

To develop and practice such skills, the students reported that they had been actively involved in utilising the opportunities provided in the course such as: planning and conducting a prevention programme, work project, dissertation preparation and making group presentations in the advanced personality course. Many of them spoke with enthusiasm about the work they had been doing in those situations as in the following extracts.

> *We have to conduct a programme on 'memory' in a school in relatio*n to the prevention programme. We planned to do it this week. I like that thing very much. But we are unable to do it this Thursday.

> Another group is using the same school. So we have found another school. One of us is doing the dissertation work in this second school.
>
> <div align="right">Darshi (Interview 3)</div>

> I think the first thing in doing the dissertation is to understand how to do research. Other thing is to develop the ability to develop connections and relationships with different institutions. You can learn many such things. I am focusing on the nature of counselling expected by the workers in a garment factory. I hope that experience will help me to be a counsellor in an institutional setting.
>
> <div align="right">Priya (Interview 3)</div>

> I am doing my work project in an MOH. I work as a counsellor there. We have to do sixty hours. Sir asked us to do it only for three months. But they ask us to work for another three months. So I have three more *months…. I'll go there after exams.*
>
> <div align="right">Sisie (Interview 3)</div>

Many of the students reported that they used such opportunities to gain, practice and improve skills that they believed useful. Except for the work project, other activities mentioned above were related to student assessment in the course. Students' views on practical learning experience cited above and the outcomes highlighted by them in the next main section provide some insights about how the use of different tools as well as social relationships mediated and helped them to achieve expansive learning. Allowing the students to face unstructured situations and to work with different people in different settings has been effective in improving their self-efficacy beliefs as well as bringing in transformations in their object and identities, as discussed in the next main section.

5. 2 Engagement with innovations and achieving expansive learning

In Chapter 4, I discussed how the students' view of the object of their learning activity had gradually changed over time, as a result of mediation by teaching,

curriculum and assessment (tools) used in the course, and social relationships. Here, in this chapter, I have discussed so far, how the students had collectively responded to the tensions or the contradictions that they had encountered in the undergraduate course.

The students' changed views, and some of the ways in which they responded to the dilemmas and affordances in the activity system emerged from the analysis seems to have helped them to achieve certain outcomes and to learn expansively. In the next section, my purpose is to discuss the outcomes of the course from the perspective of the students, to explore whether they have achieved expansive transformations and if so, to identify what helped them to learn expansively.

5.2.1   Indications of expansive learning

According to Engeström (1999), expansive transformation takes place when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically different mode of activity. Expansive transformation of an activity system is a collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity. Expansive learning actions start with questioning and analysis of the activity system, which helps to define contradictions and problems. Then it follows the modelling of a solution, testing out, implementing and reflecting on the process (Engeström, 2001). Students' questioning and analysis of the situation of their course in their third year (that I discussed in Chapter 4), their active involvement in resolving contradictions in the activity system (discussed in section 5.1), and the innovations introduced by their lecturer appear to have affected the transformations reported by the students, that I

shall discuss in the following subsections. The students' views suggest that the undergraduate course has helped them to transform their identities and to increase their action possibilities as well as their capacity to understand others and develop interpersonal relationships.

5.2.1.1 Transformation of identities

Generally, I feel that I can do something on my own. Maybe it is due to the nature of this subject. During A/Levels we did our work as directed by our custodians and teachers. But now we are used to doing things on our own. So I feel I can create and organise things on my own.

Rev. A (Interview 3)

I was able to understand myself. I could identify both my strengths and weaknesses, and creative abilities. Even for my dissertation, I chose an intervention study. I could have chosen some writing stuff, but I was interested in the practical aspects. I wanted to do something challenging. There were a lot of barriers and difficulties to overcome in that project. But I could do it because the course experiences have strengthened me.

Sisie (Interview 3)

The students appeared to have developed new identities with different beliefs and abilities. Identity is '... the way a person understands and views himself, and is viewed by others, a perception of self which is fairly constant'.... (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.81). Self awareness and changing self efficacy beliefs seem to help students to develop new identities and to become new people. Many other students reported that they were able to understand their own hidden potential as well as their weaknesses as a result of participating in the course.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), 'learning implies becoming a different person. …..Learning involves the construction of identities' (p.53). It implies that learning is not only changing what people think and do but also making changes in who they are (Bloomer, 2001). According to the activity theory, these kinds of transformations can be defined as expansive learning. Here the students have changed their narrowly defined initial object from learning to secure employment, to learning to face challenges, perhaps in an uncertain future, and thereby to transform identities.

Barnett (2007) asserts these kinds of changes related to personal development as 'becoming oneself', which involves a leap, by the student. "Through the leap, the student throws herself into newness. She ventures into a new place, which she discovers for herself, but in so doing, discovers herself" (p. 55). The students cited above seem to have achieved similar transformations. Therefore, learning in higher education is not only constructing identities (Lave and Wenger, 1991) but also discovering oneself (Barnett, 2007). However, this discovery is never-ending, because "The student's educational being is always in a process of becoming" (Barnett, 2007, p. 67).

5.2.1.2 Increased action possibilities

Initially, the students had vague notions about the object of their learning as discussed in Chapter 4. However, at the end of the course they reported that they were now capable of doing things that were not possible earlier. A typical response was:

I like to be a counsellor now. A friend of mine and I are thinking about opening a counselling centre in the future when we get more experience in the subject. We are not that mature for it now. But after some time we would like to open a centre like that. We are also inclined to go for a government job, if we get a chance. Now they have a plan to recruit counsellors for MOH offices all over the island. There are 184 such offices. So, there will be vacancies.

<div align="right">Anu (Interview 3)</div>

The above extract suggests that the students have also expanded their capacities to engage in new activities involving others, to be of a service to their families and the wider society.

5.2.1.3 Understanding others and managing interpersonal relationships

Many students reported that the course experiences helped them to develop their abilities to understand, work and live with others as highlighted in the following extracts.

When we did counselling we discussed problems of the clients. A lot of family problems were discussed in them. In fact, sometimes I now think as a psychologist about the incidents that happen in my own family. I feel that I was able to solve problems in my family to a great extent by thinking in that way.   Sanda (Interview 3)

I did not get hostel facilities at the beginning of this year. So, I had to *share with others in a room as a 'gajaya'* (slang used to denote one who is illegally enjoying the privileges of the legitimate occupants of the facilities in the hall of residence) for sometime. I was able to develop good relations with them. Initially they ignored me. They treated me as if I was a nuisance to them. I understood their feelings, and kept my cool. Finally they became very friendly with me. In that *situation 'Psychology' came t*o my rescue (laughs).

<div align="right">Abeya (Interview 3)</div>

Thus, the students appear to have improved their capacity to understand others and develop interpersonal relationships using the knowledge of psychology.

In the cultural historical activity theory, learning is conceptualised as an activity system, a whole that constitutes subjects, tools, community, division of labour and rules. Individuals and community contribute to the productive activity not only by ultimate reproduction of society but also by increasing possibilities for themselves (Roth and Lee, 2007). The interaction between the individual and the society helps to achieve expansive learning at the individual and societal level. Expansive learning at the individual level occurs when the above mentioned interaction contributes to 'enlarge the room for manoeuvre' for the individual to create new learning possibilities. Roth and Lee (2007) claim that learning is expansive when:

> ...it contributes to an enlarged room to manoeuvre for the individual whereby new learning possibilities are formed. ...Learning occurs whenever a novel practice, artefact, tool or division of labour at the level of the individual or group within an activity system constitutes new possibility for others (as resource, a form of action to be emulated) leading to an increase in generalised action possibilities and therefore to collective (organisational, societal, cultural) learning. (p. 205)

The students' reported outcomes suggest that they had been able to increase their action possibilities, and to contribute to collective learning in a variety of activity contexts which involved classrooms, families, work places and communal living in halls of residence. Therefore, they have achieved expansive learning. The next question arising from this observation is "how did they achieve expansive learning in this context?" Their engagement with the innovations, which provided them with new tools and also opportunities to interact with different people in different settings, appears to have helped them to achieve expansive learning. In the next sub-section, I explore how the students' engagement with the innovations helped them to achieve expansive learning.

226

5.2.2 Achieving expansive learning by engaging with innovations

Expansive learning involves meta-cognitive reflection on the object and the relationship between the object and other elements of the activity system (Edwards, 2005a). The students' changing views of the object, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, have made them review their ways of handling tools such as the curriculum, teaching and assessment. When they had opportunities to interact with different people in and outside university classrooms, they had to use different tools such as participating in discussions and negotiations, attempting to teach others in their own classrooms, and using different text and materials to collect information to make presentations. These tools and social interactions in different settings helped them to achieve higher order learning by changing their object and at the same time exerting a reverse action (Vygotsky, 1978, p.40) on the individuals to change their identities and to improve their action possibilities to involve others in new activities. So, they have achieved expansive learning through mediation by tools and social relationships while increasing their action possibilities.

In the undergraduate course, the students' expansive learning process started with their questioning and analysing evidence provided by past students who were already doing psychology-related jobs. The lecturers also were concerned about the theory/practice balance in the course, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Then, one of the lecturers modelled a solution by bringing in innovations to the curriculum, teaching and assessment processes (tools), to the particular courses that he had taught to the students in their final year.

227

Innovations in Teaching: The lecturer started to use new tools which included group discussions, simulations, presentations, seminars in teaching. He also introduced new activities such as planning and conducting prevention programmes in schools, factories, and prisons by small groups of students. Students' involvement with the innovations and the dissertation is summarised in Figure14.
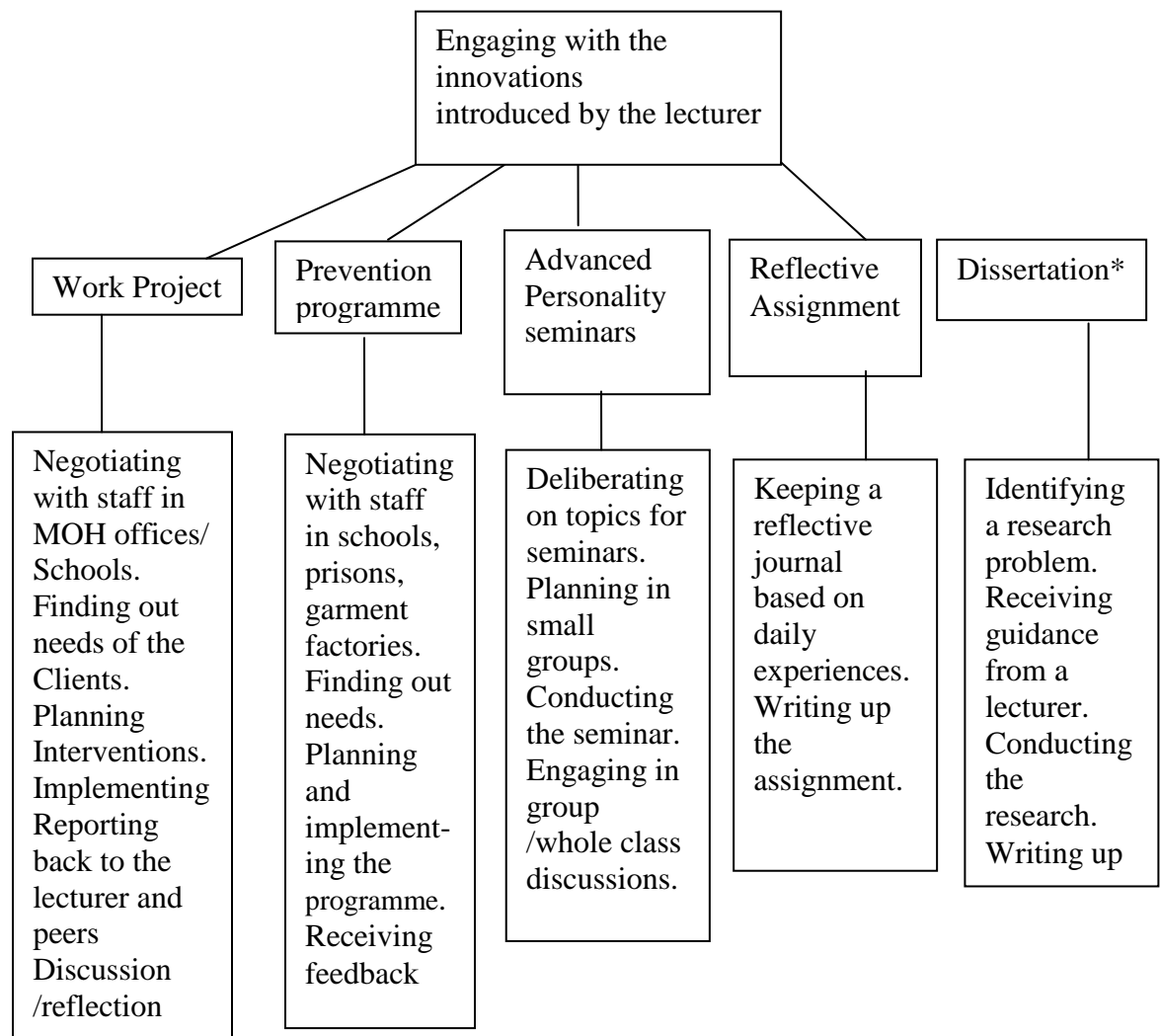
*Dissertation was not an innovation

Figure 14: Students' engagement with innovations and the dissertation in the final year

Innovations in Assessment; One lecturer had introduced a reflective assignment which required the students to keep a journal to record their day- to-day experiences in and outside university and their reflections on them. He also provided oral and written feedback to the students, depending on the task, during implementation and after completion of the prevention programme and the work project. Therefore, students received both formative and summative feedback.

Innovations in the curriculum: The lecturer provided the students with opportunities to plan their own curriculum, by deliberating on the topics for seminars in the advanced personality studies course that he had taught in the final semester, which I discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Moreover, he assigned work projects to students, where they had to work in settings such as schools and the offices of Medical Officers of Health for one day per week over ten weeks. This was an open situation where the students had to be responsible for choosing what to learn and how to learn, with some guidance and supervision by the lecturer. As reported by the students in their interviews, individual students had to collaborate with relevant staff in those settings to gain useful experiences in counselling practice. Each week, they shared their experiences with the lecturer who provided guidance, and with peers in small groups. The lecturer used these opportunities to allow students to engage in collective reflection and collaborative learning. Hence, the students had to use new tools such as negotiating with staff and clients, and engaging in counselling practice, self-reflection and collective reflections on their object of learning and the effects of their actions on it.

As a result of the above innovations, the activity system has also been transformed into a more complex network of interactive activity systems (See Figure 15), which embraces a new form of object, new tools and new kinds of social relationships.
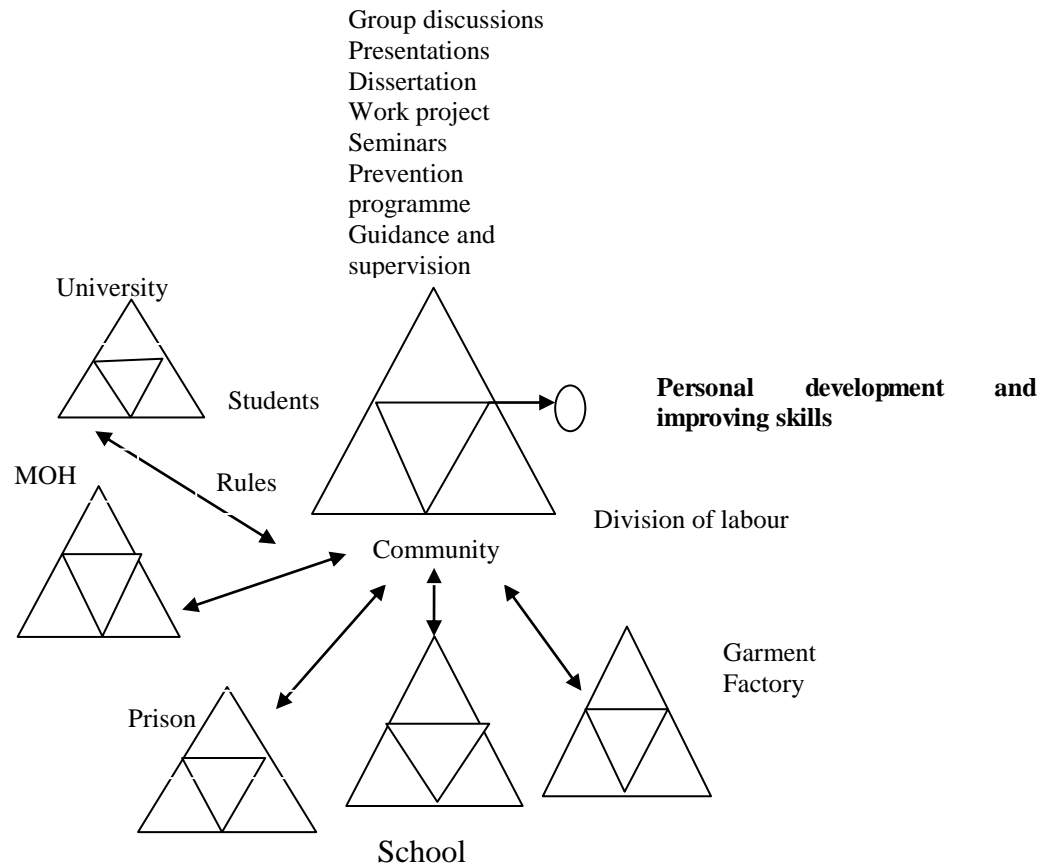
Figure 15: The interacting network of student learning activity in its final semester.

As depicted in Figure 15, the activity system has been transformed into a complex system where students had to interact with multiple different participants, to use new tools and form new social relationships. Students' and the lecturer's collaborative action to transform their object and the activity context have in turn transformed the students and their interactions with the community and tools. Therefore, a reciprocal change appeared between the students' identities and their object as a result of their

attempt to change the object of their learning for personal development and improving skills. According to Roth (2004), this is because of the dialectical relationship between the object and the subject of activity. This dialectical relationship between the object and subject is a result of the twofold nature of the object, which is illustrated in Leont'ev's writings. The object of 'activity' is twofold:

> ...first, in its independent existence as subordinating to itself and transforming the activity of the subject; second as an image of the action, as a product of its property of psychological reflection [italics added by Roth] that is realised as an activity of the subject (Leont'ev cited in Roth, 2004, p. 3).

Accordingly, Roth and Lee (2007) further argue that the object of activity exists twice, 'first, as a material entity and second as a vision or an image, both in its present state and how people envisage it in the future' (p. 198). Therefore the object exists simultaneously outside of the subject as a material entity and as an image or a vision inside the subject. According to Roth and Lee (2007) this relationship between the object and the subject suggests that it is not possible to consider the subjects as separate entities for analysis and theorise independently. Therefore, what happens in learning is a mutual transformation of the object and the subject. As explained by Roth and Lee (2007):

> What the relevant object is in actions and activities observed depends on who the acting subject is, and the nature of the relevant subject depends on the nature of the object (Lave, Murtaugh and de la Rocha, 1984). Hence, learning is equivalent to mutual change of object and subject in the process of activity; human beings plan and change the material world and societal life just as these settings mutually transform agents and the nature of their interactions with each other (Roth and Lee, 2007, p. 198)

Therefore, the transformation of the students' collaborative purpose and their identities is a result of the mutual transformation in the object and subjects that are dialectically related to each other.

The students' object of their learning was transformed to embody a new motive of personal development and improving skills. This has, in turn, transformed their identities, increased their action possibilities, improved their capacity to understand others and to develop interpersonal relationships while being mediated by new tools and social relationships. **Therefore, student learning in the undergraduate course is a dialectical change process where both students and the object of their learning mutually transform each other while being mediated by tools and social relationships.**

Further analysis of individual accounts of what they have achieved in the undergraduate course, shows that there are differences among individuals in relation to what they have achieved and how they have achieved those outcomes. Ball and Wells (2006) also report a similar situation in their intervention study on undergraduates in the University of California. Although the students encountered the same experiences, the outcomes achieved by them were different. Ball and Wells were puzzled about why some students were likely to rely on previously established expectations of teaching and learning while others were motivated to confront multiple cues and construct new meanings. To address this issue of individual

differences I have used a cross-case analysis of the individual activities of learning of three different students in the next main section.

5.3 Factors affecting expansive learning at the individual level

The above analysis suggests that what the students have collectively achieved and how they have achieved the outcomes are dependent on a complex interplay between many factors. Moreover, it emerged that there were differences between students' views on what they had learned and who they had become. On further exploration of those differences using case studies of three different students who seemed to have achieved different levels of expansive learning according to their reported outcomes, there emerged five factors that affect expansive learning at the individual level. These included the student's past history of education, goal setting, motivation to transform identities, ability to mobilise resources and their views of the object and tools used in the course. These factors are not determinants of expansive learning but they operate in each individual's cultural historical context of learning in particular ways to enable or inhibit expansive learning. In the following sub-sections I shall discuss these factors and how they were associated with expansive learning of different students.

5.3.1   Student's past history of education

Students' past history of studying appears to have affected their learning in the university. There tended to be interrelationships between their past history of studying and their motives, strategies of learning, goal setting and ways of mobilising both internal and external resources, and the way they viewed the cultural tools used in the

course. Their specific past histories and these other factors interact with each other in the activity systems of learning of individuals and created unique outcomes for each individual. The following extracts from individual case stories and the evidence presented in the next, and the rest of the subsections, illustrate the complex interaction among these factors.

Rev A:

Rev. A was ordained as a Buddhist monk at the age of thirteen and had studied in a government school until then. According to his account, his pre university education was moulded by the pirivena (a traditional school for Buddhist monks) education. The temple in which he had lived in his youth had a pirivena on the same premises and he claimed that his childhood and youth was devoted to education. He described his childhood as 'unpleasant' because he had to keep away from pleasures enjoyed by lay children. He expressed the view that his involvement in education made it easier for him to cope with the unpleasantness of temple life.

The monks in the pirivena were prohibited from attending private tuition classes for the GCE (O/L) examination. Rev. A described the teachers in his pirivena as highly dedicated. They conducted additional classes in the night for the students who were to sit for their O/L examinations. Rev. A was of the view that the foundation laid by the pirivena education in his formative years had helped him in the university. He studied for his GCE(A/L) at another pirivena in adifferent district. He attended private tuition classes for two subjects and for the other two subjects he relied on what was taught in the pirivena. He also reported that he had studied relevant additional books and

materials on his own. He attributed his success at the A/L examination to his own effort, collaborative learning he had with two other monks in the pirivena, the dedication of their teachers and the support he had received from his Loku-hamuduruwo or the head priest in his temple.

According to his account, he felt that university education was completely different from that of the pirivena. He described the former as '*Apima soya yana gamanak*' or a journey of searching on our own. He reported that he used social relationships especially with his seniors, lecturers and peers to find out necessary clues and guidance on learning in the university. For examinations and assignments, he shared knowledge and materials with his fellow monks, and he used to go to another monk's temple during the study leave period to study for the examinations. His past history of studying included strategies such as memorising, self-study, collaborative learning and help seeking when necessary. He said that those strategies helped him in the university in his 'journey of searching on his own'.

Mali

Mali is from a rural, lower middle class family. She attended a rural type 1C school in a remote area. According to her account, Mali had been able to achieve the best results in the GCE (A/L) examination in her district in the Arts stream and was proud of it. She had attended private tuition classes in all four subjects and attributed her success in the A/L examination to her own effort and the education that she had received in the private tuition classes. She reported that the tuition masters had

explained the subject matter clearly and dictated notes. Students were made to answer essay type model questions and the teachers regularly marked them. In this way she practiced answering examination questions. She also mentioned in her account that she had not participated in any extracurricular activities in the school.

In the university, Mali's reported strategies were individual in nature. She claimed that she studied on a daily basis and worked hard throughout the semester with the aim of attaining a first class and excelling in her studies. Unlike Rev. A, Mali did not collaborate with anyone in writing assignments or in preparing for examinations. She seemed to have a competitive attitude and blamed her friends for hiding library books and trying to read her written assignments before submitting their own. Her attempts at self-study seemed to be limited to writing assignments. She said that she preferred examinations to written assignments. She also reported that she used to copy from senior students when she had to write assignments similar to those which had been given to her seniors in the previous year.

Her main concern had been whether she would be able to secure suitable employment even after getting a first class degree. In her final two years, she had completed three different employment-related courses. However, unlike Sisie (whose story is presented below) she had not taken a great interest in developing practical skills. She had shown little interest in the advanced personality studies seminars, work project and the dissertation, compared to the interest shown by Sisie and Rev. A. The coaching she received in private tuition classes and her success in examinations appear to have influenced her preference for transmission approaches to

teaching in the university. Her strategies of learning and motives have been closely associated with examination success and her strong identity of a high achiever developed throughout her school career and in the university. Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) names this kind of phenomenon which refers to the 'socialising effects of an assessment regime in shaping learner's identities within a learning programme' (p.481) as 'assessment career'. Mali's story reflects an assessment career to some extent.

Sisie

Sisie was from an urban, lower middle class family. She had been accepted into university from elite urban National school where she had re-taken her 'A' levels in order to obtain higher grades. She reported that she was not very keen on going to the university since there were many other avenues to find employment. The influence of her parents and others in the family affected her decision to go. After considering the social, economic, cultural and educational value of the university degree she decided to follow a degree course in the university. She received private tuition individually at home in three subjects that she offered in A/L. She attributed her success in the examinations to the individualised tuition she had received at home. Unlike Mali, she said that she was not very keen on achieving a first class at the beginning of the course. By the time she reached her third year, however, she became interested in achieving a first class as well as acquiring practical skills.

Evidence presented in this subsection suggests that students' past histories of studying affected the way they view themselves, set their goals, and mobilise their

own and external resources to achieve their goals. Each student has a unique history that affected his or her identities, beliefs, values, goals and actions. Previous studies also indicate that students' past histories of education affected the way they interpret teaching, assessment and curriculum practices used in their undergraduate course and their motivations and future goals (Stiwne, 2003). Bloomer (2001) uses the concept of 'learning career' to explain the continuities and changes occurring in an individual's disposition to learning throughout the course of life. According to Bloomer, the disposition or the orientation to learning consists of periods of stability, change and transformations, related to continuities and changes in meanings, perceptions, values and identity, and in the cultural and material conditions of life. Therefore, the past history of education of the student is not a factor that determines his or her ways of learning but a factor that contributes to it in a complex way. It may affect the way the students set their goals, mobilise resources, and view their object and the processes that mediate their learning as well as their motivations.

5.3.2 Goal setting

In response to my questions at different time intervals during the course period the students expressed their own goals. Table 11 sets out a comparison of the goals reported by the three students at different time intervals.

Table 11: Goal setting by students: cross-case comparison

	Goals at the entry point	Goals first year	Goals 2nd and 3rd Years	Goals final year	Future Goals
Rev. A	To specialise in Buddhism in the English medium.	The same Goal	To earn a first class and to learn practical applications of psychological knowledge.	To learn psychology for personal development and to relate it to Buddhism. To top the batch by achieving the highest GPA.	To do postgraduate studies in Buddhist psychology and to become a lecturer in a foreign university.
Mali	To earn a first class	To get selected to specialise in psychology	To earn a first class. To enrich life using the knowledge of psychology.	To enhance employability by acquiring additional qualifications.	To find a job and later to study further.
Sisie	To earn a degree qualification.	To get selected to specialise in psychology.	To acquire necessary skills to face challenges in life and work situations.	To earn a first class. To develop practical knowledge in counselling.	To be a counsellor in a private firm and later to start her own counselling centre.

Table 11 indicates two significant features of goal setting. First, the students' goals tend to change over time as a result of mediation by tools and also the social relationships. Second, there are differences in the goals set by different students at different intervals of the course. The students appear to have had performance goals (which focus on performing well to avoid appearing incompetent) as well as learning

goals (which involve learning conceptual and practical skills or strategies) (Dweck, 1999) during the course.

Many interacting factors that include the students' own socio cultural backgrounds, individual needs, and views of the object of the activity system and tools and social relationships in the context appear to affect the way they set their goals. For example, Rev A went to university to specialise in Buddhism in the English medium. However, in his second year he had decided to specialise in psychology because in his view, Buddhism was not taught properly at the university and he was not able to earn good grades in the subject. By the time he had reached the third year, he said that he had realised the possibility of achieving a first class using the affordances in the context. He also reported that he was interested in understanding the deep meaning of the subject and its relevance to life and for personal development. By the time he was about to graduate he appears to have set a new goal to become a lecturer in Buddhist psychology in a foreign university. He reported that he had already discussed the matter with a monk who was teaching in a foreign university. Therefore, the goals he has set seem to be a result of interplay among both individual and contextual factors that I have highlighted above.

Compared to Rev. A and Sisie, Mali had expressed a narrowly defined range of goals which focussed on academic achievement and finding employment after completing her degree. Sisie started with a vague idea but later became more focussed on enhancing employability and improving professional skills. Sisie's interest in

improving skills motivated her to engage in related activities while Mali appeared to be focusing on achieving better grades and outperforming others.

Students' capacity to set their own goals and pursuit of such goals helped them to learn expansively. As argued by Ball and Wells (2006), in a dialectic approach learners need new 'objects' or goals to act on, because 'knowledge grows out of and has value for action' (p.190). They further elaborate on the importance of goal formation and strategic awareness of the process, and results of their own object-oriented activity are situated by that object for expansive learning:

> ...the first 'task' in a dialectic approach is for learners, using their own readily available resources, to negotiate a definition of the problem-situation itself, thus transforming the object of study as it is engaged and appropriated. (Ball and Wells, 2006, p. 190).

According to Barab et al (2002), learners change their goals when they identify troubles in the context. They observed that subjects' goals and intentions play an important role to some extent in facilitating and constraining which aspect of the object will transform. In my study also it was evident that the goals set by the students at different points of the course had provided directions to their actions and what and how they learned. Therefore the differences among students in achieving expansive learning tended to be related to their capacities for goal setting in relation to their changing view of the object. This inference further led me to explore how the contribution of the students' ability to mobilise resources to achieve goals affected their learning.

5.3.3 Mobilising resources to achieve goals

The students' capacity for mobilising resources in and outside university also appeared to be related to their expansive learning. The resources available to students and their ability to mobilise those resources may be dependent on the cultural capital and social capital that they possess. The cultural capital constitutes of *'behaviours, dispositions, knowledge and habits internalised through socialisation accumulated through investments in education and training, and objectified in cultural goods and artefacts'* (Bourdieu cited in Ecclestone, 2004, p. 31). The social capital is *'the actual* or potential resources that individuals can mobilise through membership of *organisations and social networks'* (Ecclestone, 2004, p.32). The following brief segments extracted from the students' case studies illustrate the differences in their capacities for mobilising resources to achieve their own goals, which tended to be linked to their different cultural and social backgrounds and educational past histories.

Rev. A: Rev. A effectively mobilised both cultural and social capital to set and achieve goals during and beyond the course period. According to his own account, his early education in a Buddhist pirivena made him develop habits of learning which helped him to memorise large amounts of Buddhist Gathas, Sutthas, and stories as well as factual knowledge. The practices and habits developed in those formative years helped him to use strategies such as memorisation, collaborative and self learning in the undergraduate course. As he reported on many occasions, he was also able to develop and use social networks to get support and assistance to achieve his

own goals. For example, when he wanted to follow the "diploma in counselling" course for which he had to pay a considerable amount of money, he was able to solicit the support of a senior monk who had been a friend of his own head priest. Similarly, when he was in his first year in the undergraduate course, he sought advice and received support from the senior students on attending to assessment tasks. Moreover, according to his own account, when he did his work project in a secondary school he actively involved himself in identifying students' problems and planning programmes to help those students with his knowledge of psychology. He also reported that his somewhat elite position as a Buddhist monk also helped him to develop positive relationships with the lecturers to solicit support and advice in and outside the classroom. His account consists of numerous examples where he was able to mobilise material, non-material and mental resources to achieve his own goals.

Mali: Compared to Rev. A, Mali appeared to have mobilised a limited range of cultural and social resources to improve learning. She reported that she relied on books in the university library, and sought guidance and support from seniors when writing assignments. Unlike Rev. A, she did not use the internet to find additional facts to include in her assignments. Unlike Sisie, she also did not seem to be so keen on developing practical skills and did not talk enthusiastically about the opportunities for such practice available in advanced personality studies seminars or in the work project. Unlike Rev. A and Sisie, she did not seem to have considered the dissertation as an opportunity to improve skills. For the dissertation, she had chosen a topic related to students' counselling in the university and stated that she was doing it

because of the interest shown by the lecturer and the nagging she received from him for not being punctual in doing it. She also did not talk about the work project with enthusiasm. Her relatively narrow view of the object of the course as earning a first class and the habits and practices developed throughout her school career also seemed to have affected her ways of mobilising resources.

Sisie: Sisie said that she had developed useful social relationships with important people outside the university, especially in her final year, to achieve her own goals. For example, when she had to identify a topic for her dissertation she sought ideas from the doctors in the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital. She also reported that she was able to develop useful relationships with the lecturers in the "diploma in counselling" course conducted by an outside organisation. They had given her an opportunity to work as a part time lecturer in the same course during weekends after completing her diploma. She reported that she was also keen to develop her practical skills by choosing a dissertation topic which included an intervention programme. She reported several incidents where she had used social relationships to improve her practical skills.

Compared to both Mali and Sisie, Rev A appeared to have been in a more advantageous position in terms of both cultural and social capital and to mobilise resources to achieve his goals. However, the students' ways of mobilising resources seem to be related not only to cultural and social capital, but also to their goals as well as the motives that they had. For example, Sisie was interested in developing her

practical skills in counselling and she seemed to be keen on mobilising the resources to achieve such goals, while Mali was not specifically interested in improving practical skills and therefore had not been keen to utilise the opportunities provided in the course to develop such skills and social relationships to achieve those kinds of goals. Hence, the students' ways of achieving expansive learning seem to be a result of a complex interplay between many factors. Another such factor emerging in the analysis was motivation, more specifically the motivation to transform one's identity.

5.3.4   Motivation to transform identity

As I discussed in section 5.2, learning in higher education involves becoming a new person with new forms of identity and with expanded possibilities for action. The students whom I interviewed expressed their intention to develop their action possibilities as well as to become new people. At the individual level, these expectations or motives were expressed in unique ways as indicated in the following extracts from individual case stories:

Rev. A: Rev. A expressed his desire to earn a good degree and to outperform others on many occasions during the interviews that I had had with him. However, he was not solely confined to those extrinsic motivations. There are many examples in his accounts that indicate intrinsic motivation to learn psychology and to expand his own action possibilities. For example, he reported that he enjoyed learning psychology while drawing parallels between psychology and Buddhism. He also talked about the dissertation and work project with enthusiasm. He considered those opportunities as

learning opportunities which made him take responsibility for deciding what to learn and how to learn. He had been keen on identifying a topic relevant to his own interests for the dissertation. He also reported that he had wanted to utilise the time spent in the school during the work project to practise his knowledge and skills in psychology and to be of service to the school. As he mentioned in his second interview, he had been motivated to transform his identity to become 'somebody who is able to do something independently.'

Mali
Mali said her prime motive in learning in the psychology course was to earn a first class and to top the batch. However, in her later interviews she said that she was a little de-motivated because of her doubts about getting a job after the completion of the degree course. In her third year, she reported that she was working hard to earn a first class and felt that what had been learned in the course had helped her to enrich her life. She appeared to have sustained her interest and effort because of these two expectations. She had fulfilled the grade requirements of a first class by the end of the third year and in her final interview she expressed the view that she was now feeling lazy but if she was given a chance to follow a new course, she would take interest and do her very best. She appeared to have built a strong identity in relation to achieving a first class. When I asked her about her most valued outcome of the course, she claimed: 'obtaining a first class. I think I received what I expect from university life. I am so proud of it." She seems to have been motivated largely to achieving an identity which is strongly associated with a first class.

Sisie

Similar to Rev. A, Sisie described learning in the university as a journey of searching for knowledge. According to her account, she also appeared to have been motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. In her first interview, she reported that she had taken interest in writing assignments because she felt that she could learn new facts from reading books and other materials indicating an intrinsic motivation to learning. Unlike Mali, Sisie did not show interest in achieving a first class from the very beginning and it was not her sole purpose of being at the university. However, by the time she reached her final year she reported that since she felt that she could achieve a first class by gaining a few more good grades and she was working hard to earn them. As she reiterated in her account, her prime motive was to develop as a person, and to become somebody who is armed with 'practical skills'. She attributed her emphasis on acquiring practical skills and self development to the challenges she anticipated from her siblings and relatives who were studying for professional degrees. She reported that she felt that they were socially, economically and culturally more advanced than herself. To keep up with them, she wanted to develop the necessary skills to become a professional psychologist or a counsellor.

Thus the students' motivation for learning appeared to be associated with their desire to become a new person with a different identity. Haggis (2004), in her analysis of differences among the 'access' students, has observed that students' different motivation for participation in higher education included a desire for 'a search for new kinds of meaning and the creation of new forms of identity' (p.344). The

247

students in my study also expressed their motivation to transform their identities and it was evident that their actions were guided by such motivations. In their views on the outcomes of the course, they reported that they had increased their action possibilities and had improved their capacity for interpersonal relationships. Barnett (2007) terms such kind of change as 'a process of ontological displacement' in which, 'the student moves into another place as a human being. Her life, her relationship to the world, was changed' (p.76). My analysis suggests that the students' motivation to transform their identities is an important factor that affects such a transformation. Each one has defined his or her need for transforming identities in unique ways depending on a number of other factors that involve social and cultural capital, past and current experiences of learning as well as future expectations.

5.3.5   Views on cultural tools used on the course

Students have had different views about the cultural tools such as curriculum, teaching and assessments used in the course. Table 12 sets out the summary of views expressed by the students in their final year about their object and the tools used in the course.

Table 12: Students' views of the object and the cultural tools used on the course in the final year

	Rev. A	Mali	Sisie
Object in the final year	More elaborated with an emphasis on developing as a person.	Least elaborated. Narrowly confined to exam success and finding employment.	Moderately elaborated. Emphasised personal development and improving skills
Curriculum	Talked enthusiastically about the course content. Used opportunities to expand the curriculum by active interaction with different sources and people.	Considered what is taught in the course to be relevant to life. Was critical about changing the curriculum of advanced personality studies course.	Initially critical about the lack of opportunities for practical training. Was eager to utilise opportunities to improve employability skills. Appreciated the opportunities to learn from unstructured situations.
Teaching	Equally preferred both transmission and social constructivist approaches to teaching	Preferred transmission approaches.	Preferred social constructivist approaches.
Assessment	Enthusiastic about assignments, presentations and group activities because they provided opportunities to learn more from other sources.	Preferred examinations to assignments because the additional effort made to do assignments was not useful for preparing for exams.	Preferred assignments, group assignments and presentations to examinations because they provided opportunities to practise skills and to learn more from sources other than teachers.

As set out in the table, the students' view of the object affected the way they viewed

the tools used in the course. Rev. A had a more elaborate view of the object than the

other two students. As mentioned earlier, he was interested in understanding the deep

meaning of the subject and its relationship to Buddhism and he wanted to become

somebody who can do something independently by learning psychology. So, it seems that his views on curriculum, teaching and assessment were shaped partly by this more elaborated view of the object. In contrast to that, Mali had a relatively narrow view of the object where she had been focusing on earning a first class and gaining employment at the end of the course. So, her preference for the given curriculum, especially in the advanced personality studies course, for examinations and transmission approaches to teaching appeared to have been shaped to some extent by this narrow view and also her past experiences of teaching, learning and curriculum which were mainly based on transmission approaches.

Compared to Mali and Rev. A, Sisie was keen on improving skills and personal development and it appeared that her preference for learning from unstructured situations, social constructivist approaches to teaching and assessment tasks which allowed her to learn from different sources, reflected her focus on those aspects. As pointed out by Edwards (2005a), expansive learning takes place by 'repositioning oneself in relation to the object' (p. 54) as a result of seeing it more elaborately. This repositioning changes the system by changing the way the subjects view and use tools and social relations to transform the object. Russell and Yanez (2002) specifically discuss how undergraduate students in a 'general education' course in a mid western university in USA had overcome alienation and learned expansively by viewing the object and the tools (textual pathways/genre systems) differently with the help of their instructor. Students in my study also were able to learn expansively when they viewed their object (what they wanted to learn) more elaborately and viewed tools

(curriculum, teaching and assessment) as means for learning what they wanted to learn.

The five factors that I have identified are interrelated and interactive as I have discussed above. They do not operate in isolation but in the socio-cultural context of each individual's learning activity. Therefore, ultimately the differences in expansive learning among individuals depend on their specific socio-cultural contexts within which the above agentic factors operate. Moreover, these factors include both cognitive and affective elements which affect learning. Therefore, expansive learning at the individual level has to be understood as a dialectical process which involves a complex interaction of both individual and contextual factors.

5.4 Synthesis of findings into a model for understanding student learning

In this chapter, my purpose was to explore how the students acted on the context in their pursuit of learning in the undergraduate course. In particular, I have addressed the final two research questions of my thesis:

- How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?

- What are the outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at the individual level?

It was evident that the students collectively responded to the interacting demands arising from the institutional assessment practices and their own collective purposes, in interesting ways. The way they responded to the need to earn better grades to earn a good degree included maximising grades, competition and mimicking mastery,

which resembled the practices of undergraduates in other countries as revealed in previous research. However, the students' collective response to the need to enhance employability which is characterised by them enrolling in vocational and other courses conducted by different institutions and also by engaging with the affordances (opportunities) in the context to improve 'practical skills' appeared to be more context specific.

Students' engagement with the innovative practices introduced by one of the lecturers and with the dissertation helped them to achieve expansive learning in varying degrees. Students' changed view of their collective purpose (object: personal development and improving skills) and their use of new tools (group discussions, negotiations, role plays, simulations, work project, conducting prevention programmes) and social relationships (with peers, lecturers, and different people in different settings such as schools, factories and prisons) have helped them to achieve expansive learning. Students' and their lecturer's collaborative effort to transform their purpose of learning in turn transformed the students' identities. Therefore, student learning in the undergraduate course is a dialectical change process of expansive learning. In further exploration of the individual differences in achieving expansive learning using cross case analysis of three different students, there emerged five agentic factors which comprise both cognitive and affective elements. These factors are:

- individuals' past histories of learning;
- goal setting;

- ability to mobilise resources;

- motivation to transform identities;

- and views of the object and the tools used in the course.

Since these factors operate within the particular socio-cultural context of each individual, the differences in expansive learning ultimately depended on how these factors interact and operate within each individual's cultural historical context of learning. Therefore, student learning in this particular undergraduate course is a complex dialectical process which is affected by a number of interacting individual, social, cultural and historical factors as depicted in the model of student learning in Figure 16.

As depicted in Figure 16, a group of students (subjects) who simultaneously operate individually on their own cultural historical context of learning are engaged in a collective activity of student learning in the undergraduate course. Since their individual context of learning was not independent or entirely separated from the collective activity of student learning in the undergraduate course, it is depicted as an overlapping circle. The small circles numbered 1-5 in the bigger circle represent the five interacting factors that operate within the individual's context to enable or inhibit expansive learning. The collective purpose of student learning embodies multiple motives, beliefs and expectations of students, lecturers and the participants of the interacting network of activity systems as depicted in Figure 16. Therefore, the collective purpose or the object of student learning is a multifaceted, multi-voiced

formation. This multifaceted and multi-voiced nature of the object is depicted as a polygon in the diagram.

Curriculum, teaching and assessment
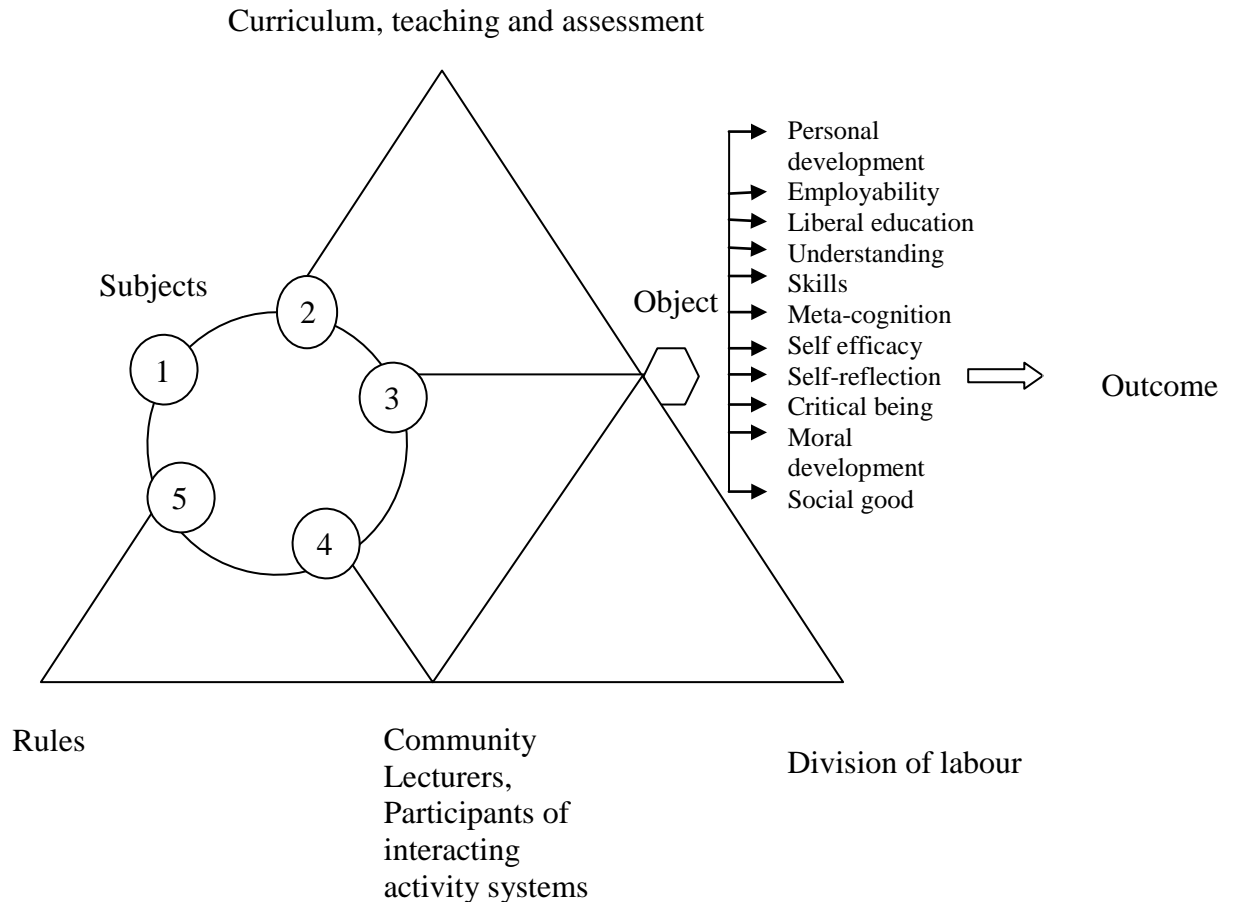
Key: 1-Past history of education,
      2- Goal setting,
      3- Motivation for transforming identity,
      4- Mobilising resources,
      5- Views on the object and tools used in the course

Figure 16: A model for understanding student learning in undergraduate education

Students' learning is mediated by both tools which are broadly depicted as curriculum, teaching and assessment, and social relationships among students,

between students and the community which comprises the lecturers and the participants of interacting activity systems. Expansive learning occurs when the subjects and the community (lecturers) collaboratively attempt to change their object by inventing and using new tools and forming and utilising different social relationships. This need for change of object arises as a result of sensing a problem or a contradiction by the participants of the activity system.

5.5 Conclusion

The main argument of this thesis has been that an alternative way to understand student learning in undergraduate education is to pay attention not only to how the students are affected by the context but also to how the students act on the context in their pursuit of learning. Accordingly, I have used a theoretical framework based on the activity theory and the triangular model of object-oriented, culturally-mediated, collective activity of Engeström, as a heuristic to analyse the data that I have generated over a 3-4 year period.

In this research I conceptualised the undergraduate course as an activity system that I constructed and reconstructed using the participants' views and the systemic view (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999, p.10). The analysis of the context of student learning at different intervals helped me to develop further insights about the nature of 'context' of the undergraduate course.

The context of the course is partially given (some aspects of the course are already defined by the institutional arrangements and practices) and partially constructed and

reconstructed by the participants. It emerged in the analysis of data in Chapters 4 and 5 that context changes over time and space. It has also been changed by the intentional actions of the participants. The context of one classroom episode was different from the next or previous episode. In other words context was in a state of flux. Therefore ' context' of the undergraduate course is a dynamic and evolving whole which is constituted and reconstituted by interacting cultural tools and people who are engaged in a collaborative activity of student learning. In this thesis I analysed only the relatively enduring aspects of the context using CHAT framework.

I also find the emergent view of 'context' described in the above is consistent with the definition suggested by Cole (1996). For Cole, context means dynamic activity which 'weaves together ... goals, tools and settings including other people' and not 'what it surrounds' (Cole, 1996, p.135).

The analysis of the context of student learning in this particular course provides evidence to conclude that student learning is affected by the tensions or the contradictions in their collective purpose and institutional practices of assessment. Furthermore, it is affected by the problems of context such as the lack of feedback on assessment tasks, explicit marking criteria and the mismatches between the students' and their lecturers' beliefs, assumptions, values and expectations which seem to be a result of the lack of dialogic relationships between the lecturers and the students. Moreover, the students' learning is affected by the historically evolving characteristics of the students, their lecturers and the tools used in the course such as teaching, curriculum and assessment practices.

The analysis of how the students act on the contextual demands, provide evidence to conclude that student learning in this particular course is a dialectical change process of expansive learning. Students' and their lecturer's collaborative effort to change the object and context of the course has mutually transformed both the collective purpose (object) and the students' identities. This dialectical process is mediated by the tools or the teaching, curriculum and assessment practices as well as the social relationships. Further analysis of differences between individuals suggests that agentic factors that include both cognitive and affective elements affect expansive learning at the individual level. However, the individual differences in expansive learning ultimately depend on how these agentic factors operate and interact within the individual's socio-cultural contexts of learning.

Therefore, the above findings suggest that student learning in the undergraduate course is a historically evolving, complex dialectical process affected by individual, social, cultural and historical factors as depicted in the model for understanding student learning in undergraduate education (Figure 16). So, the findings of this research support the view that learning is both individual and social. Individuals make sense of the world not only by observing, thinking and reflecting about it but also by acting collaboratively on it to change it.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss the implications of these findings for research, policy and practice; strengths and weaknesses of this research; and my reflections on how the engagement with this research has affected my own learning.

Chapter Six: Conclusions, implications and reflections

6.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes this thesis by reflecting on how the main research questions have been addressed, the implications for policy practice and research, implications for policy and practice in the Sri Lankan context, strengths and weaknesses of the research and the impact of research on my own learning.

The specific research question addressed in this thesis was "how do the students regulate their learning in the undergraduate course in relation to the contextual demands and their own valued outcomes?" To address this question in more detail I have set three sub-questions. In the next main section I summarise how they have been addressed in this research.

Student learning in undergraduate education is a complex process and it has been studied using different perspectives and methodologies over the past 4-5 decades. Current research on student learning is dominated by the approaches to learning perspective, which focuses on how the students' and teachers' perceptions on the learning environment affect their approaches to teaching, learning and outcomes. The other research broadly classified as social practice approaches to research in student learning (Ashwin, 2009) focuses on how the student identities are affected by literacy practices (Lea and Street, 1998), or how the learning environments affect alienation or engagement in students (Mann, 2001; Case, 2008). None of these approaches have paid attention to how the students and their lecturers act on the learning context to

achieve their own goals. I believe that to understand student learning better, we need to focus not only on how students are affected by the context but also on how students act on the context in pursuing their goals. Therefore, in this research I have focused on both aspects of how the students are affected by the context and also how the students and their lecturers act on the context to achieve their collective purposes.

Accordingly, I have selected the theoretical framework of cultural historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001) to study student experiences of learning in the undergraduate course. I have employed a longitudinal qualitative design to capture the dynamics of the complex process of student learning. A group of students specialising in psychology was selected for this study. The data was collected over a 3-4 year time period and the methods of data collection included interviews with students and their lecturers, reflective accounts, focus group interviews, classroom observations and documents.

6.1 Key findings in relation to research questions

I now take each of the sub-questions to discuss how they have been addressed in this research.

- **What are the students' interpretations of their experiences of learning in the undergraduate course?**

Students' understanding of their purposes as well as the curriculum, teaching and assessment used in the course, was a gradual process. Their understanding of these aspects was mediated by social relationships and also the curriculum, teaching and

assessment processes. Students at the entry point had a rather narrow purpose of earning a degree qualification to secure employment. However, by the time they had reached their final year they had more elaborate collective purposes which included, enhancing employability skills, personal development, life enrichment and to develop their ability to 'do something independently'. Initially the students reported difficulties in adapting to the teaching, curriculum and assessment practices, However, they gradually socialised into these practices as reported in previous studies (Merrill, 2001).

One of the main tensions that surfaced in the context was the primary contradiction or the tension in the collective purpose of student learning activity in the form of learning for enhancing employability skills vs. learning for the intrinsic value in education. This had affected the way the students interpreted their experiences of teaching, curriculum and assessment. Mismatches between their expectations and the realities of their experiences in curriculum, teaching and assessment processes led to further tensions between these processes and their collective purposes, in classrooms where teaching was based on transmission approaches (Brophy, 2002). Lack of opportunities in the curriculum to gain practical skills, lack of interactive sharing of ideas between students and their lecturers in teaching and the overemphasis on the grading and selection function of assessment led to such tensions. In the students' final year one of the lecturers attempted to bringing in innovations and change based on social constructive approaches to the teaching and curriculum practices in the course components that he taught. Since the institutional practices of assessment

which emphasised the importance of examinations and the grading and selection function remained unchanged, tensions surfaced between the assessment practices and the students' collective purpose, curriculum and teaching processes in this situation. Assessment practices had a backwash effect on curriculum, teaching and learning processes as found in previous research (Havnes, 2004; Murphy, 2006). Apart from these tensions there were other problems in the context. They included: the lack of feedback on assessment tasks, explicit marking criteria and mismatches between students' and their lecturers' views on the purposes and processes used in the course. The continuous assessment used in the course served only a summative function. Lack of dialogue between lecturers and students about what and how the students learn in their classrooms was also another problem which is similar to the situation found by Mann (2003). Moreover, the students' learning had also been affected by historical factors such as past educational experiences of students and the lecturers and the historical characteristics of teaching, curriculum and assessment practices which were based on different theoretical traditions. Hence, the student learning in the undergraduate course was a complex change process affected by social, cultural and historical factors and contextual demands.

The findings also support the widely acknowledged view that assessment directs student learning (Crooks, 1988; Biggs, 1998; Shepard, 2000, Murphy, 2006). However, as emerged in this study and a recent study in the UK (Tomlinson, 2008) it is not the only demand that affects student learning in contemporary higher education. Students' need to enhance employability was also a significant factor. Therefore,

261

these two issues that affected this particular group of students in this study are not only confined to the particular course or to higher education in Sri Lanka.

As argued by Lave and Wenger (1991) these issues are the results of commoditisation of learning. They represent the fundamental contradiction between the use value and the exchange value of learning (Engeström, 1987; Lave and Wenger, 1991). As evident in the literature on higher education, these two issues have been addressed by governments, policy makers, academics, practitioners and researchers around the world using different perspectives.

As I discussed in detail in the previous chapters of this thesis, the ongoing debate on enhancing employability skills vs. providing a liberal education has not provided clear cut answers to the issue of improving employability skills. However, there is an interesting attempt to redefine the term employability to make it a broader concept which encompasses not only the skills sought after by the employers, but also the characteristics of good learning which produce complex outcomes (Knight and Yorke, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006, 2007). They suggest a model of USEM, to conceptualise employability which comprises '**U**nderstanding, **S**kills, **E**fficacy beliefs, students' self theories and personal qualities and **M**etacognition. According to Yorke and Knight (2006) the need to align the concept of employability with good learning which produces complex outcomes arises because 'being able to make a strong claim to employability is a complex achievement' (p. 570). They further argue

by citing Borden and Evenbeck that the learning outcomes that affect long-term achievement and success in the workplace result from a strong liberal education.

> ...writing and communication skills, intellectual adaptiveness, creative problem solving and the ability to work with diverse individuals are amongst the liberal education outcomes that are now recognised as the traits most central to the success of the 21st century college-educated worker (p.570).

Hence, we cannot undermine the contribution of a good liberal education for life enrichment and also for employability. Therefore, the current interest among policymakers and also the students in my sample, on skills and practical training has to be treated carefully without undermining the importance of providing a good higher education.

The other important issue that emerged in the undergraduate course was the tension in the institutional practices of assessment which emphasised the grading and selection function of assessment at the expense of its function to improve learning. This is also a fundamental contradiction between the use value and exchange value of learning as I have mentioned above. The issue is also addressed by policymakers, practitioners, academics and researchers in higher education around the world. Both formative and summative assessments are necessary in higher education (Elton, 2004, MacLellan, 2004). The grading and selection function of assessment cannot be ignored because both employers and the wider world demand an overall degree class (Elton, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). However, as argued by Knight (2002), summative assessment in higher education in the UK is in 'disarray, due to the weaknesses in practices, especially in relation to the reliability of grades or classification'. Although there are

263

attempts to improve formative assessment in higher education by developing innovative practices (Bryan and Clegg, 2006), written examinations are still the dominant form of assessment in higher education (Sainsbury and Walker, 2007). Moreover, as argued by MacLellan (2004), although the alternative assessment practices based on sociocultural perspectives serve a formative function, they are weak in providing valid data for summative purposes which include selection, certification and accountability. Therefore, the issue of striking a balance between improving the use value and exchange value of assessment in higher education seems to be an unresolved problem that needs to be addressed by policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. The stance suggested by Murphy (2006) provides a good foundation for such an endeavour:

> Our more modern stance is now to recognise that assessment procedures can and should contribute to student learning as well as measure it, and to acknowledge that student learning across the higher education curriculum is complex, multifaceted and may need to be assessed in wide variety of ways, and indeed be reported in ways that recognise the diversity rather than mask it (Murphy, 2006: p. 44).

In summary, student learning in the undergraduate course has been a complex change process which was affected by contextual demands and cultural, historical and social factors. The demands confronted by the students were not confined to the particular course or to higher education in Sri Lanka but applicable to systems of higher education around the world. Although the issues are global they need to be addressed locally. In the following section I shall discuss how the students responded to these demands using the affordances in the context.

- **How do the students collectively and individually respond to the demands in the context?**

As discussed in detail above, students in this particular undergraduate course were confronted with competing demands arising from the institutional assessment practices, which lacked feedback, explicit marking criteria and emphasised the grading and selection function of assessment at the expense of its function of improving student learning. Their learning was also affected by the demands arising from their collective purpose which had focused on enhancing employability skills as well as receiving a good education of intrinsic value. Students responded to these demands in interesting ways. Their responses to assessment demands resembled the responses of students in other countries in similar situations. However, the responses to the demands arising from the need to enhance employability were more context specific.

In relation to the assessment demands, the students' dominant responses were, maximising grades, generating competition and mimicking mastery. The values behind these practices were completely opposed to the values explicated in the policy documents of reforming higher education in Sri Lanka (NEC, 1996a, b; SCHSS, 2002, NEC, 2010) such as developing capacities for leadership, teamwork, good interpersonal relationships and lifelong learning. Therefore, the assessment practices had a rather negative impact on student learning in this course.

Students collectively responded to the demands arising from their collective purpose in more positive ways by enrolling in additional vocational and other courses in and outside university and also by utilising the affordances or the opportunities provided in the course for improving skills. Their responses, in fact, are attempts to add value to their degree qualification to have a competitive advantage in the labour market which records a high rate of graduate unemployment (Usvatte-aratchi, 2004). Tomlinson (2008) observes a comparable trend among UK undergraduates in a pre-1992 university to perceive earning better credentials, engaging in extracurricular activities and developing skills as a means to add value to the academic qualification in order to gain an advantage in the labour market.

Unlike the responses to the assessment demands, the above mentioned responses made a positive impact on the students' learning. The tension in the collective purpose of the students has also triggered one of the lecturers to introduce innovations in teaching, curriculum and assessment practices in the courses that he had taught in their final year. The purpose of these innovations was to improve skills and personal development. The students' engagement with these innovations helped them to achieve expansive learning at different levels as I shall discuss in the following section.

- **What are the outcomes reported by the students and what factors affect expansive learning at the individual level?**

The analysis of reported outcomes of students suggests that the undergraduate course helped them to transform their identities, increase their action possibilities in the individual, social and intellectual spheres of their lives as well as improve their capacity to understand others and manage interpersonal relationships. These reported outcomes suggest that they have achieved expansive learning because they indicated 'enlarged room for manoeuvre for the individuals to create new learning possibilities' (Roth and Lee, 2007, p.205). The students have achieved this feat by their active engagement with the innovations introduced by their lecturer. These innovations provided them with new tools (group discussions, seminars, planning and implementing prevention programmes, work project) and different social settings and people for them to interact with. The students and their lecturer's collective effort to change their collective purpose to improve skills and for personal development have, in turn, transformed their identities, action possibilities and interpersonal relationships. According to Roth and Lee (2007) this mutual transformation between the collective purpose (object) and the students' identities (subjects) is a result of the dialectical relationship between the object and subjects in the activity system. The dialectical relationship is due to the dual existence of the object as a material entity in the context and as a vision or image in the subjects. Therefore the object depends on who the subjects are. Neither subject nor object can exist without the other (Roth, 2004). Therefore, the student learning in this context is a dialectical process which is

mediated by tools (curriculum, teaching and assessment in broad terms) and social relationships.

Further analysis of the three case studies of students who achieved differential levels of expansive learning suggests five interacting factors which operate in an individual's socio-cultural context that affect expansive learning. These interacting factors are student's past history of education, goal setting, motivation for transforming identity, mobilising resources and views on the object (purpose) and tools used in the course. These factors include both cognitive and affective elements. The analysis suggests that the differences in expansive learning among individuals ultimately depend on how these factors operate and interact within an individual's socio-cultural context of learning. Therefore, student learning in the undergraduate course can be conceptualised or defined as follows: A group of students who operate in their own socio-cultural context of learning are simultaneously engaged in a collective activity of learning in the undergraduate course while being mediated by tools such as curriculum, teaching and assessment as well as social relationships. Students' and their lecturers' attempts to change their collective purpose using new tools and social relationships helped them to transform their identities and to achieve expansive learning of different degrees.

Hence, this thesis supports the view that learning is both individual and social. Individuals make sense of the world not only by observing, thinking and reflecting on

it but also by acting on the world to change it. In the next section I shall discuss the implications of these findings for policy, practice and research.

6.2 Implications for policy, practice, and research

The above findings suggest that it may be useful to conceptualise undergraduate education as an opportunity for identity transformation of the students, where students' identities are transformed to become graduates with increased possibilities for action to contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual and moral spheres of their own lives as well as those of society. To enable this kind of transformation, the undergraduate programmes have to be planned to provide opportunities for the students to produce and use new tools for learning and also to interact with different people in different settings. This new way of conceptualising undergraduate education helps to address the contemporary issue of striking a balance between providing a good general education of intrinsic worth and enhancing employability. When the students are provided with new tools and a variety of social settings to interact with different people, they would be able to move through their many zones of proximal development in intellectual, social, cultural and moral spheres of their lives while transforming their identities and increasing their action possibilities in those spheres.

Specific implications of the findings of this research for curriculum, teaching and assessment are as follows:

6.2.1 Curriculum, teaching and assessment

Undergraduate education has to be geared towards achieving the broad purposes of higher education. As argued by Barnett (2004) we live in an age of super complexity, which is characterised by uncertainty. Important questions to consider in this situation are: 'How are we to live personally and collectively with uncertainty? How are we to relate to both the world and each other when all bets are off? How do we understand research and teaching as intentional actions in a context of radical uncertainty? (p.71).

Therefore, the curricula in undergraduate education have to consider such philosophical questions when defining their aims and objectives. Furthermore, to prepare students to face and live with uncertainty, it may be necessary to develop their capacities for imagination, creativity, critical evaluation and judgement. Therefore, the curricula of undergraduate education cannot be confined to disciplinary knowledge only. They also need to include provisions for students to engage in authentic tasks, use new tools and interact with different people in different settings, to create effective solutions to the problems that they encounter in such settings and interactions.

The curriculum, teaching and assessment also need to be considered as integral parts of the education practice (Havnes, 2004). To provide a rich educational experience for the students, it may be necessary to align curricular goals, teaching and assessment tasks together (Biggs, 2003). To create opportunities for expansive learning, it may also be necessary for the students and their lecturers to develop

dialogic relationships to discuss their assumptions, beliefs and expectations about curriculum, teaching and assessment, to identify the mismatches and problems and to plan necessary actions.

A further issue that emerged in this research is the students' need to enhance employability by participating in undergraduate education. Since the graduates' employment prospects depend on the state of the economy and the labour market, participation in undergraduate education does not guarantee them employment after graduation. However, undergraduate education cannot ignore the needs of the economy and the labour market in planning teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment practices. Creative solutions are necessary to address this issue. The USEM model suggested by Yorke and Knight (2006, 2007) is one such solution which provides a broad framework to understand the meaning of employability and to make appropriate curricular provisions to enhance employability. As argued in this thesis, provision of opportunities for the students to use new tools and to interact with different people in different settings may also be helpful in enhancing employability.

6.2.2 Implications for further research

In this research I have used the activity theory to analyse how the students are affected by the context and how they acted on it to change it. It has helped me to develop a holistic framework to understand the students' collective purpose, their action patterns and the factors affecting their learning in the undergraduate course.

The power of the activity theoretical framework for understanding change and innovation has been revealed in this study.

Similarly, the activity theoretical framework can be used to analyse the effects of different tools and modes of social relationships on student learning. It can also be used to understand teaching-learning interactions within particular learning environments (See Ashwin (2009) for a detailed discussion).

Furthermore, the developmental research methodology (Engeström et al, 1999) of this theoretical framework can be used to develop new tools to improve student learning while involving the participants of the activity system in the research process.

I used the third generation activity theory in this research and the concept of expansive learning. However, Engeström (2007) in his discussion on enriching the theory of expansive learning presents the idea of learning in co-configuration work. Learning in co-configuration is:

> ...accomplished in and between multiple loosely connected activity systems and organisations operated in divided local and global terrains and representing different traditions, domains of expertise, and social languages (Engeström, 2007, p.38).

Therefore the concepts of learning in co-configuration work may be useful in understanding further the process of expansive learning among undergraduates who participate in interacting networks of activity systems in an out of university. I would like to suggest that further research on students' expansive learning may benefit from using the concept of co-configuration.

6.3 Implications for policy and practice of undergraduate education in Sri Lankan context

In addition to the general implications for undergraduate education, I would like to discuss the following implications which are specific to the undergraduate courses conducted by the particular university in Sri Lanka.

It has emerged in the course of this research, that the purposes of undergraduate education in Sri Lanka are not clearly specified in the policy documents (NEC, 1996a, b; SCHSS, 2002; NEC, 2010). Therefore, the first suggestion that I wish to make is to develop a clearly specified set of purposes for undergraduate education and to make academics, administrators, students, parents and the general public aware of those purposes. These purposes may include important components of good higher education such as opportunities for students to develop capacities for critical thinking, imagination, creativity, problem solving, personal development, lifelong learning, self reflection, metacognition, disciplinary knowledge, understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and moral development.

6.3.1 Employability

The issue of graduate unemployment is rather complicated in Sri Lanka. As argued by Gunawardene (1993) employers, especially in the private sector in Sri Lanka, emphasise 'social and general transferable skills in addition to or in lieu of academic achievement' (P.125). After reviewing the studies carried out in the past she infers that:

> ...the employers look for more than mere educational credentials. They expect education in the broader sense, where learning is not limited to mere book learning but entails the development of higher cognitive abilities and applicable, transferable skills, and personal development in which competency in English language is a prime tool (Gunawardene, 1993, p.129).

The situation has not changed much even after more than a decade where interpersonal or social skills and English language competency take a prominent place in the requirements of employers (Arulpragasam, 1999; Hettige, 2000; Balasuriya and Hughes, 2003; Wijemanna and Welikala, 2005; World Bank, 2009). English is the language of private sector enterprises and secondary school graduates from upper class families who possess English language competencies and necessary social skills are preferred by the employers to the university graduates who are educated in the Sinhala or Tamil medium (Gunawardene, 1997). The replacement of English as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary levels in schools, by the national languages of Sinhala and Tamil in the 1950s has contributed to the development of cultural and national identity. However, it had negative consequences on employment and technological development (Balasuriya and Hughes, 2003). This is a challenge faced by countries in the world, whose national language is not widely

spoken. According to Altbach (1989) there is a pervasive influence of the English language throughout educational systems and the scientific culture in Asia.

Reform proposals in higher education continue to make recommendations to improve English language proficiency, IT skills and generic skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, interpersonal competencies valued by the employers, among the undergraduates (NEC, 1996a; SCHSS, 2002, Arudpragasam, 1999; Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training, 2004; World Bank, 2009; Wickremasinghe and Perera, 2010).

However, as argued by Uswatte-aratchi (2004) the high unemployment rate among graduates is not only due to the lack of required competencies of university graduates but also due to the slow growth of the economy and the private sector which is unable to absorb university graduates to their workforce.

Although a university degree would not guarantee employment, universities cannot ignore the need to prepare students for general employment and for specific professions (Atkins, 1995). As I have mentioned earlier, success in the workplace depends on the qualities developed through a good liberal education (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Therefore, it can be suggested that universities need to provide a good higher education by reforming the existing curricula to ensure the development of understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs and metacognition among students as suggested by Yorke and Knight (2006).

6.3.2 Reforming Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment

It has emerged in this research that the curriculum and teaching in the undergraduate course had been more content-based and lacked opportunities for the students to interact with their peers and lecturers. The lack of practical training and opportunities to learn skills was another problem that emerged in the study.

To facilitate expansive learning and to prepare students to face unforeseen future challenges in life and work situations, we need to create opportunities in the curriculum and teaching for students to use different tools and to interact with different people in different settings. Curriculum, teaching and assessment have to be decided at the programme level considering the nature of the subject discipline and processes that would help students to use different tools other than the lecture note or reading materials. They may include small group discussions, presentations, activities, simulations and project activities which allow the students to interact with their lecturers, peers, and relevant people in and outside the university. The process approach to curriculum planning suggested by Knight (2001) which 'draws together the processes, encounters or engagements that lead to good learning' (p. 375) would be useful in planning curricula.

It has also emerged in this research that there were mismatches between the beliefs, assumptions and expectations from teaching, learning and assessment, of the students and those of their teachers in the course. It may not be possible for the lecturers to discuss how and what the students learn in each of the teaching-learning encounters.

However, it may be useful to discuss these issues at least periodically to create more effective teaching-learning environments.

As emerged in the findings, the continuous assessment system used in the course does not serve a formative function of improving students' learning. Therefore, there is a need to look for innovative alternative approaches for assessment which provide; effective feedback to students; the opportunity to self-monitor their progress in learning by engaging in self assessment; situations to help understand assessment criteria such as involvement in peer assessment and receiving feed forward (Sadler, 1989). It may also be necessary to improve the validity and reliability of grades and reporting processes to better inform the users about the nature of the courses followed by the students and their participation and achievements in various curricular and co-curricular activities.

6.3.3 Staff Development

Two other important issues that need to be addressed are the lack of opportunities for the new lecturers to take part in any kind of induction training before they embark on classroom teaching at the university and the lack of dialogue and agreement between lecturers in the same department about the issues in curriculum, teaching and assessment.

At present, the lecturers who are appointed on a temporary basis are not provided with any orientation or training to be able to teach effectively in the undergraduate

courses. The "sink or swim" approach, used in employing the new graduates who excel in their examinations to teach in the undergraduate courses, needs to be reconsidered. At least, they should be provided with a course on orientation to teaching in undergraduate education which includes the purposes of higher education, the curriculum, teaching and assessment used in undergraduate courses and several practice lessons supervised by a senior staff member or a mentor before allocating them to undertake teaching duties.

The present practice of staff development of academics is limited to a six week course provided over a three month period for the newly recruited permanent lecturers. Participation in these courses is compulsory for confirmation in the present post and for promotion to the next grade. However, this kind of short term training is inadequate for at least two reasons. First, it gives an indirect message that the training provided once and for all in the short term course is adequate for one to become a competent university lecturer. Effective teaching is not just about applying general principles of teaching to the context of teaching. They need to be adapted to the teacher's own personal strengths and to the teaching context. Teachers continually need to reflect on how their practice might improve (Biggs and Tang, 2007). Therefore, I would suggest the introduction of a postgraduate diploma course in teaching in higher education and to encourage the academics to conduct action research and some activity theory-based studies to improve teaching-learning, curriculum and assessment practices of different subject disciplines. It is doubtful whether the trainees participate in a short term intensive training programme would

be able to develop such attitudes to become a reflective teacher. Second, it is difficult to discuss teaching, curriculum and assessment matters pertaining to different disciplines and to find possible solutions to the problems in these kinds of training situations where only the junior members of different disciplinary areas come together to discuss such issues. Therefore, I suggest that short term training programmes need to be supplemented with staff development activities at the departmental level where all members of staff discuss and review the purposes and processes of teaching, curriculum and assessment in the courses conducted by the department to plan for improvement of such practices.

6.4 Strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the research

Research in student learning in higher education which employed activity theory is mostly confined to shorter time periods, teaching learning practices used in a course module and to study the effects of particular tool mediation on student learning (Barab et al, 2002, Russell and Yanez, 2002; Roth and Tobin, 2002; Havnes, 2004; Mwanza and Engeström, 2005; Ball and Wells, 2006). In contrast to these studies, in this study I have focused on the holistic nature of student learning in an undergraduate course during its entire time duration. In this sense, it is pioneering work which attempted to understand student learning in undergraduate education from a holistic perspective of the activity theory by studying the dynamics of students' experiences of learning throughout an entire programme.

For the analysis of students' experiences of learning I have conceptualised it as an activity system which 'weaves together' (Cole, 1996; Russell and Yanez, 2002) the subjects (students), object (collective purpose of learning), tools (curriculum, assessment and teaching), community (the lecturers and participants of interacting activity systems), rules and division of labour. This type of conceptualisation makes it harder to analyse a complex process such as student learning because it has to deal with a myriad of data which included students' past and present experiences as well as their future expectations. Similar to the other researchers (Russell and Yanez, 2002) who attempted this kind of analysis, I also found difficulties in deciding what to focus on in order to come up with a plausible story through rigorous analysis. However, by extensive reading of the literature that discussed the applicability of the activity theory for understanding teaching, learning and assessment as well as previous research that applied activity theory to analyse learning in different contexts (Nardi, 1996; Engeström, 2001; Russell and Yanez, 2002; Barab et al, 2002; Roth and Tobin 2002; Havnes, 2004; Edwards, 2005a, 2005b; Ball and Wells, 2006; Yamagata-Lynch and Haudenschild, 2009; Ashwin, 2009), I was able to make sense of my data.

The methodological stance adopted by me; to study student learning over almost the entire duration of the undergraduate course; to focus on the broad pattern of activity; to use a variety of data collection techniques; and the attempt to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants are in accordance with the methodological implications of the 'activity theory' for research (see Nardi, 1996,

p.47 for a discussion of methodological implications of the 'activity theory' in analysing human computer interaction). My prolonged involvement with data collection helped me to understand the culture of the students and their lecturers (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the dynamic nature of student learning in the undergraduate course over time. The focus on whole activity rather than specific episodes of teaching and learning helped me to understand the overall direction and meaning of student learning. Use of a variety of methods to collect data and commitment to understand the phenomena through the eyes of the participants helped me to reduce researcher and methodological bias (Denzin, 1989). Therefore I have been able to achieve the methodological rigour required for this kind of study.

I also acknowledge the following limitations and weaknesses of this study:
Since this is a study confined to a single course implemented in one university in one country, the findings cannot be generalised into the other courses in the same university or to undergraduate education in general. The applicability of these findings to other contexts depends on the similarities between the context of this study and those other contexts. As I have done in my chapters on data analysis, these findings can only be generalised to the extent of existing theoretical knowledge.

In my analysis of the context of student learning I found that the students did not refer to how the rules and division of labour affect their learning. Hence, my data set was very thin in those aspects and I had little to say about those elements in the activity system. This could be a result of the way I interpreted the students' responses. For

example, when they referred to their frustrations about the lack of transparency in marking I considered it as a problem related to assessment practices or tools. (See p.167). I did not interpret it as a lack of knowledge about rules. Similarly when the students referred to what should have been the role of the lecturer in classrooms where the lecturer adopted a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning I considered that as a matter related to their views about teaching as a tool which mediated their learning. (See pp.194-195). I did not interpret it as an aspect of division of labour between the teacher and students in classrooms. Davydov (1999) and Ashwin (2009) highlights this kind of confusions faced by the researchers in defining different elements of the activity systems as one of the unresolved problems or limitations of activity theory.

Another limitation is related to the methodological complexities involved in accessing or collecting dependable data on experiences of students. As pointed out by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) there is no way for the researchers to look into the 'inner life' of individuals. The interview data may not present the complete picture of the individual's experience and his/her interpretation. Students are not always able to fully explain their actions or intentions. What they say to the interviewer can be dependent on the interview situation, how they perceive the interviewer and how they want the interviewer to perceive them. The observations are also not objective. Observations are affected by the social context or the situation both the observer and the observed are engaged in (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Therefore, what we can construct from the data collected through observations, interviews and reflective accounts is only a plausible story.

Research is always a compromise between the intentions and expectations of the researchers, the resources available or accessible to them and the affordances (opportunities) in the research context. In this research I wanted to video record the classroom interactions among students and between students and their lecturer in the advanced personality studies course which consisted of student seminars. However, the lecturer and the students were of the view that this would affect the interactions among them. So, I had to use less obtrusive methods of non-participant observation and record keeping.

6.5   Reflections on the impact of this research on my own learning

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I wanted to do a PhD for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Intrinsically, I was motivated to learn more about 'learning' and qualitative research. Extrinsically, I was motivated to do a PhD because I need it for career advancement as a university teacher.

When I look back at my journey as a research student, I find that involvement in this research has helped me to develop an in depth understanding about both learning and qualitative research. I was also able to gain a deeper understanding about some of the key issues affecting student learning in undergraduate education and how they are being addressed in Sri Lanka, the UK and in other countries.

In my research I have conceptualised student learning as an object-oriented culturally-mediated collective activity. It emerged in the analysis that student learning is a dialectical change process mediated by social relationships and cultural tools. Teaching and learning in undergraduate education is not merely a transaction between teacher and students. Student learning is a result of complex interaction between many cultural, social and individual factors. Students' and their lecturer's collective attempts to change their collective purpose of learning has in turn helped them transform the learning context as well as their identities to become new people with increased action possibilities to face challenges in life and work situations.

This kind of conceptualisation of student learning leads us to think about teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment in undergraduate education in new ways. For example, it asks for increased dialogue and interaction between students, their lecturers, peers and others in a variety of learning situations. It also highlights the importance of allowing students to engage in authentic tasks in different settings by collaborating with different people to increase their action possibilities and to form new identities. Moreover, it requires cooperative assessment structures (which allow students to collaborate with others to complete assessment tasks and to earn required grades) rather than individualised or competitive structures.

Furthermore, the model that I have developed for understanding diversity in student learning, conceptualises student learning as an activity system where individual students, who operate in their own socio-cultural contexts simultaneously engaged in

284

a collective activity of student learning, is mediated by cultural tools and social relationships. So, the diversity of student expectations, achievements, and outcomes are explained in terms of differences in the individual's cultural historical contexts of learning and not in terms of the individual's abilities or deficits (Cole, 1998; Roth and Lee, 2007). To improve students' achievements and outcomes it may be necessary to allow students, coming from different backgrounds, to take part in collaborative activities with others where they would work with more advanced peers or others to move through their zone(s) of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

In addition, the new understanding that I developed through this research helped me to conceptualise student learning in new ways which ultimately contributed to improve the effectiveness of my teaching. Moreover, it will help me to make an effective contribution to the teaching learning programmes conducted by our department. I also feel that my involvement in this research has helped me to increase my action possibilities as a researcher, curriculum developer and a lecturer to involve others in improving teaching-learning practices. I have already developed a set of optional courses in education for undergraduates in collaboration with colleagues in my department while studying for my PhD. The insights that I gained about students and their expectations of teaching, curriculum and assessment have helped me to design this particular course. I also feel that I could use the understanding that I gained through this research to conduct further research in teacher education, undergraduate education and school education. I am particularly interested in using the developmental research approach (Engeström, 1999, 2001) to improve

educational practices at school level and in teacher education in my country. The work of Edwards (2007), Roth and Lea (2007) and Roth and Tobin (2002) provide insights to design such kinds of research.

Furthermore, I expect to share the model for understanding student diversity and learning in undergraduate education that I have developed in this research with the lecturers who participate in staff development programmes conducted by the staff development centre of my university. I would particularly draw the lecturers' attention to the need to provide opportunities for students to interact with different people in different settings as well as to use dialogues to explore collaboratively how and what the students learn in their courses.

Thus, the involvement in this research has indeed improved my action possibilities to involve others to improve teaching and learning in a variety of settings as a lecturer, curriculum developer and a researcher.

When I look back at the collective activity of learning in the PhD programme as a part time overseas student, I can see how the tools and social relationships or the community mediated my learning and how the sociocultural context of my own learning affected **how** and **what** I learned in the process.

Interactions and feedback received from my supervisors helped me immensely to keep on the right track and to move forward in completing this task. Formal and

informal interactions with other academics and research students at Nottingham University also mediated my learning. The tools most useful to me in this process were academic texts, journals and other materials, writing assignments, participating in research training modules conducted by the school of education and the graduate school, making presentations in students' research seminars at Nottingham and annual research sessions at my university in Sri Lanka.

I can also see the effects of the five factors (which operated in my own cultural historical context of learning) that I have identified in the model that I presented in Chapter 5 on my learning in this endeavour. My own past history of education, where I studied up to the first degree level in my mother tongue which is not English, completed my undergraduate education in the stream of biological sciences, post graduate education in the English medium and in different subject disciplines which included Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Education Management and Administration and Applied Psychology have had some effect on the way that I learned in the PhD programme. My own intellectual curiosity made me read widely on education, research methods and other subjects of interest and to use self-learning throughout my relatively long professional career of 28 years. These habits of self-learning also helped me as a part-time overseas student stationed mostly in Sri Lanka during the total period of completing this thesis. Not only my history, but also my awareness of my own goal-setting, my ability to mobilise resources to complete this work, my motivation for identity transformation, my views on the object and the tools that mediated my learning, have all affected the way I learned and developed in this endeavour.

Therefore, as suggested in the model of student learning I created on page 254, I believe that my success or otherwise also depends on my own cultural historical context of learning which operates simultaneously in the collective activity of research students' learning in the PhD programme of the School of Education at the University of Nottingham.

Notes

1. *'Special degree' course:* Four year undergraduate honours courses, where the students specialise a single subject are called 'special degree' courses in Sri Lanka.

2. Kuppi Classes: Informal term used by the present day undergraduates. It refers to the revision classes conducted by a more knowledgeable peer (or a senior student) for other students.

3. Arts-oriented courses: Courses offered in the social sciences and humanities are generally referred to as arts-oriented courses in Sri Lanka.

4. Pirivena universities: In 1958 the government has upgraded two centres of Buddhist learning (Pirivenas) to the level of universities to meet the increasing demand for university education.

5. Arts graduates: Graduates in the social sciences and humanities.

6. Private tuition classes: Fee levied classes conducted by private individuals to provide additional instructions for students outside school hours.

7. Attunements: Regular patterns of an individual's participation can be conceptualised as that person's attunement to constraints, and to affordances. Attunements include well coordinated patterns of participating in social practices, including the conversational and other interactional conventions of communities (Greeno et al, 1998, p.9).

8. Constraints: The concepts of constraints and affordances have been developed explicitly in situative theory and ecological psychology. In situative theory, constraints are formally represented as if-then relations between types of situations. Greeno et al (1998) use the term constraints to include if –then regularities of social practices and of interactions with materials and informational systems that enable a person to anticipate outcomes and to participate in trajectories of interaction. (Greeno et al 1998, p. 9).

9. Affordances: are qualities of systems that can support interactions and therefore present possible interactions for an individual to participate in. Affordances can be represented, using situative theory notation, as if-then relations between types of situations, in which the antecedents involves resources in the environment and enabling characteristics of a person or a group and the consequent is a type of activity that is possible whenever those environmental and personal properties are present (Greeno et al, 1998,p.9).

10. Akka: a Sinhala term referring to older female which could be 'a sister's age

Bibliography

Abeysinghe, N. (2008) Improving The Quality of Teaching and Learning In a Small Group by Using Self and Peer Evaluation among Students. SLAIHEE Newsletter, Vol.6. Available at www.slaihee.org/home/downloads/Newsletters/Newsletter_06.pdf last accessed on 25/06/2010.

Altbach, P. G. (1989) Twisted Roots: The Western Impact of Asian Higher Education. Higher Education.18, 9-29

Arulpragasam, K. D. (1999) Reforms in University Education. Economic Review, November/December, 1999, 13-17

Ashwin, P. (2005) Variation in Students' Experiences of the Oxford Tutorial. Higher Education. 50, 631-644

Ashwin, P. (2009) Analysing Teaching Learning Interaction in Higher Education: Accounting for Structure and Agency. London: Continuum

Astin, A. W. (1987) Competition or Cooperation? Change, 19, (5), 12-19

Atkins, M. (1995) What should we be Assessing? In: P. Knight, (Ed.) Assessment for Learning in Higher Education, London: Kogan Page, 1995, 25-33.

Balasuriya, L. and Hughes, R. (2003) Education and Employment in Sri Lanka: A Look Towards the Future. International conference on Sri Lankan studies (ICSLS); University of Ruhuna, Matara: Sri Lanka

Ball, T. and Wells, G. (2006) Walking the Talk: The Complexities of Teaching about Teaching. International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. 18, (3), 188-203

Bandura, A. (1977) Self-efficacy: Toward a Theory of Unifying Behavioural Change. Psychological review.84 (2) 191-215

Barab, S. A. Evans, M. A. and Baek, E.O. (2004) Activity Theory Lens for Characterising the Participatory Unit. In D.H. Jonassesn (Ed.) Handbook of Research on Educational Communities and Technology Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Elbraum associates, 199-214

Barab, S. A., Barnett, M., Yamagata-Lynch, L., Squire, K. and Keating, T. (2002) Using Activity Theory to Understand the Systemic Tensions Characterising a Technology Rich Introductory Astronomy Course. Mind, Culture, and Activity. 9(2), 76-107

Barnett, R. (1990) The Idea of Higher Education. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and The Open University Press.

Barnett, R. (1995) Improving Higher Education: Total Quality Care. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and The Open University Press.

Barnett, R. (1997) Higher Education: a Critical Business. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and The Open University Press.

Barnett, R. (2004) The Purpose of Higher Education and the Changing Face of Academia. London Review of Education, 2 (1), 61-73

Barnett, R. (2007) A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty. Berkshire: SRHE and Open University Press

Becker, H. S., Geer, B. and Hughes, E. C. (1968) Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College life. New Brunswick (US): Transaction publishers

Benton, T. and Craib, I. (2001) Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought. New York: Palgrave.

BERA (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, Southwell: British Educational Research Association.

Bhaskar, R. (1989) Reclaiming Reality : A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy. London: Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (1998) The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical critique of the contemporary Human Science. London: Routledge.

Biggs, J. (1979) Individual Differences in Study Processes and the Quality of Learning Outcomes. Higher Education. 8, 381-394.

Biggs, J. (1987) Student Approaches to Learning and Studying. Melbourne: Australian Council for Education research.

Biggs, J. (1993) What do Inventories of Students' Learning Process Really Measure? A Theoretical Review and Clarification. British Journal of Education Psychology. 63, 3-19.

Biggs, J. (1994) Approaches to Learning: Nature and Measurement of. Encyclopaedia of Education. (pp. 318-322) Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Biggs, J. (1998) Assessment and Classroom Learning. A Role for Summative Assessment? Assessment in Education, 5(1), 103-110

Biggs, J. (1999) Teaching for Quality Learning at University. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Biggs, J. (2003) Teaching for Quality Learning at University . (2nd Edition) Buckingham: SRHE/Open university press

Biggs, J., Kember, D. and Leung, D.Y.P. (2001) The Revised Two-factor Study Process Questionnaire: R-SPQ-2F. British Journal of Education Psychology. 71, pp 133-149.

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2007) Teaching for Quality Learning at University (3rd Edition). Maidenhead: The Open University press
Black, P. and William, D. (1998) Assessment and Classroom Learning. Assessment in Education, 5 (1), 5-74

Bloomer, M. (2001) Young Lives, Learning and Transformation: Some Theoretical Considerations. Oxford Review of Education, 27(3), 429-449

Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, S . K.(1992) Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods,(2nd Edition), Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, S . K.(2007) Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods, (3rd Edition), Boston: Pearson

Brennan, J. and Osborne, M. (2008) Higher Education's Many Diversities: of Students, Institutions and Experiences, and Outcomes? Research Papers in Education, 23, (2),179-190

Bridges, D. (1993) Transferable Skills: a Philosophical Perspective. Studies in Higher Education 18(1), 43-51

Bridges, D. (2000) Back to the Future: the Higher Education Curriculum in the 21st Century. Cambridge Journal of Education. 30(10), 37-55

Brophy, J. (2002) Introduction. In J. Brophy, (Ed.) Social Constructivist Teaching: Affordances and Constraints. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Ltd. (pp. ix-xxii)

Brown, G. (2004) How Students Learn: a Supplement to the Routledge Falmer Key Guides for Effective Teaching in Higher Education Series. London: RoutledgeFalmer

Bryan, C. and Clegg, K. (Eds) (2006) Innovative Assessment in Higher Education. London: Routledge,

Bryman, A. (1988) Social Research Methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Case, J. (2008) Alienation and Engagement: Development of an Alternative Theoretical Framework for Understanding Student Learning, Higher Education, 55: 321-332

Chandrika, K. A. C. and Perera, G. D. N. (2006) A Trial Study in the Use of an Outdoor Training Programme for Enhancing Student Inclusivity. A paper presented at the SDC-SLAIHEE Conference II held on the 18th May, 2006, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (1998) Personal Experience Methods. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds) Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 150-178

Coffield, F., Moseley, D., Hall, E. and Ecclestone, K. (2004) Learning Styles and Pedagogy in post-16 learning: a systematic and critical review. London**:** Learning and Skills Research Centre

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000) Research Methods in Education. (5th Edition), London: Routledge Falmer

Cole, M. (1988) Cross-cultural Research in the Socio-historical Tradition, Human Development. 31(3), 137-151

Cole, M. (1990) Cognitive Development and Formal Schooling: The Evidence from Cross-cultural Research. In L. C. Moll,. (Ed) Vygotsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Socio-historical Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cole, M. (1996) Cultural Psychology: a Once and Future Discipline. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press

Cole, M. (1998) Can Cultural Psychology Help us Think about Diversity. Mind, Culture and Activity. 5 (4), 291-304

Corson, D. (1991) Bhaskar's Critical Realism and Educational Knowledge. British Journal of Sociology of Education. 12(2), 223-241

Crooks, T. J. (1988) The Impact of Classroom Evaluation Practices on Students, Review of Educational Research. 58, (4), pp. 438-481

Davydov, V. V. (1999) The Context and Unsolved Problems of Activity Theory. In Y. Engeström, , R. Miettinen, and R. Punamaki, (Eds) Perspectives in Activity Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

Dayaratne, S. (1994) A Study on the Learning Approaches Used by the University Students. Unpublished MPhil Thesis, Department of Education, University of Peradeniya.

Denzin, N. K.(1989) The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1998) Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research In N. K. Denzin, and Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds) Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. (2nd Edition) Thousand Oaks: Sage

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) Introduction. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. (3rd Edition), Thousand Oaks: Sage

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2008) Introduction. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry. (3rd edition) Thousand Oaks:Sage

Department of Philosophy and Psychology (2009) Draft Proposal to Create a New Deparment of Psychology : University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Dey, I. (1993) Qualitative Data Analysis. London: Routledge

Dingwall, R. (1997) Accounts, Interviews and Observations In G. Miller and R. Dingwall (Eds) Contexts and Methods in Qualitative Research. London:Sage

Dissanayeke, D. and Atapattu, P (2010) Using Pyramiding to Promote Active Participation of the First Year Medical Students in Small Group Discussions. Paper presented at the Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher Education in Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Dore, R. P. (1976) The Diploma Disease. Berkley: University of California Press.

Dweck, C. S. (1999) Self-theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development. Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis.

Ecclestone, K. (2004) Learning in a Comfort Zone: Cultural and Social Capital Inside an Outcome-based Assessment Regime. Assessment in Education, 11(1), 29-46

Ecclestone, K. and Pryor, J. (2003) Learning Careers or Assessment Careers? The Impact of Assessment Systems on Learning. British Educational Research Journal. 29(4), 471-488

Edwards, A. (2005a) Let's Get Beyond Communities and Practice: The Many Meanings of Learning by Participating. The Curriculum Journal 16(1), 49-65

Edwards, A. (2005b) Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Learning: A Relational Turn. Paper presented at the 6th annual conference of the Teaching and Learning Research programme, Warwick, 28-30 November 2005

Edwards, A. (2007) Relational Agency in Professional Practice: A CHAT Analysis. Actio: An International Journal of Human Activity theory. 1, 1-17

Edwards, A. and Protheroe, L. (2004) Teaching by Proxy: Understanding How Mentors are Positioned in Partnerships. Oxford Review of Education, 30(2), 183-197

Eisenhardt, K. M. (2002) Building Theories from Case Study Research. In M. Huberman and M. B. Miles (Eds) *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion.* Thousand Oaks: Sage

Elton, J. (2004) A Challenge to Established Assessment Practices. Higher Education Quarterly.58 (1), 43-62

Engeström, Y. (1987) Learning by Expanding: An Activity Theoretical Approach to Development Research. Available at http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/Paper/Engeström/expanding/toc.htm last accessed on 25/10/2010.

Engeström, Y. (1993) Developmental Studies of Work as a Test Bench of Activity Theory: The Case of Primary Care Medical Practice. In S. Chaiklin and J. Lave (Eds) Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context (pp. 64-103) Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, Y. (1999) Activity Theory and Individual and Social Transformation. In Y.Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R. Punamaki, (Eds) Perspectives in Activity Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, Y. (2000) Activity Theory as a Framework for Analysing and Redesigning Work. Ergonomics. 43(7)pp. 960-974

Engeström, Y. (2001) Expansive Learning at Work: Toward an Activity Theoretical Re-conceptualisation, Journal of Education and Work, Vol.14, No. 1, pp. 133-155.

Engeström, Y. (2007) Enriching the Theory of Expansive learning: Lessons from Journeys towards Coconfiguration. Mind Culture and Activity,14(1-2), 23-39

Engeström, Y. and Miettinen, R. (1999) Introduction. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and

R. Punamaki, (Eds) Perspectives in Activity Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Entwistle, N. (1987) Understanding Classroom Learning. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Entwistle, N. (Ed) (1990) Handbook of Educational Ideas and Practices. London: Routeledge.

Entwistle, N. (2007) Research into Student Learning and University Teaching. In N. Entwistle and P. Tomlison (Eds) Student Learning and University Teaching. Leicester: The British Psychological Society.

Entwistle, N. and Ramsden, P. (1982) Understanding Student Learning. New York: Croom Helm.

Entwistle, N. and Smith, C. (2002) Personal Understanding and Target Understanding: Mapping Influences on the Outcomes of Learning. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 72, 321-342

Entwistle, N. and Tait, H. (1990) Approaches to Learning, Evaluations of Teaching, and Preferences for Contrasting Academic Evironments. Higher Education. 19, pp. 169-194.

Faculty of Arts (2003/04) *Students' Handbook*. Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya.

Fanghanel, J. (2004) Capturing Dissonance in University Teacher Education Environments. Studies in Higher Education, 29(5), 575-590

Fanghanel, J. (2006) Enhancing Educational Development Practices through a Socio Cultural Understanding of University Teaching. Higher Education Close-up 3. International Research Conference. 24th-26th July 2006 (Available online: www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/events/hecu3/documents/joelle-fanganel.doc last accessed on 9th July 2007.

Gibbs, G. (2006) How Assessment Frames Student Learning. In C. Bryan and K. Clegg (Eds) Innovative Assessment in Higher Education. London: Routledge, 11-22

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L., (1967) The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Goslin, D. (2000) Using Habermas to Evaluate Two Approaches to Negotiated Assessment. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 25, 3

Greeno, J. (1997) On Claims that Answer the Wrong Questions, Educational Researcher. 26(1), 5-17

Greeno, J. (1998) The Situativity of Knowing, Learning and Research. American Psychologist, 53(1), 5-26.

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005)   Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions and Emerging Confluences. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Edition) London: Sage, 191-215

Gunawardene, C. (1993) Employer Expectations and Equity in Education in Sri Lanka. International Journal of Education Development, 13(2), 125-130

Gunawardene, C. (1997) What Employers Look for in University Graduates. Economic Review. January 1997, 19-26

Gunawardene, N., Seneviratne, R., Fernando, D., Senarathne, U. (2010) A Community Based Health Promotional Intervention: A Learning Experience of Medical Undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Paper Presented at The Challenges In Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher education in Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Haggis, T. (2003) Constructing Images for Ourselves: A Critical Investigation into Approaches to Learning in Higher Education. British Educational Research Journal. 29, (1), 89-104

Haggis, T. (2004) Meaning, Identity and Motivation: Expanding What Matters in Understanding Learning in Higher Education. Studies in Higher Education, 29,335-352

Hanks, W. F. (1991) Foreword. In J. Lave and E. Wenger Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harvey, L., Moon, S., Geall, V. and Bower, R. (1997) *Graduates' Work:* Organisation Change and *Students' Attributes.* Birmingham: Centre for Research into Quality and Association of Graduate Recruits.

Hativa, N. and Birenbaum, M. (2000) Disciplinary Differences of Students' Preferred Approaches to Teaching and Learning Styles. Research in Higher Education, 41 (2) 209-236.

Havnes, A. (2004) Examination and Learning: An Activity Theoretical Analysis of the Relationship Between Assessment and Educational Practice. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 29(2), 159-176

Hernandez-Martinez, P., Black, L., Williams, D., Pampaka, M., Wake, G. (2008) Mathematics Students Aspirations for Higher Education: Class, Ethnicity, Gender and Interpretative Repertoire Styles. Research Papers in Education. 23 (2), 153-165

Hettige, S. T. (2000) Economic Liberalisation, Qualifications and Livelihoods in Sri Lanka. Assessment in Education: principles, policy and practice, 7(3), 325-333

Higgins, R. (2003) The Meaning and Impact of Assessment Feedback for Students in Higher Education. Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

Holliday, A. (2007) Doing and Writing Qualitative Research. Second edition, London: Sage

Indraratne, A. D. V. De S. (1992) Access to University Education during the Last Fifty Years (1942-1992) In R. A. L.H. Gunawardena (Ed.) More Open than Usual? An Assessment of the Experiment in University Education at Peradeniya and Its Antecedents: Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, pp 10-29

Jayasuriya, J. E. (1969) Education in Ceylon Before and After Independence, 1939-1968. Colombo: Associated Educational Publishers

Jayawardene, A. (1992) Jennings on University Education. In R. A. L.H. Gunawardena (Ed.) More Open than Usual? An assessment of the Experiment in University Education at Peradeniya and Its Antecedents: Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, pp. 30-51

Kember, D. (1997) A Reconceptualisation of the Research into University Academics' Conceptions of Teaching. Learning and Instruction. 7,(3), 255-275

Kirschner, P.A., Sweller, J. and Clark, R. E. (2006). Why Minimal Guidance during Instruction does not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching. Educational Psychologist,

Knight, P. (2001) Complexity and Curriculum: A Process Approach to Curriculum Making. Teaching in Higher Education. 6 (3), 369-381

Knight, P. (2002): Summative Assessment in Higher Education: Practices in disarray, Studies in Higher Education, 27:3, 275-286

Knight, P. and Yorke, M. (2003) Employability and Good Learning in Higher Education. Teaching in Higher Education. 8(1), 4-16

Knight, P, Tait, J, Yorke, M. (2006) The Professional Learning of Teachers in Higher Education. Studies in Higher Education. 31(3), 319-339

Kodithuwakku, P. A. D. E. (2006) Changing Traditional Teaching-assessment to Groupwork to bring about Development of Undergraduate Higher Learning Skills. A paper presented at the SDC-SLAIHEE Conference II held on the 18th May, 2006, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Kolb, D. A. (1974) Organisational Psychology: A Book of Reading. Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall

Kolb, D. A. and Fry, R. (1975) Towards an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning. In C. Cooper (Ed) Theories of Group Processes, London: John Wiley.

Kuutti, K. (1996) Activity Theory as a Potential Framework for Human-Computer Interaction Research. In B. A. Nardi (Ed.) Context and Consciousness: Activity Theory and Human Computer Interaction. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press.

Kvale, S. (1996) Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Kvale, S. (2006) Dominance through Interviews and Dialogues. Qualitative Enquiry.12 (3), 480-500

Lambert, C., Parker, A., Neary, M. (2007) Enterpreneurialism and Critical Pedagogy: Reinventing the Higher Education Curriculum. Teaching In Higher Education, 12(4), 525-537

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lea, M. and Street, B. V. (1998) Student Writing in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach. Studies in Higher Education, 98(23), 2

Lea, M. and Street, B. V. (2000) Student Writing and Staff Feedback in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach In M. Lea. and B. Stierer (Eds) Student Writing in Higher Education: New Contexts. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press

Lea, M. and Street, B. V. (2006) The Academic Literacies Model: Theory and Applications. Theory into Practice. 45(4), 368-377

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985) Naturalistic Inquiry. Beverly Hills : Sage

Liyanage, B. C. (2010) Sustaining Active Learning in an Online Learning Environment- Reflections in Offering Online Blended Course In Engineering. Paper Presented at The Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher Education In Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff

Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

MacLellan, E. (2001) Assessment for learning: The differing perceptions of tutors and students. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 26, (4),

MacLellan, E. (2004) How Convincing is Alternative Assessment for Use in Higher Education? Assessment and Evaluation in Higher education. 29, (3), 311-321

Malcolm, J. and Zukas M. (2001) Bridging Pedagogic Gaps: Conceptual Discontinuities in Higher Education. Teaching in Higher Education 6,1, 33-42

Mann, S. (2001) Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: Alienation and Engagement. Studies in Higher Education, 26, 1:7-20

Mann, S. (2003) Inquiring into a Higher Education Classroom: Insights into The Different Perspective of Teacher and Students. In C. Rust (Ed.) Improving Student Learning: Theory and Practice- 10 Years on. Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development. pp. 215-223

Marton, F. (1981) Phenomenography- Describing Conceptions of the World around Us. Instructional Science. 10 ,177-200

Marton, F. and Saljo, R. (1976a) On Qualitative Differences in Learning-I: Outcome and Process. British Journal of Education Psychology, 46, 4-11

Marton, F. and Saljo, R. (1976b) On Qualitative Differences in Learning-II: Outcome as a Function of the Learner's Conception of The Task. British Journal of Education Psychology, 46,115-127

Marton, F., and Saljo, R., (1997) Approaches to Learning. In F. Marton, D. Hounsell and N. Entwistle (Eds) The Experience of Learning. (2nd Edition). Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press

Marton, F., Hounsell, D. and Entwistle, N. (1997) The Experience of Learning. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press

Mason, J. (2002) Qualitative Researching (2nd Edition) London: Sage

Melia, K.M. (1997) Producing 'Plausible Stories': Interviewing Student Nurses in G. Miller and R. Dingwall (Eds) Contexts and Methods in Qualitative Research. London: Sage

Merriam, S. B. (1998) Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Merriam, S. B. (2009) Qualitative Research: a Guide to Design and Implementation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Merrill, B. (2001) Learning and Teaching in Universities: Perspectives from Adult Learners and Lecturers. Teaching in Higher Education, 6, (1)5-17

Miles, M. B. and Huberman, M. (1994) Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expandard Sourcebook. (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Miller, C. M. L. and Parlett, M. (1974) Up to the Mark: A Study of the Examination Game. London: Society for Research into Higher Education

Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training (2004) Improving Quality and Relevance in Undergraduate Education in Sri Lanka. Colombo: Sri Lanka

Murphy, E. and Dingwall, R. (2005) Qualitative Methods in Health Policy Research. New Yorke: Aldine de Gruytes.

Murphy, R. (2006) Evaluating New Priorities for Assessment in Higher Education. In C. Bryan and K. Clegg (Eds) Innovative Assessment in Higher Education. London: Routledge. pp.37-47

Murphy, R. and Scott, R. (2003) How Well do we Understand Student Experiences of Higher Education? University of Nottingham: IRLTHE

Murray-Harvey, R. (1994) Learning Styles and Approaches to Learning : Distinguishing Between Concepts and Instruments. British Journal of Education Psychology. 64, 373-388

Mwanza, D. and Engeström, Y. (2005) Managing Content in e-learning Environments. British Journal of Education Technology, (36), 3, 453-463

Nanayakkarawasam, P. P. (2010) Using Teaching Learning Methods as Formative Assessment and Vice Versa. Paper presented at the Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher education in Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Nardi, B. A. (1996) Activity Theory and Human Computer Interaction. In B. A. Nardi (Ed.), Context and Consciousness: Activity Theory and Human Computer Interaction, Cambridge: MIT press, 69-103

NEC (1996a) National Policy on University Education. Colombo: National Education Commission, Sri Lanka.

NEC (1996b) Higher Education Policy: Summary of Recommendations Available online at http://nec.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/policies/National_Policy_1996.pdf last accessed on 26/10/2010

NEC (2010) National Policy on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education: Summary of Policy Recommendations: Part One, Higher Education. Available online at http://nec.gov.lk/web/index.php last accessed on 25.10.2010

Niles, S. (1996) Cultural Variations in Learning Strategies: A Comparison of Australian and Sri Lankan University Students. Journal of Psychology, 130(1), 83-95.

O'Donnell V. L. and Tobbell, J. (2007) The Transition of Adult Students to Higher Education: Legitimate Peripheral Participation in a Community of Practice? Adult Education Quarterly. 57,312

Parlett, M. and Hamilton, D. (1972) Evaluation as Illumination: A New Approach to the Study of Innovatory Programmes Occasional Paper No.9, Centre For Research in the Educational Sciences. Edinburgh.

Pask, G. (1976) Styles and Strategies of Learning. British Journal of Education Psychology. 46, 128-148.

Patton, M. Q (1985) Quality in Qualitative Research: Methodological Principles and Recent Development. American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 1985.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Perera, G.L. R., de Abrew, K. A. G., Karunathileke, I. M. and Jayasinghe, S. (2010) Effectiveness of a Midterm Reorientation Activity for Students. Paper Presented at The Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher Education in Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Perera, S. J. (1992) A Survey of Learning Strategies of Undergraduates. Annual Research Sessions, University of Peradeniya: Faculty of Arts.

Perry, W. G. (1970) Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

Pintrich, P. R. (2004) A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning in College Students. Educational Psychology Review,16,(4),385-407

Plummer, K. (2005) Critical Humanism and Queer Theory: Living With the Tension in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. (3rd Edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage, 357-373

Pring, R. (2000a) The Philosophy of Educational Research. London: Continuum

Pring, R. (2000b) The 'False Dualism' of Educational Research. The Journal of Philosophy of Education, 34(2), 247-260

Prosser, M. and Trigwell, K. (1999) Understanding Learning and Teaching-The Experience in Higher Education. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press

Pushpakumara, M. A. S. (2009) Psychology in Sri Lankan Context with Special Reference to University Curriculum. Paper Presented at The International Workshop On 'Historical Aspects Of Psychology' and 'Learning and Adjustment Disorders With Special Reference to Disaster Affected Regions'. University of Leipzig, Institute of Psychology, 20th-21st November 2009.

Ramsden, P. (1991) A Performance Indicator of Teaching Quality in Higher Education: The Course Experience Questionnaire, Studies in Higher Education, 16, 129-150.

Ramsden, P. (1992) Learning to Teach in Higher Education. London: Routledge.

Ramsden, P. and Entwistle, N. J.(1981) Effects of Academic Departments on Students' Approaches to Studying. British Journal of Education Psychology, 51, 368-383.

Ratwatte, H. (1999) Orientations to Learning and Previous Learning Experience: Are they Factors that Affect Learning in the Distance Mode? OUSL Journal. 2, 94-120

Richardson, J. T. E. (2005) Students' Approaches to Learning and Teachers' Approaches to Teaching in Higher Education. Educational Psychology. 25, (6), 673-680

Roth, W. (2004) INTRODUCTION: "Activity Theory and Education: An Introduction". Mind, Culture and Activity, 11(1), 1-8.

Roth, W. and Lee, Y. (2007) "Vygotsky's Neglected Legacy": Cultural- Historical Activity Theory, Review of Educational Research, 77, (2), 186-232

Roth, W. and Tobin, K. (2002) Redesigning an "Urban" Teacher Education Programme: An Activity Theory Perspective. Mind, Culture and Activity 9 (2), 108-131

Russell, D. and Yanez, A. (2002) 'Big Picture People Rarely Become Historians': Genre Systems and the Contradictions of General Education. In C. Bazerman and D. Russell (Eds) Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Reasearch from Activity Perspectives. Fort Collins CO: The WAC clearinghouse and Mind, Culture and Activity. Available at http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves-societies/ last accessed on 11th June 2010

Sadler, R. (1989) Formative Assessment and the Design of Instructional Systems. Instructional Science, 28(2), 119-144

Sainsbury, E. J. and Walker, R. A. (2007) Assessment as a Vehicle for Learning: Extending Collaboration into Testing. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 1-18

Sander, P., Stevenson, K., King, M. and Coates, D. (2000) University Students Expectations of Teaching. Studies in Higher Education, 25 (3), 309- 323.

Scott, D. (2005) Critical Realism and Empirical Research Methods in Education. Journal of Philosophy in Education. 39(4), 633-646.

Sfard, A. (1998) On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing just One. Educational Researcher, 27 (2) 4-13.

Shepard, L.A. (2000) The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture. Educational Researcher. 29(7), 4-14

Silverman, D. (2010) Doing Qualitative Research. 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage

Sivayogan, N. (2006) *Use of Learning Outcomes to Improve Students' Learning and* Examination Performance. A paper presented at the SDC-SLAIHEE Conference II held on the 18th May, 2006, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sooriyaarachchi, S. J. and Nanayakkara, V. (2010) Game-Based Learning in Engineering Education in Sri Lanka. Paper presented at the Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher Education in Sri Lanka, jointly organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Special Report (1983) The University Concept and Sri Lankan Universities Economic Review, April, 1983, P. 4-20

Stake, R. E. (2008) Qualitative Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds) Strategies of Qualitative Enquiry (3rd Edition). Los Angeles: Sage,

Stake, R. E. (2010) Qualitative Research: Studying how Things Work. New York: The Guilford Press

SCHSS (2002) 28- Point Programme for Restructuring Humanities and Social Sciences Education in the Universities. Sri Lanka: University Grants Commission.

Stiwne, E. E. (2003) Study Histories in Higher Education. Paper presented at the European Conference of Educational Research, University of Hamburg, 17th-20th September 2003

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) Basics of Qualitative Research. Newbury Park: Sage

Tennant, M. (1997) Psychology and Adult Learning. London: Routledge

Tett, L. (1999) Widening Provision in Higher Education-Some Non-Traditional Participants' Experiences. Research Papers in Education 14(1), 107-119.

Tett, L. (2000) 'I'm Working Class and Proud of It'- Gendered Experiences Non-Trraditional Participants in Higher Education. Gender and Education, 12(2), 183-194.

Tomlinson, M. (2008) 'The Degree is not Enough': Students' Perceptions of The Role of Higher Education Credentials for Graduate Work and Employability. British Journal of Sociology of Education. 29(1), 49-61

Trigwell, K. and Prosser, M. (1991) Relating Approaches to Study and Quality of Learning Outcomes at the Course Level, British Journal of Education Psychology, 61, 265-275

Trigwell, K. and Prosser, M. (1993) Approaches Adopted by Teachers of First Year University Science Courses, Research and Development in Higher Education. 14, 223-228

Trowler, P. and Cooper, A. (2002) Teaching and Learning Regimes, Implicit Theories and Recurrent Practices in the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning through Educational Development Programmes. Higher Education Research and Development, 21(3), 221-240.

Udayashantha, P. D. C. and Dilhani, K. A. N. (2006) A Trial Study in Peer Assessment: Evolving Structures for Bringing About Improved Learning. A paper presented at the SDC-SLAIHEE Conference II held on the 18th May, 2006, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

University Grants Commission (1981) Universities of Sri Lanka: Handbook. Colombo: UGC

University Grants Commission (2008) Corporate Plan, 2008-2010. Colombo: UGC

Usvatte-aratchi, G. (2004) Saraswathi Meets Lakshmi: Education Meets the Market.14th J E Jayasuriya memorial lecture, Colombo: J E Jayasuriya Memorial Foundation, Sri Lanka.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. M. Cole, V. John –Steiner, S. Scribner, and E. Soiberman, (Eds) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Warnapala, W. (2009) Tertiary Education in Sri Lanka-Relevance in the Global Context. Wellampitiya, Sri Lanka: Lassana Printers and Publishers
.
Webb, G. (1997) Deconstructing Deep and Surface: Towards a Critique of Phenemenography. Higher Education, 33, 195-212.

Wenger, E. (1998) Communities of Practice Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wickremasinghe, V. and Perera, L. (2010) Graduates' University Lecturers' and Employers, Perceptions towards Employability Skills. Education and Training, 52 (3), 226-244

Wijemanna, E. L. and Welikela, G. H. F. (2005) Youth Employment and Career Guidance in Sri Lanka. Paper Presented at the Regional Workshop on Youth Employment and Career Guidance, June 25-28, Colombo: Sri Lanka

Wijesundera, S. (2002a) *Students' Perceptions on Courses: The Case of the Course* Unit System in the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. Unpublished Dissertation Submitted for the Msc Degree in Applied Psychology, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University Of Colombo, Sri Lanka.
.
Wijesundera, S. (2002b) School Improvement: An Action Based Case Study Conducted in a Disadvantaged School in Sri Lanka. Education Action Research, 10 (2), 1-17.

Wilson, K. L., Lizzio A. and Ramsden, P. (1997) The Development, Validation and Application of the Course Experience Questionnaire. Studies in Higher Education. 22 (1), 33-53

World Bank (2009) The Towers of Learning: Performance, Peril and Promise of Higher Education in Sri Lanka. Colombo: The World Bank Colombo Office

Yamagata-Lynch, L. C. and Haudenschild, M. T. (2009) Using Activity Systems Analysis to Identify Inner Contradictions to Teacher Professional Development. Teaching and Teacher Education. 25(3), 507-517

Yin, R. K. (2008) Case Study Research: Design and Methods (4th Ed.) Thousand Oaks: Sage

Yorke, M. (2003) Formative Assessment in Higher Education: Moves towards a Theory and the Enhancement of Pedagogic Practice, Higher Education, 45, 477-501

Yorke, M. (2005) Formative Assessment in Higher Education: Its Significance for Employability and Steps towards its Enhancement Tertiary Education and Management 11, 219-238

Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2006) Curricula for Economic and Social Gain. Higher Education. 51, P. 565-588

Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2007) Evidence Informed Pedagogy and the Enhancement of Student Employability. Teaching in Higher Education 12(2), 157-170

Zakeel, M. C. M. (2010) Use of Weblogs in my Teaching as a Knowledge Management Tool. Paper Presented at the Challenges in Sustaining Best Practices in Higher Education: Conference on Higher Education in Sri Lanka, Jointly Organised by Staff Development Centre (SDC), University Of Colombo and Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE) on the 5th April 2010.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000) Attaining Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Perspective. In P. Boekaerts, P.R. Pintrich, and M. Zeidner (Eds), Handbook of Self-Regulation (13-39) San Diego: Academic Press.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Curricular structure of the Special degree course in
Psychology (2000-2010)

Appendix 2: Curricular structure of the Special degree course in Psychology
(After 2010)

Appendix 3: Case studies

Appendix 4: Interview schedules used in students' interviews

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for lecturers

Appendix 6: Schedules for Focus group interview and reflective accounts

Appendix 7: Form for collection of background information of the students

Appendix 8: University of Nottingham –Statement of Research Ethics

Appendix 9: Informed consent form for students

Appendix 10: Informed consent form for lecturers

Appendix 11: Table 1: Individual differences in the use of different actions in
writing the Advanced Personality Studies assignment

Appendix 1: Curricular structure of the Special degree course in Psychology 2000-2010

Subjects	1st Semester	2nd Semester
100 Level 1st Year	PSY 101 – History of Psychology	PSY 102 - Biological Foundations of Human Behavior
200 Level 2nd Year	PSY 201 – Methodology I PSY 202 – Test and Measurements I PSY 203 – Cognitive Psychology I PSY 204 – Motivation and Emotion	PSY 205 - Methodology II PSY 206 - Test and Measurement II PSY 207 - Cognitive Psychology II PSY 208 - Psychology of Personality
300 Level 3rd Year	PSY 301 – Buddhist Psychology I PSY 302 – Developmental Psychology PSY 303 – Social Psychology PSY 304 – Abnormal Psychology I	PSY 305 – Organizational Psychology PSY 306 - Developmental Psychology-Transition to Childhood II PSY 307 - Buddhist Psychology PSY 308 - Abnormal Psychology II
400 Level **4th Year**	PSY 401 – Transition to Adolescence-Developmental Psychology PSY 402 – Counselling Psychology I PSY 403 – Applied Psychology I PSY 498 - Dissertation	PSY 405 - Advanced Studies in Personality PSY 406- Counselling Psychology II PSY 407- Applied Psychology II -In the social context PSY 499 - Dissertation

Appendix 2: Curricular structure of the Special degree course in Psychology (After 2010)

Year	Semester 1			Semester 2		
	Core Subjects	Electives		Core Subjects	Electives	
		Psycho-social Stream	Counselling stream		Psycho-social Stream	Counselling stream
1st year	PSY 103 – Intro to Psych I			PSY 104 – Intro to Psych II		
2nd year	PSY 209 – Biological Foundations			PSY 213 – Social Psychology		
	PSY 210 - Test and Measurement			PSY 214 – Developmental Psychology II		
	PSY 211 – Developmental Psychology I			PSY 215 – Cognitive Psychology I		
	PSY 212 - Personality			PSY 216 - Methodology I		
3rd Year	PSY 309 – Abnormal psychology I	PSY PS 311 – Psychology and Psychosocial Wellbeing I	PSY C 311 – Counseling Psychology I	PSY 313 - Abnormal Psychology II	PSY PS315– Psychology and Psychosocial Wellbeing II	PSY C 315– Counseling Psychology II
	PSY 310 - Methodology II	PSY PS 312 – Motivation and Emotion	PSY C 312 – School Counseling	PSY 314 - Cognitive Psychology II	PSY PS 316 – Community Psychology	PSY C 316 – Career Guidance
4th year	PSY 408 - Applied Psychology I	PSY PS 409 – Social systems and power/Gender	PSY C 409 – Organizational Psychology	PSY 411 – Applied Psychology II	PSY PS 412 – Psychosocial aspects of law enforcement and conflict; During and after war	PSY C 412 – CBT / Humanistic Therapy
	PSY 498 – Dissertation I	PSY PS 410 – Working with refugee population	PSY C 410 – Buddhist Psychology / religion-based therapy	PSY 499 – Dissertation II	PSY PS 413 – Internship - Psychosocial	PSY C 413 – Internship - Counseling

Appendix 3: The case studies

Case 1: Rev. A

Rev. A was ordained as a Buddhist monk at the age of thirteen and had studied in a government school until then. According to his account, his pre university education was moulded by the pirivena (a traditional school for Buddhist monks) education. The temple in which he had lived in his youth had a pirivena on the same premises and he claimed that his childhood and youth was devoted to education. He described his childhood as 'unpleasant' because he had to keep away from pleasures enjoyed by lay children. He expressed the view that his involvement in education made it easier for him to cope with the unpleasantness of temple life.

The monks in the pirivena were prohibited from attending private tuition classes for the GCE (O/L) examination. Rev. A described the teachers in his pirivena as highly dedicated. They conducted additional classes in the night for the students who were to sit for their O/L examinations. Rev. A was of the view that the foundation laid by the pirivena education in his formative years had helped him in the university. He studied for his GCE(A/L) at another pirivena in a different district. He attended private tuition classes for two subjects and for the other two subjects he relied on what was taught in the pirivena. He also reported that he had studied relevant additional books and materials on his own. He attributed his success at the A/L examination to his own effort, collaborative learning he had with two other monks in the pirivena, the dedication of their teachers and the support he had received from his Loku-hamuduruwo or the head priest in his temple.

According to his account, he felt that university education was completely different from that of the pirivena. He described the former as '*Apima soya yana gamanak' or* a journey of searching on our own. He reported that he used social relationships especially with his seniors, lecturers and peers to find out necessary clues and guidance on learning in the university. For examinations and assignments, he shared knowledge and materials with his fellow monks, and he used to go to another monk's temple during the study leave period to study for the examinations. His past history of studying included strategies such as memorising, self-study, collaborative learning and help seeking when necessary. He said that those strategies helped him in the university in his 'journey of searching on his own'.

Rev A went to university with the intention to specialise in Buddhism in the English medium. However, in his second year he had decided to specialise in psychology because in his view, Buddhism was not taught properly at the university and he was not able to earn good grades in the subject. By the time he had reached the third year, he said that he had realised the possibility of achieving a first class using the affordances in the context. He also reported that he was interested in understanding the deep meaning of the subject and its relevance to life and for personal development. By the time he was about to graduate he appeared to have set a new goal to become a lecturer in Buddhist psychology in a foreign university. He reported that he had already discussed the matter with a monk who was teaching in a foreign university. Therefore, the goals he has set appear to be a result of interplay among both individual and contextual factors.

Rev. A effectively mobilised both cultural and social capital to set and achieve goals during and beyond the course period. According to his own account, his early education in a Buddhist pirivena made him develop habits of learning which helped him to memorise large amounts of Buddhist Gathas, Sutthas, and stories as well as factual knowledge. The practices and habits developed in those formative years helped him to use strategies such as memorisation, collaborative and self learning in the undergraduate course. As he reported on many occasions, he was also able to develop and use social networks to get support and assistance to achieve his own goals. For example, when he wanted to follow the "diploma in counselling" course for which he had to pay a considerable amount of money, he was able to solicit the support of a senior monk who had been a friend of his own head priest. Similarly, when he was in his first year in the undergraduate course, he sought advice and received support from the senior students on attending to assessment tasks. Moreover, according to his own account, when he did his 'work project' in a secondary school he actively involved himself in identifying students' problems and planning programmes to help those students with his knowledge of psychology. He also reported that his somewhat elite position as a Buddhist monk also helped him to develop positive relationships with the lecturers to solicit support and advice in and outside the classroom. His account consists of numerous examples where he was able to mobilise material, non-material and mental resources to achieve his own goals.

Rev. A expressed his desire to earn a good degree and to outperform others on many occasions during the interviews that I had had with him. However, he was not solely

confined to those extrinsic motivations. There are many examples in his accounts that indicate intrinsic motivation to learn psychology and to expand his own action possibilities. For example, he reported that he enjoyed learning psychology while drawing parallels between psychology and Buddhism. He also talked about the dissertation and work project with enthusiasm. He considered those opportunities as learning opportunities which made him take responsibility for deciding what to learn and how to learn. He had been keen on identifying a topic relevant to his own interests for the dissertation. He also reported that he had wanted to utilise the time spent in the school during the work project to practise his knowledge and skills in psychology and to be of service to the school. As he mentioned in his second interview, he had been motivated to transform his identity to become 'somebody who is able to do something independently.'

Rev. A had a more elaborated view of the object in the final year than the other two students. As mentioned earlier, he was interested in understanding the deep meaning of the subject and its relationship to Buddhism and he wanted to become 'somebody who can do something independently' by learning psychology. He also talked enthusiastically about the course contents and reportedly used the opportunities wisely to expand the curriculum. For example during the time he spend in a school for the work project he reported that he worked with the teacher responsible for counselling to identify problems faced by the students and to conduct programmes to help them. He was of the view both transmission approaches and social constructivist approaches to teaching are necessary. He also reported that he liked the assignments,

presentations and group activities, because they provided opportunities to learn more from other sources. Hence, it appears that his views on curriculum, teaching and assessment were shaped partly by this more elaborated view of the object.

Case 2: Sisie

Sisie was from an urban, lower middle class family. She had been accepted into university from elite urban National school where she had re-taken her 'A' levels in order to obtain higher grades. She reported that she was not very keen on going to the university since there were many other avenues to find employment. The influence of her parents and others in the family affected her decision to go. After considering the social, economic, cultural and educational value of the university degree she decided to follow a degree course in the university. She received private tuition individually at home in three subjects that she offered in A/L. She attributed her success in the examinations to the individualised tuition she had received at home. Unlike Mali, she said that she was not very keen on achieving a first class at the beginning of the course. By the time she reached her third year, however, she became interested in achieving a first class as well as acquiring practical skills.

Sisie started with a vague idea about university education but later became more focussed on enhancing employability and improving professional skills. Sisie's interest in improving skills motivated her to engage in related activities while Mali appeared to be focusing on achieving better grades and outperforming others.

Sisie said that she had developed useful social relationships with important people outside the university, especially in her final year, to achieve her own goals. For example, when she had to identify a topic for her dissertation she sought ideas from the doctors in the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital. She also reported that she was able to develop useful relationships with the lecturers in the "diploma in counselling" course conducted by an outside organisation. They had given her an opportunity to work as a part time lecturer in the same course during weekends after completing her diploma. She reported that she was also keen to develop her practical skills by choosing a dissertation topic which included an intervention programme. She reported several incidents where she had used social relationships to improve her practical skills.

Similar to Rev. A, Sisie described learning in the university as a journey of searching for knowledge. According to her account, she also appeared to have been motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. In her first interview, she reported that she had taken interest in writing assignments because she felt that she could learn new facts from reading books and other materials indicating an intrinsic motivation to learning. Unlike Mali, Sisie did not show interest in achieving a first class from the very beginning and it was not her sole purpose of being at the university. However, by the time she reached her final year she reported that since she felt that she could achieve a first class by gaining a few more good grades and she was working hard to earn them. As she reiterated in her account, her prime motive was to develop as a person, and to become somebody who is armed with 'practical skills'. She attributed her emphasis

on acquiring practical skills and self development to the challenges she anticipated from her siblings and relatives who were studying for professional degrees. She reported that she felt that they were socially, economically and culturally more advanced than her. To keep up with them, she wanted to develop the necessary skills to become a professional psychologist or a counsellor.

Compared to Mali and Rev. A, Sisie was keen on improving skills and personal development from her second year onward. She was initially critical about the lack of opportunities in the curriculum for practical training and skills development. She was also eager to utilise opportunities provided in the final year curriculum to improve employability skills. She talked enthusiastically about the opportunities she had to learn from open situations such as work project and dissertation. She reported that she preferred group activities to lectures as well as assignments, group work and presentations to examinations because the former helped her to learn and practice skills and to learn more from different sources. It appeared that her preferences for learning from unstructured situations, social constructivist approaches to teaching and assessment tasks which allowed her to learn from different sources, reflected her moderately elaborated object and her focus on the above aspects.

Case 3: Mali

Mali is from a rural, lower middle class family. She attended a rural type 1C school in a remote area.

According to her account, Mali had been able to achieve the best results in the GCE (A/L) examination in her district in the Arts stream and was proud of it. She had attended private tuition classes in all four subjects and attributed her success in the A/L examination to her own effort and the education that she had received in the private tuition classes. She reported that the tuition masters had explained the subject matter clearly and dictated notes. Students were made to answer essay type model questions and the teachers regularly marked them. In this way she practiced answering examination questions. She also mentioned in her account that she had not participated in any extracurricular activities in the school.

In the university, Mali's reported strategies were individual in nature. She claimed that she studied on a daily basis and worked hard throughout the semester with the aim of attaining a first class and excelling in her studies. Unlike Rev. A, Mali did not collaborate with anyone in writing assignments or in preparing for examinations. She seemed to have a competitive attitude and blamed her friends for hiding library books and trying to read her written assignments before submitting their own. Her attempts at self-study seemed to be limited to writing assignments. She said that she preferred examinations to written assignments. She also reported that she used to copy from senior students when she had to write assignments similar to those which had been given to her seniors in the previous year.

Her main concern had been whether she would be able to secure suitable employment even after getting a first class degree. In her final two years, she had completed three

different employment-related courses. However, unlike Sisie (whose story is presented below) she had not taken a great interest in developing practical skills. She had shown little interest in the advance personality seminars, work project and the dissertation, compared to the interest shown by Sisie and Rev. A. The coaching she received in private tuition classes and her success in examinations appear to have influenced her preference for transmission approaches to teaching in the university. Her strategies of learning and motives have been closely associated with examination success and her strong identity of a high achiever developed throughout her school career and in the university.

Compared to Rev. A and Sisie, Mali had expressed a narrowly defined range of goals which focussed on academic achievement and finding employment after completing her degree. Compared to Rev. A, Mali appeared to have mobilised a limited range of cultural and social resources to improve learning. She reported that she relied on books in the university library, and sought guidance and support from seniors when writing assignments. Unlike Rev. A, she did not use the internet to find additional facts to include in her assignments. Unlike Sisie, she also did not appear to be so keen on developing practical skills and did not talk enthusiastically about the opportunities for such practice available in advanced personality studies seminars or in the work project. Unlike Rev. A and Sisie, she did not appear to have considered the dissertation as an opportunity to improve skills. For the dissertation, she had chosen a topic related to students' counselling in the university and stated that she was doing it because of the interest shown by the lecturer and the nagging she received from him

for not being punctual in doing it. She also did not talk about the work project with enthusiasm. Her relatively narrow view of the object of the course as earning a first class and the habits and practices developed throughout her school career also seemed to have affected her ways of mobilising resources.

Mali said her prime motive in learning in the psychology course was to earn a first class and to top the batch. However, in her later interviews she said that she was a little de-motivated because of her doubts about getting a job after the completion of the degree course. In her third year, she reported that she was working hard to earn a first class and felt that what had been learned in the course had helped her to enrich her life. She appeared to have sustained her interest and effort because of these two expectations. She had fulfilled the grade requirements of a first class by the end of the third year and in her final interview she expressed the view that she was now feeling lazy but if she was given a chance to follow a new course, she would take interest and do her very best. She appeared to have built a strong identity in relation to achieving a first class. When I asked her about her most valued outcome of the course, she claimed: 'obtaining a first class. I think I received what I expect from university life. I am so proud of it." She seems to have been motivated largely to achieving an identity which is strongly associated with a first class.

Mali had a relatively narrow view of the object where she had been focusing on earning a first class and gaining employment at the end of the course. She preferred the given curriculum, especially in the advanced personality studies course. She also

reported that she considered examinations were more useful than assignments and group activities. She said that she liked lecture method because they provided an organised set of notes that made it easier to prepare for examinations. Her views about curriculum, assessment and teaching appeared to have been shaped to some extent by her relatively narrow view of the object and also her past experiences of teaching, learning and curriculum which were mainly based on transmission approaches.

Appendix 4:   Interview schedules used in students' interviews

Interview Schedule for Students- 1ˢᵗ Interview

The purpose of this interview is to learn about your background, past experiences prior to the entrance to the university, experiences in the first year and experiences in the first semester of the second year.

1. Student's background

- Name
- Where do you come from?
- Schools attended,
- Parents (occupations, education level, nature of support for education from the parents)
- Family (No. of members), education, occupations, nature of support from the family members, monthly family income, whether receive 'Samurdhi' Allowance (Poverty alleviation)
- Whether receiving 'Mahapola' bursaries (Special bursaries granted by the Sri Lankan government to Undergraduates)
- Explain what other financial support is available
- Hobbies, interests, extracurricular activities, second language competencies?
- Any work experiences
- Your aspirations, goals during university education
- Are there any professional courses that you follow?

2. Past educational experiences

- GCE A/L results, How did you prepare for your exam? What support did you receive? From whom? Whether you went for private tuition?
- What helped you most to achieve the results? Did you achieve any special goals?
- Are there any other significant aspects about your school education?

3. Experiences in the first year

- What was it like to be at university as a day scholar/residential student in your first year?
- How would you describe your first year at university?
  (Friendships, romance, politics, ragging, adjustment to life at the university)
- Views about
  - Own goals,
  - teaching,
  - learning and

  What did you want to achieve in the first year?

4. Assessment

- How was the assessment done?
- How did you go about completing the assessment tasks?
  - Written assignments
  - In-class quizzes
  - mid semester and end semester exams
- What was the nature of
  - Marking, grading and feedback
- What were your reactions to feedback and grades achieved in different assessment components
- General impressions/ reactions to the assessment process (compare with school experiences)
- What helped you to achieve what you have achieved?
- What hindered your learning/ achievements in the first year?

5. Impact of assessment
- How helpful are these assessment tasks for your learning?
- How did the assessment affect your life at university this year?
- Based on your experiences in assessment at university in the first year what changes would you like to
  - make in your own behaviour in the second year
  - see in your fellow students' behaviour
  - see in the lecturers' behaviour
  - see in the nature of assessment tasks, exam papers and the procedures

6. Experiences as a Second year Special degree student

Now you are specialising in psychology. I would like to ask you a few more questions about your experiences so far in the second year.

- What made you to opt for psychology?
- What do you expect from specialising in psychology?
- What are your views about
  - The course content
  - Teaching and learning
  - Student – lecturer relationships
  - Assessment (How was it carried out? Views on different methods, examinations, assignments, how did you prepare for different components of assessment? How did the assessment affect your life at university)
  - What are your responses to feedback? (Feelings, how useful? in what ways?)
- Factors supporting learning
- Problems and constraints on learning and/or life at the university

Thank you for participating in this interview.

2nd Interview with students

In the first interview, we have discussed about your experiences in the first year and part of the second year. In this interview, I would like to hear about your experiences since then. (Latter part of 2nd semester up to now in the third year)

1. **Life at University**
    How was the life at university during the latter part of 2nd year and in the first semester of the third year?
    Living (boarding house/hall/home)
    Ragging
    Leisure
    Friendships
    Love
    Finances
    Extra curricular
    Participation in other courses
    Your general impression about the life at University?

2. **Views about the courses, contents, teaching and learning**
    Specific goals for this year
    Courses that you have done
    Your views about the course contents, teaching and learning
    What do you think that you have learnt best this year and why?
    What do you think that you have learnt least this year and why?
    Any constraints in learning?

3. **Assessments other than examinations**
    Nature of the assessment tasks that you have in the last two semesters
    How did you complete/prepare for those tasks?
    Could you explain in detail how did you write your assignments?
    What difficulties did you encounter in doing them?
    How do you feel about the grades that you've achieved?
    What support did you receive from friends and others?
    What feedback did you receive from your lectures?
    How do you feel about the assessment feedback?
    What are the significant lessons that you have learnt by doing these assessment tasks?

4. **Examinations**

    How did you prepare for
    > Mid semester examinations
    > End –semesterr examinations
    > What support did you receive from friends/others?

Your views about
> The nature of question papers, questions?
> Marking
> Feedback
> Your response to the results that you received

5. Impact of assessment
How helpful are these assessment tasks for your learning?
Are there any difficulties that yon face in the assessment process?
How did the assessment affect your life in the university this year?
Based on your experiences so far in the university what changes do you want to make in your own behaviour in the next year?
> See in the behaviour of fellow students
> See in the behaviour of the lecturers
> See in the curriculum, teaching
> See in the nature of assessment tasks, exams and other procedures

Is there anything that you want to add that I didn't ask and you think is important?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Interview Schedule for students-3rd Interview

1. As a student about to complete your course how would you describe yourself now?

2. When I first interviewed you in your second year you told me about your expectations of entering the university. To what extent that you feel that you have fulfilled them?

3. What are your goals now in this final year?

4. What did you expect to learn from the Psychology course? To what extent were those expectations fulfilled? Why do you say so?

5. What did you learn best in the course? And why do you say so?

6. What did you learn badly in the course? Why do you say so?

7. What kind of strategies did you use in your part to achieve your expectations from the course?

8. What kind of support did you seek from other personnel/ resources in the university?

9. What kind of support that you seek from other personnel/ resources outside the university? (including courses that you follow)

10. How do you see the following aspects of the course now? How they affected your goals of learning?

- Curriculum (Relevance, Theory/ practice balance, What changes are necessary?)
- Teaching (views on methods used, strengths, weaknesses, your preferences and why)
- Assessment (What are your preferences for different assessment tasks? and why? How did you prepare for different assessment tasks? Your views about marking? Feedback? Your responses to feedback/or lack of it. How did the assessment affect your goals?
- Dissertation (Your views on the dissertation, How it affected your learning)
- Work project
- Prevention Programme
- Advanced Personality Seminars
- Teachers (How supportive were they? T/P relations, any impact of their behaviour on you?)

- Who did you seek support from when you were in trouble? How supportive were they to resolve your problem?

11. What problems did you face in achieving the goals that you set for yourself?
12. How did you resolve them?
13. What do you feel that you have achieved in the course?/Your most valued outcome?
14. If you happen to start anew your university education what changes would you make in your choices, goals and strategies?
15. Is there anything would you like to add that I haven't asked but you think is relevant and important?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for lecturers

Interview Schedule for Lecturers

1.0 Personal background
- Could you tell me about yourself
    - Personal background
    - Specialisation
    - Research interests
    - Experience in teaching undergraduates
    - The courses that you teach
    - Other responsibilities

1. **Expectations from teaching the course**

- Purpose of the Special degree in Psychology course
- Your views about the curriculum, teaching and assessment processes used in the course
- What do you expect from the students in teaching the particular component?
- What do you want to achieve by teaching this course?

2. **Assessment**

- What methods did you use?
- What do you expect from using these methods? (purposes)
- What criteria were used in these different assessment methods?
- How did you communicate these criteria to the students?
- How did you give feedback to the students?

3. **Evaluation of student responses**

By now, you have evaluated students' assignments and examination answer scripts.
- How do you rate their achievements in relation to your expectations?
    - Assignments
    - Examination
- What did they seem to have successfully learned?
- What did they seem to have found difficult?
- What general patterns do you see in the students' responses?
- How do you explain these variations?

4. Problems and reflections

- What problems (if any) are there in the assessment procedure?
- When you teach the same course in the next year , what changes would you like to
  - See in your own behaviour
  - See in the students' behaviour
  - See in you relationships with students
  - Make in the assessment process
  - Make in the assessment criteria and feedback

Is there anything else that you would like to add that I didn't ask?

Thank you for participating in this interview

Appendix 6: Schedule for focus group interviews

Focus group interview 1

1. **Your expectations from getting into the university**
2. **Purposes in the first year**
3. **Life at university during first year**
4. **Teaching, curriculum and assessment in the first year**
5. **Problems and issues that you encountered in learning in the first year**
6. **Expectations from specializing psychology**
7. **Purposes in the second year**
8. **Life at university during second year**
9. **Teaching, curriculum and assessment in the Second year**
10. **Problems and issues that you encountered in learning in the second year**

Focus group interview 2

1. **Purposes in the third year**
2. **Teaching, curriculum and assessment in the third year**
3. **Strategies used for learning**
4. **Problems and issues in the third year**
5. **Purposes in the final year**
6. **Teaching, curriculum and assessment in the final year**
7. **Outcomes that you value most**
8. **Problems and issues in the final year**

Questions for reflective accounts

For Students

Please record your reflections about your participation in the Advanced Personality Studies Course. I am particularly interested in the following aspects:

- Your initial purposes of participation in the course and how they had been changed/remained unchanged during the course
- Your views about the methods of teaching, curriculum, and assessment practices used in the course and how they have affected your learning?
- What have you gained and how the other participants' and the lecturer's behaviour affected your learning?
- Strengths and weaknesses of the course

For the Lecturer

Please record your reflections about the Advanced Personality Studies course. I am particularly interested in the following aspects:
- Your expectations from the students
- Your initial purposes and how they have changed during the implementation of the course
- How the innovations in teaching, curriculum and assessments affected the students' learning and behaviour?
- Your concerns/ problems about student learning

Appendix 7: The form for collection of background information of the students

Background information of the students

1. Name:
   Rev./Mr./Miss/Mrs……………………………………………………………
2. Registration Number:……………….....................
3. Age on 01.06.2004…….yrs. ……..months
4. Sex: M/F
5. Temporary Address:--
   -----
6. Telephone:---
   Mobile……………………….
7. Permanent
   Address:………………………………………………………………….
8. Telephone:---
9. E-mail:………………………..
10. District:………………………..
11. School attended for GCE (A/L)
12. Type of the School: National/1AB/1C (1AB: Schools with Science A/L stream, 1C: Schools with Arts/Commerce streams)
13. District in which the school is located:----------------------------
14. The school is located in a   1). Municipal council area
                                     2). Urban council area
                                     3). Divisional area
14. Subjects that you studied at GCE(A/L)
    ………………………………………………………………………………
15. Z score at the GCE(A/L)………………..
16. English Proficiency:
             Speaking   High/Medium/Low
             Reading   High/Medium/Low
             Writing   High/Medium/Low

17. Family background:
18. No. of family members including parents……………..
19. Father's occupation:……………………………..
20. Mother's occupation:…………………..
21. Total monthly family income:Rs………………..
22. Parents' education level   Mother   Father
             Never attended school
             Grade 5
             Grade 8
             GCE(O/L)
             GCE(A/L)
             First Degree
             Postgraduate degree

22. Who funds your university education

       Parents

       Mahapola Bursary   Other (Pl. specify)……………..

23. Your GPA at the end of the 1st Year:……………..

Thank you

Appendix 8

University of Nottingham –Statement of Research Ethics

Information about completing the form

From September 2004, all research who have not yet begun their fieldwork /data collection and who will not be beginning their fieldwork before November 2004 will be required to have their plans for data collection approved by the Research Ethics Coordinator, on behalf of the School of Education's Ethics Committee.

In order to gain approval, you would be required to complete a 'Statement of Research Ethics' form, which must be signed by yourself and your supervisor/lead supervisor, and submitted to the Postgraduate Research Student Office, together with:

(1) A brief statement of your research aims or questions and proposed methods of data generation;
(2) Written materials (e.g. letters) that you are planning to use to gain access to prospective research participants; and
(3) A draft consent form to be used with prospective participants.

Please note that all students will not be able to tick every box on the Statement of Research Ethics form. However, where you are not able to tick any of the boxes, you will need to provide a convincing explanation in order to have your research plans approved. Most statements relate to the British Educational Research Association's revised Ethical guidelines for Educational Research (2004), which have been adopted by the School of Education.

You should submit your ,Statement of Research Ethics' form at two full months prior to the commencement of any fieldwork, in order to allow sufficient time to have these approved (in some cases resubmission may be necessary). Forms may be submitted by the last day of each month. They should be returned to you by the end of the second full week of the following month.
<u>You must not undertake any data collection until your 'Statement of ResearchEthics' has been approved.</u>
This does not apply to those students who have already begun data collection or for whom plans are already in place to begin fieldwork before November 2004.

Appendix 9: Informed Consent form for students

Dear Student,

I am a lecturer in the Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. I am planning to conduct a research study on student experiences in undergraduate education. In my study I am focusing on your experiences of being in the university and of teaching, curriculum, learning and assessment in your Special Degree Course. I am planning to use interviews, focus group interviews, observations and reflective accounts for data collection.

You have a choice on whether you would like to participate in this study or not. You also have a right to withdraw at anytime you want to. However, I hope, you will participate in this study and help me to make it successful. Your views and ideas are very important for this research.

Please be assured that your responses would be kept in full confidence. Your identity will not be revealed at any time.

If you wish to participate in this study please fill in and sign the following form. Please keep one copy with you.

Thank you and good luck

Subhashinie Wijesundera
Senior lecturer,
Department of Education (Telephone:081-2392704,Home:081-2301062,
subhashiniew@yahoo.com)
Faculty of Arts
University of Peradeniya

I,

Rev./Mr./Ms. …………………………………………………….hereby gives my consent to participate in the following aspects of the above study.

.

Interviews

Focus Group Interviews

Observations

Reflective account

Perusal of Marked assignments

Please tick the relevant cages. You may tick one or more cages according to your wish.

Signature of the student

Date

Appendix 10: Informed consent form for lecturers

Dear Colleague,

I am a lecturer in the Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. I am planning to conduct a research study on student experiences in undergraduate education. In my study I intend to focus on students' experiences of being at university and of teaching, curriculum, learning and assessment in your Special Degree Course. My purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of the various factors affecting the learning process.

In my study I wish to examine the perspectives of students as well as lecturers. Therefore, I am planning to use interviews, observations, and analyses of documents (Syllabi, course descriptions, feedback comments on assignments and answer scripts) for collecting data from the lecturers.

You have a choice on whether you want to participate in this study or not. You also have a right to withdraw at anytime you want to. However, I hope, you will participate in this study and help me to make it successful. Your views and ideas are very important for this research.

Please be assured that your responses would be kept in full confidence. Your identity will not be revealed at any time. If you wish to participate in this study please fill in and sign the following form. Please keep one copy with you.

Thank you

Subhashinie Wijesundera
Senior lecturer,
Department of Education (Telephone:081- 2392704, 081-2301062)
Faculty of Arts
University of Peradeniya

I, Prof./Dr../Mr./Ms. …………………………………………………….hereby give my consent to participate in the following aspects of the above study.

Interviews
Observations
Reflective account
Comments of Marked assignments

(Please tick the relevant cages. You may tick one or more cages according to your wish.)

Signature of the lecturer
Date

Appendix 11

Table 1: Individual differences in the use of different actions in writing the APS assignment

Name	Self disclosure	Questioning and Arguing	Analysis of the relationship between own values and personality	Effects of class discussions on personality	Effects of other course experiences on personality	Integration of theory	Own personality theory	Grade Received
Sanda	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	A
Sangeeta	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	B
Mali	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	A
Priya	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	A
Darshi	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	A
Supuni	1*	1	1	1	1	1	0	A
Dilki	1*	1	1	1	0	1	0	A
Sisi	1*	1	1	0	0	1	0	A
Kumi	1*	1	1	0	1	1	0	A
Rev. B	1*	1	1	0	0	1	1	A
Ama	1*	1	1	0	0	1	1	A
Rev. A	1*	1	1	0	0	1	1	A
Anu	1*	1	1	0	1	1	1	A
Abeya	1*	1	1	1	0	1	1	A
Saku	1*	1	1	0	0	1	1	A
Total Resp	15	14	14	7	3	14	8	

Key: * denotes that the student used experiences outside the classroom context in their self disclosure; 0-did not attempt the action; 1-attempted the action