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'IN SEARCH OF ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK'
- STUDENT VIEW ON THE FINNISH AND BRITISH
HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate how students who had first hand experience of both Finnish and British higher education, had experienced the main differences of the two educational settings, with a particular focus on the usage of assessment feedback. Furthermore, the perceived meaning of higher education and feedback was explored, as was also the perceived value of feedback in the students' personal learning experience.

The study was conducted by using a semi-structured interview. The ten chosen participants were University of Jyväskylä students who had engaged in the Erasmus Exchange Programme in Britain during the period 1999-2002. The interview data was analysed using qualitative methodology; themes and types emerged from the data. The main difference between the two educational settings was reported to be the 'critical balance of student support'. The British system was seen as more supportive, though to the extent of being 'patronising', in its discursive methods of learning and teaching, and in providing frequent assessment feedback. In contrast, the Finnish system was considered to better foster the development of reflective, critical thinking by placing more responsibility on students. Students attached developmental, instrumental and inspirational meanings to assessment feedback. A 'Pragmatic' and 'Learning for Life' type of approach to learning and feedback could be established from the data.

Key Words: higher education, cultural differences, assessment, feedback, reflection, critical thinking

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment feedback has an important influence on student learning, and this study aims to explore the meaning of assessment feedback as seen from the student's perspective. Mainly, the study will investigate the issue of assessment feedback from a cultural point of view; how students who have an understanding of both Finnish and British higher education experience the differences between the two educational contexts. These questions have arisen from a personal experience after engaging in Erasmus Exchange Programme in Britain, and having the opportunity to compare and contrast the two different educational settings. The usage of feedback, particularly, seemed to be more frequent and more detailed in my exchange institution, and on reflection, the scarcity of assessment feedback in my home institution had seemed to have an adverse effect to my academic self. I became more aware of my strengths and weaknesses after experiencing the detailed feedback I received during my studies in Britain. I felt that receiving frequent and structured feedback had led to a deeper and more satisfying learning experience, and so I became interested in the underlying philosophy behind these differences, as well as the validity of my experience; I wondered whether feedback had more importance for students in general than was typically granted for in the Finnish higher education. Student perceptions on assessment feedback are also fairly under-researched. Consequently, the main focus of this research is on the following questions: how do students who had experienced the Finnish and British higher education setting perceive the main differences in the educational settings, with a particular focus on assessment feedback; how do students see the meaning of higher education and what is the role of feedback in the students' personal learning experience; and what is the perceived meaning and value of assessment feedback, as experienced by the students.

The literature review of this study will firstly explore the differences in the Finnish and British academic cultures from a philosophical and historical perspective, providing a background against which to assess the underpinning differences of the student experience in the two cultures. It will then proceed to provide the contemporary context, and an account of the two educational systems, as they were at the time of the study.

This theoretical account on cultural differences will subsequently be revisited in the results section, particularly in Chapter 6.1, through the empirical evidence.

The second chapter of the literature review will outline the role of higher education in cultivating the student mind. An introduction to the underlying approach to learning is provided: learning is seen as constructive activity, where the student's previous knowledge and understanding affect what is being learned. Moreover, the role of assessment and feedback in the learning process will become clear when placed against the background of constructive learning theories, and particularly, the emphasis that the constructive approaches place on the importance of social interaction in learning. In the course of the study, it becomes clear how important it is to gain external insight to one's work, and discuss the issues at hand, in order to best facilitate the learning. Following the more general account on learning, the focus will be on the development of higher level intellectual development, 'reflective' or 'critical' thinking, as recognised by many (see Atkins 1995; Dewey 1933; King & Kitchener 1994; Barnett 1997), as one of the main purposes of higher education. Furthermore, a review of previously conducted research into the perceived differences in methods of learning and teaching in Finland and Britain will provide the backdrop for the different learning environments, and difference in attitude towards assessment feedback.

The study will then narrow the focus down on the role of assessment and feedback in learning and teaching. Assessment is seen as an essential element in the learning process, and yet the implications of assessment on student experience are not always fully appreciated in the day-to-day grind of the Finnish higher education. Assessment has multiple functions, formative and summative, which serve the student learning, function as a useful tool for the teacher, as well as provide the means for grading of performance. However, without feedback, the role of assessment in the learning process is seen as incomplete. Feedback provides students with a valuable instrument; knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as getting information on one's overall academic development, will enable further growth, and assessment and feedback will become an integral part of the learning process and an instrument of self-reflection.

Due to the nature of the research topic in attempting to make sense of a shared experience, a qualitative approach was adopted. The research was conducted by using a semi-structured interview; ten University of Jyväskylä students, who had first-hand exchange experience from Britain during 1999-2002, were selected. Although the aim of the study was to understand the student experience, rather than make broad generalisations and form a theory, the participants were selected to represent six out of the seven Faculties at the University of Jyväskylä, and a total of eight Departments within the Faculties. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed using a thematic approach; also a typology of learners could be teased out from the interview material.

The main findings of the research are reported in Chapter 6. Firstly, the main, overriding theme of *'the critical balance of student support'*, provide an answer to the first of the research questions on the cultural differences of the Finnish and British higher education, with a particular focus on assessment feedback. The research showed that the main difference between the two educational settings was the balance of student support, which is implied by the literature review and the fundamental differences between the Humboltian research university and the British 'educating university'. The British educational setting seemed to offer students more support in the form of discursive methods of learning and teaching, tutorials and, particularly, frequent assessment feedback. In contrast, the Finnish higher education was seen to overlook the benefits of assessment feedback by placing perhaps too much responsibility on the student in general. However, the Finnish self-directed approach seemed to result in more critical, reflective learners.

Consequently, the second main theme arising from the interview material was *'constructing the personal worldview'*, the development into a 'critical being'. The interviewees emphasised the role of higher education, in general, and the role of assessment feedback, in particular, in constructing a personal worldview, and greatly affecting the student's perception of their self. The students' accounts explicitly support the theoretical take on the role of higher education presented in Chapter 3; however, the role of assessment feedback in the learning process and in constructing the student's academic self remains implied until the theme is explored through the two types of students that could be extrapolated by taking the analysis of the theme further, in

Chapter 6.4. However, it seems that assessment feedback could improve the overall learning experience for all by providing the student with 'a wider perspective', and furthermore, for some students, constructive feedback plays an important role in the process of becoming a 'critical being'.

A further analysis of the meanings students attach to assessment feedback could be carried out. Students' accounts on the meaning and value of feedback identified three different functions of feedback: *developmental*, *instrumental* and *inspirational* functions, which are presented in detail in Chapter 6.3. The instrumental and inspirational functions of feedback reflect the informative and hedonistic functions respectively (e.g. Falchikov 1995), but the analysis is then taken further to present the developmental aspects of feedback, which are seen as both informative and hedonistic. From this analysis it became apparent that according to the meanings the students attached to feedback, whether developmental, instrumental or inspirational, and the general approach the student had on learning in higher education (refer to Chapter 6.2), a typology of learners could be identified. The main result of the study, drawing together all the three research questions, was that the students represented either Type A, the 'Pragmatically orientated' learner, who saw feedback as beneficial, having an instrumental function, yet not *essential* to learning, and Type B, named as 'Learning for Life', who was explicit about the centrality of feedback in learning, and development of critical thinking. The 'Learning for Life' type also considered assessment feedback as an important factor in developing the student's academic self. Chapter 7, 'Discussion', will draw together the main results of this piece of research, and discuss the findings in the light of the recent changes in the Finnish higher education.

2. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OF UNIVERSITY TRADITIONS

It is important that the basic assumption of universities being the same across the western world is abolished right from the beginning. Although great similarities can be found, the British (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland[1] and Wales) tradition of higher education differs from the Finnish equivalent a great deal. The British have far-reaching university traditions dating back to medieval boarding schools, whereas the Finnish traditions are fairly new and based on very different principles. In order to understand the reasons for the differences between these two academic cultures, some historical and cultural factors will be examined. The purpose of the following account is to highlight the fact that when the approach to learning and student support come from such different backgrounds, it is only natural that the attitudes towards assessment and assessment feedback vary as well. In this section, I will present a brief history of the differences behind the two different systems of higher education, returning to the present, providing an account of the degree structure both in the UK and in Finland.

2.1 DIFFERENT UNIVERSITY MODELS – DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHIES

Cabal (1993, 29) starts differentiating university models based on universities' main function, whether the main mission is teaching or research. Naturally, the culture and philosophy within a university is very different when looking from these two perspectives. Although there are various ways to identify different types of universities, and different philosophies behind the institutions, the focus here is to present the main ways of categorising them. Studies on these different types have been made since the beginning of the 19th century and in 1906 Abbot formulated three different orientations of universities (Cabal 1993, 29-35). These consist of the English idea of the development of the person, the German ideal of science and the North-American goal for social development.

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[1] The Scottish higher education is included, as it falls under the category of 'British'; however, the Scottish higher education falls under the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (Quality Assurance Agency 2000).

Furthermore, Cabal presents Giner de los Rios' (1916) primary types of universities. The old English 'educating university' emphasises the intellectual rather than purely scientific function, whereas the German 'research university', alive, for example, in Germany and Scandinavia, emphasises research and training of scientists as its main goal. Finally, Latin (e.g. French and Spanish) university underlines the focus in professionalisation (Cabal 1993, 29-35). In 1991 Husén (in Cabal 1993, 29-35) combined these theories as one. Firstly, there are the Humboldtian "research university" corresponding to the German model and the British "residential model", which is presented in detail in the following chapter. Secondly, the French "les grandes écoles" corresponding to the meritocratic, professionalising Latin model. Thirdly, there is the "Chicago model" equivalent to Abbot's North-American model. Here the interest lies in the British and the German models, as the Scandinavian, and Finnish, system follows the German traditions (Cabal 1993, 29-35).

The main purpose of the following account is to stress the fact that different university traditions result in different emphasis on educational goals and ideals. The British model concentrates on somewhat broader outcomes, so called "life-skills", which are considered to be more than just academic competence. This differs greatly from the Finnish, i.e. German model's objectives to educate experts and researchers.

2.2 THE BRITISH TRADITION

As one can conclude from the previous chapter, the different models of universities have a profound effect on the philosophies and practices of universities, or in the broader sense, higher education. As the study here is focused on the British and the German models, it is necessary to explain them in more detail. The "residential model" is scrutinised in the following paragraphs, and the reasons behind the strong emphasis on student support will become evident.

Historically, the earliest British universities were found on religious needs to bring up clergymen, lawyers and medical doctors. The students were as young as 14 years of age and these universities were usually boarding schools; therefore, the teachers had moral, as much as educational, responsibility over the students. Earwaker (1992, 102-103)

explains the British tradition of the well-established tutoring tradition on the long history of British universities. Even nowadays, British youth usually go to university or college straight from school and from their childhood homes. They are living on their own, and taking responsibility over organising their normal everyday life, for the first time in their life. Therefore, it is seen as crucial for the teachers not to leave the students "on their own" in their studies and everyday problems (Earwaker 1992).

The universities were, and very often still are, self-governing colleges that are organised as communities. The students usually live on campus and "the cloistered quadrangle" consists of shared residence, shared scholarship, shared religion and shared leisure (Earwaker 1992, 103). The idea of residential experience is central; hence, the "residential model". The ideal that students should learn from the informal, as well as the formal, education is very much still alive. Extra-curricular activities were, and are, seen as important elements as studying itself in higher education, and these activities are organised in a fairly formalised, structured manner throughout the studies. This model has had extensive influence on the university structures and practices in the UK till this day. As Earwaker (1992, 106) puts it: "ideally, higher education is a social experience as well as an intellectual one." In this quote, the essence of the British model of university becomes very clear.

2.3 THE CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the UK, the Government policy paper, the "White Paper" on higher education (Department for Education and Skills 2003) emphasises the importance of employability, and local demands on higher education. Aspirations to produce academically achieved, yet "ready-to-employ-experts" has changed the educational landscape in all discipline areas in the recent years. The three-year degree programmes are to offer, on one hand, employable graduates, direct application of theory to practice and, on the other hand, academic credibility and reliability. These changes have resulted in a great shift from the previous intellectual function in the heart of higher education to meeting the society's needs for well-educated professional *practitioners*. The focus seems to be on the quest to be more 'relevant' to the world of work, on specific

competencies, of which employers can make use (Bowden and Marton 1998); the value of learning for its own sake, and the value of learned individuals to the society has suffered inflation in this scenario.

The UK higher education system consists of universities and colleges, which in turn, offer both purely academic programmes or alternatively, vocationally focused or professional training. The Higher Education Funding Council (Hefce) (1999) guide to the UK higher education provides the number of 111 universities and 60 higher education colleges in the whole of the UK in 1999. "Universities are diverse, ranging in size, mission, subject mix and history"; the size of universities in the UK range from 4,000 to 28,000 students, and there are effectively three different types of university traditions in the UK (Hefce 1999). The earliest, most prestigious universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge date from the 12th and 13th centuries, and are often referred to as 'Elite' or 'Ancient' universities. The 'Civic' universities, sometimes referred to as 'Red Brick', were founded in the major cities in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The term 'Red Brick' roughly equates to the universities which belong to the so-called Russell Group and were founded between 1850 and 1960, the term inspired by the old Victorian red brick buildings where these universities were, and are, often located. The 'old' universities were founded mostly in the 1950s and 1960s, whereas the 'new' universities represent the former polytechnics which existed only briefly and were given the status of universities under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The 'New' universities are sometimes referred to as 'Plate Glass Universities', the term reflecting their modern architectural design, often featuring plate glass in steel or concrete frames. The main feature of universities is that they have their own degree-awarding powers; recently, the number of universities has expanded rapidly, as well-established colleges have gained degree-awarding powers (Hefce 1999).

Colleges of Higher Education vary in size, mission, subject mix and history as well. All colleges are self-governing and independent institutions. Nevertheless, in most colleges degrees are awarded by a university or a national accrediting body, though, University Colleges have their own degree-awarding powers (Työministeriö 2003, Hefce 1999). From the Finnish perspective, colleges could be considered as independent satellite campuses of universities with their own principles and regulations. Colleges range from

small specialist institutions of a few hundred students to large multi-disciplined institutions of over ten thousand students.

The UK higher education system is built on a clear two-tier system: undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Työministeriö 2003). The undergraduate degree programmes, i.e. Bachelor's degrees, such as Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc), are the main study programmes, in the UK, consisting of 360 local credits, full-time study time being three years (excluding degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine which last five years). As an exception, Scottish undergraduate programmes are offered both three-year general degree and four-year Honours degree basis. Other lower level higher education qualifications include, for example, Certificate and Diploma in Higher Education, and the latest addition of vocationally focused Foundation Degrees, which usually take one to two years to complete. (Hefce 1999; Department of Education and Skills 2003) It is notable, that the main qualification aim, 'perustutkinto', in the UK is the first degree, i.e. Bachelor's degree, whereas in the Finnish context 'perustutkinto', the basic degree, is a (continuation) Master's degree.

Postgraduate courses, roughly equating to the final years of the Finnish Master's programmes, or rather 'Maisteriopinnot', consisting of 180 credits, can be either taught or research programmes, or a combination or both; these include Master's studies (MA, MSc) and Doctoral studies (PhD). Also intermediate (exit) awards of Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma, which are not recognised in the Finnish system, are available. Postgraduate taught programmes last usually one year (full-time), and research programmes three years. The National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Quality Assurance Agency 2000) provides clear level descriptors for the development of any new degrees, ensuring parity over programmes across institutions.

Over 70 percent of the new undergraduate students in higher education in the UK are under 21 years old (Hefce 1999). Although, major changes in the structure of student body in the British higher education have occurred lately, and there has been a substantial increase in the number of non-traditional students (students over 23 years of age), amounting to as much as 50 per cent of the enrolment in some UK universities,

some of which have virtually no previous formal academic qualifications (Heywood 2000, 144).

After the massive expansion of higher education in Britain in the past decades, the general concern over the quality of provision gave birth to the culture of quality assurance. The arrangements for assessing the quality and standards in the UK higher education are impressive, and range from rigorous internal quality assurance processes to subject reviews and institutional quality reviews (Hefce 1999). The main authority in higher education, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body, established in 1997, which provides an integrated quality assurance service for the UK higher education. QAA has published a suite of inter-related documents, which form the overall Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. The completed Code provides an authoritative reference point for all higher education institutions for programme design and delivery. All institutions must be able to demonstrate how these Codes of Practice have been adhered to; thus, the written Codes are an excellent indicator of how the British system takes the issues raised in this work into account. The relevant Codes of Practice will be further explored at a later stage of this study.

2.4 THE FINNISH WAY

The following chapters will explore the influences behind the Finnish context, and will present the contemporary state of the Finnish higher education. Opetusministeriö, the Ministry of Education (2000), states that the priorities of the Finnish higher education are high quality, educational equality and the principle of lifelong learning. The aim is to develop into a humane knowledge-based society through education and research. Having no tuition fees at any level of education, unlike in Britain, ensures the basic educational security, as well as having a regionally and linguistically covering higher education network (Ministry of Education 2000). One of the research and development priorities lie in internationalisation; already in 1999 some 1340 Finnish students took part in exchange in Britain alone, whereas merely some 280 British students entered exchange programmes in Finland (Ministry of Education 2000).

The system and traditions in the Finnish higher education are very different from the equivalent in the UK. As noted previously, the principles of the university as an institute in Finland arise from the German model, and from a distinctively different historical background (Cabal 1993). The British idea of 'pastoral care' is foreign, as students entering higher education are usually older, and thus more mature than in Britain, due to the different educational structure. Students in Finland only finish their A-level equivalent (lukio), which normally is the prerequisite for admission to higher education, at the age of 19, after which many take a year off in the world of work before entering the university. This means that most first year students are actually at least 20 years of age on entry. Students also live off campus. There are "student villages" providing student accommodation but they could not be further away from the British idea of "residential experience". Because higher education is clearly seen as education aimed at adults, it is understandable that the emphasis is on independent learning and self-reflection, as well as becoming a skilled researcher or an expert of a certain field. From the very beginning, it is made clear to any student that he or she is responsible for their choices and their learning. Therefore, the whole ideology of how studies and learning are seen in the Finnish culture of higher education stands on very different grounds from the British one.

2.5   THE FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Finnish higher education system comprises two parallel sectors, universities and polytechnics (Ministry of Education 2000). There are twenty universities in Finland, ten of which are multi-faculty institutions and ten specialist institutions, such as universities of technology, art academies and schools of economics and business administration. All of them are State-run and engaged in education and research. Furthermore, there are 29 polytechnics, maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities, of which most are multidisciplinary, established during the reform process in the 1990's. Degrees offered by polytechnics are Bachelor's degree level higher education degrees with a professional emphasis. After an experimental and developmental phase, all the polytechnics received a permanent licence in 2000 (Ministry of Education 2000). The new polytechnics have gained increasing prestige and popularity, although, the classic, purely academic education offered by universities still seems to possess prestige over

the more vocational, practice-orientated training. However, new links and progression routes between universities and polytechnics are being established. This study purposefully concentrates on universities, leaving out polytechnics, as the British system no longer recognise polytechnics.

The first degree, roughly corresponding to the Bachelor's Degree can be completed in three years of full-time study, Master's Degree five years, i.e. two additional years to the first degree. However, in practice, the Master's Degree, incorporating the Bachelor's degree, is the 1st degree in the Finnish context, and as stated previously, the 'perustutkinto'. Due to the flexible ways in which the studies can be organised, studies are often prolonged; the average time to complete a Master's degree is about 6.5 years; it is a Government priority to reduce graduation times by restructuring the overloaded basic degrees (Ministry of Education 2000, 25). A pre-doctoral postgraduate degree of a licentiate, which can be completed in two years subsequent to the Master's Degree, is also available; completion of a doctorate normally takes four years.

The national degree regulations define the overarching objectives, extent and overall structure of degrees; content and curricula available are decided by universities (Ministry of Education 2000). The degree structure normally includes studies in one major and one or more minor subjects. Studies are measured in credits, which are defined as the amount of work required to attain the expected learning outcomes, normally equivalent of 40 hours of learning activity per credit. Bachelor's degrees ('*kandidaatti*') consist of minimum of 120 credits, the second-cycle Master's degrees ('*maisteri*') consist of a total of 160 or 180 credits or normally, a Bachelor's syllabus plus 40-60 credits of Master's level studies.

Studies within a degree programme are not referred to as Level 1, 2, 3 and M, as they often are in the UK, but are usually classified as basic studies, intermediate or subject studies and advanced studies. The lower Bachelor's degree normally consists of basic and intermediate studies in the major subject, including a Dissertation, basic studies in one or more minor subjects and some generic studies, such as languages. The Master's degree requires the additional advanced studies and a Master's Dissertation in addition to the Bachelor's syllabus. For some degrees, such as Teacher Education, practical training is compulsory as a part of the degree; for others work placement is optional.

Thus, in the Finnish system nearly all Master's Degrees are continuation, not conversion degrees; students usually progress to postgraduate studies, without even formally graduating at the end of the Bachelor's cycle. The polytechnic degrees are lower level degrees with a professional emphasis, and consist of 140 or 160 credits. The studies comprise basic and professional studies, optional studies, practical training and a final project. (Ministry of Education 2000)

Whereas degree programmes in the UK are named degrees (e.g. BA Early Childhood Studies) with a clearly defined, prescribed title, content and structure, the Finnish system does not provide predetermined schedules and programmes, but places a strong emphasis on students' own initiative and individual work; a student has a great autonomy in selecting the course content from a wide range of modules or courses ('*kurssi*'), themes and minor subjects under a broad, generic degree title (e.g. Master of Education) . This alone demands a great deal of independent thinking, and thus it would be fair to say that the Finnish university is based on a reliance on students taking the responsibility over their learning from the very beginning of their studies.

Cornwall (1988) has presented a hypothetical hierarchy of choice in learning in terms of aspects of the curriculum. On his 'steps' to independence in learning, increasing levels of choice begin from the decision to enrol onto the programme to the pace of study. At the next level, the student could decide the mode of study. Following on to defining the student's own study objectives and assessment methods, leading to the highest step in defining the criteria for success, the practical order in developing independence is structured. What is distinctively notable, is that the Finnish and British systems differ considerably in progressing upwards on these steps. From early on, a student will be making his/ her choices in their study objectives and preferred assessment methods in the Finnish system, whereas the British student choice is rather restricted within the set curriculum.

Self-directed learning demands self-organisation and the ability to converse with oneself about one's own learning processes. Furthermore, the learner has to observe, search, analyse, formulate, as well as, review, judge, decide and act on the basis of that conversation (Tight 1996). Not many students are readily capable of doing this

independently, so the institution should develop these abilities in students. Especially, when self-directed learning is also referred to

> All cases where the responsibility for, and control of, the learning experience – its planning, delivery and assessment – is largely transferred from the institution to the individual learner (Tight 1996, 101).

The line is thin here: all the above-mentioned, planning, delivery and assessment are organised at the level of the institution; nevertheless, in practice, the control over studies lie in the hands of students at Finnish universities. Firstly, students make individual decisions regarding their subject combinations, and routes through their main and minor subjects, and by doing so, plan their own curriculum for each semester, and ultimately for the degree. Furthermore, there is considerable freedom in choosing preferred study methods and assessment patterns, as in many disciplines one can choose from a lecture series to essay writing, or from examination to keeping a learning diary and so forth. The student is also responsible for scheduling their studies; essentially, the only external influence on student's work pace often come from the student's own financial situation and the restrictions of the Student Financial Aid Board[2]. However, it is purely financial so if a student is not dependent on the student grant, considering that the education is free, the completion of the degree is in the student's hands; part-time or full-time study in the Finnish context is an artificial, or rather purely financial, definition, as in reality, students progress at their own pace.

Autonomous learning, self-directed learning and independent learning are only few examples of the terms used for learning, where the main responsibility lies with the student; these terms could be seen, on one hand, from a philosophical viewpoint or, on the other hand, practical, didactic viewpoint (Boud 1988). When I here refer to self-directed learning, I take the more philosophical view: autonomy as an approach to education. Autonomous, self-directed learning here is independent of the actual modes of teaching but the main characteristics have elements of high learner responsibility. Boud (1988) provides a helpful account on the potential aspects where this could be realised (the grouping added):

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[2] Financial aid is available in the form of study grants, housing supplements and government guarantees for student loans. For studies in higher education, financial aid can be granted for up to 55 months per one Master's-level degree. Vocational or other studies qualify if the studies comprise an average of at least 3 study weeks per month (or 25 hours a week). (The Social Insurance Institute of Finland 2002)

- identifying learning needs; setting goals; determining criteria to apply to their work; deciding when learning is complete; reflecting on their learning processes;
- planning learning activities; finding resources needed for learning; choosing where and when they will learn; opting to undertake additional non-teacher directed work, such as learning through independent learning materials; engaging in self-assessment; learning outside the confines of the educational institution;
- working collaboratively with others; using teachers as guides and counsellors rather than instructors;
- selecting learning projects; creating problems to tackle;
- making significant decisions about any of these matters, that is, decisions with which they will have to live (Boud 1988; 23).

There have been attempts to formulate theoretical models of self-directed learning, which have been strongly linked with the ideas of critical reflection and internalised 'learning conversations' (Tight, 1996). University of East London is the leading example of supported self-directed study in Britain (Tight 1996). Nevertheless, it is a highly atypical study form in Britain and it is considered as alternative, and by no means, normal study mode. The objective is to provide students with support of specialist staff, group sessions and facilities of the institutions to enable the students' independent study. In contrast, it may be fair to say, that this is the way Finnish higher education is organised in practise. Depending on the discipline, there is a great deal of variation in the quantity of contact hours and self-directed study.

A question arises, whether available resources and, more specifically, the student-teacher ratio might be one of the reasons for, or the result of, the Finnish independent study mode. According to the KOTA database for universities (2004), the student-teacher ratio in Finnish universities in 1999 was an average of 20.9 students per teacher, for University of Jyväskylä 20.4 students per teacher. The equivalent ratio in the UK was 14.9 students per teacher, as approximately 114,000 members of academic staff were employed to accommodate the needs of 1.7 million students (Hefce 1999). The number across Finnish higher education institutions in 1999 was 7,300 academics per 151,900 students in total (KOTA 2004). Research activity of academic staff also has a significant impact on academic administration, and more precisely on resources concerning the academic body. As Cabal (1993) rightly questions,

> should the emphasis be on first-class educators who are filled with enthusiasm for research and keeping up-to-date, or on researchers by trade who are almost exclusively dedicated to research? (Cabal 1993, 74)

Overall, the academic and pedagogical staff engage in research in both countries, but as became evident in the previous section on the differences in cultural traditions, British higher education is more educationally focused, whereas in Finland, strong emphasis is put on quality research. In fact, the British Government "White Paper" suggests a division between teaching universities and research universities (Department of Education and Skills 2003). Naturally, engaging in both teaching and scholarly activities mean that educators have compound, and often rivalling, vocations and responsibilities towards the institution and the society, as well as towards the students. Cabal (1993) points out that there are considerable hindrances to unite these two roles: part-time and full-time preferences have to be made. Teaching hours, classes, versus time spent on research have an effect on the quality of teaching, as well as on the salary.

Whereas in the UK all education is highly regulated and audited, the Finnish HE functions without heavy quality assurance mechanisms, which means that all institutions can deliver aspects of learning and teaching as they see best. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) provides advisory and consultancy services in the implementation of evaluations, develops evaluation methodology and disseminates good practice (Ministry of Education 2000). Nevertheless, there is no quality assurance body in Finland, which would publish similar specific guidance and, some might say, prescriptive policies and standards, as the QAA in Britain. In the course of this study, in January 2004, I contacted the FINHEEC, and requested any published papers available for academic staff on standards or guidance regarding assessment and assessment feedback, to which the formal response was that such publications were inexistent. Consequently, national guidelines on assessment, for example, which in the UK are closely adhered to, are unavailable for institutions, faculties, departments and staff in Finland.

3. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CULTIVATING THE STUDENT MIND

In order to understand the nature of learning in higher education, and the theoretical background against which learning, teaching and assessment, including feedback, can be perceived, the following will firstly explore what the purpose of higher education is, and then introduce the approaches to learning by which the goals of higher education can be achieved. It is recognised that the question of the role of higher education is a convoluted one and could be considered from various perspectives; there are vast societal, cultural and economical aspects, such as the commonwealth of the society, professionalising the workforce and so forth, in addition to the traditional role of higher education in academic research and education. Välimaa (2001) has researched widely the effects of massification and globalisation in higher education, and he notes that the role of higher education has changed dramatically since the 1990's, when higher education was first acknowledged as a part of the national production and innovation system in response to international competition. As a result, the role of the university is to produce an expert workforce. Furthermore, collaboration between higher education and industry has increased, and now any changes in the global market affect teaching and research in higher education more than ever before. According to Kolehmainen et al. (2002), higher education is facing the pressure to adopt a role 'as a motor of the society's technologic-economical growth'. Kallio (2001) expresses concerns over the evidently increased commercial pressures on universities, and the implication of increased pressures on academic staff, and questions, whether there still is room for educating independent, self-directed and critical citizens in the ever more commercial and global mass higher education. Aittola (2001) also is concerned that the pressures on productivity may put the role of higher education as a provider of high-quality education and research at risk.

However, putting aside the wider challenges facing the higher education sector, this study will concentrate on the intellectual, educational aspects of higher education. The focus will be on the individual, rather than the wider societal and socio-economical aspects.

Atkins (1995) distinguishes four distinctive purposes for higher education:

1. To provide general educational experience of intrinsic worth in its own right;

2. To prepare students for knowledge creation, application and dissemination;

3. To prepare students for a specific profession or occupation;

4. To prepare students for general employment. (Atkins 1995, 25-26)

Atkins further breaks down the general educational experience into four sub-components:

1. The development of the 'trained mind'; i.e. reasoning skills and critical thinking, independence of thought, ability to think conceptually.

2. The acquisition of knowledge needed to be an educated person; exposure to different domains of knowledge, cultures and theories.

3. Personal development for adult life; affective, moral and creative aspects of personality, as well as the cognitive, paying attention to educating the future citizen and an employee.

4. Establishing a base for lifelong learning. (Atkins 1995)

King and Kitchener (1994, 222) place particular emphasis on the 'trained mind', "Teaching students to engage in reflective thinking and to make reflective judgements about vexing problems is a central goal of higher education", the quote also echoing Dewey's (1933) thoughts on the role of higher education. Also, Ramsden (1992) adequately summarises research into the aims and higher level learning outcomes in higher education; student's ability to 'think reflectively', which means to analyse, gather evidence, to synthesise, and to be creative thinkers, has been stated as the main goal for higher education for centuries. Being reflective implicitly includes the notion of autonomous learning: higher education is expected to enable students to become more autonomous in taking responsibility over their learning (Boud 1988). Following on from Atkins' (1995) account on the role and purpose of higher education, the following chapters will attempt to bring together on one hand a brief account on the constructive approach to learning in general, and on the other hand, expand the notion of learning into general intellectual development towards what is often prescribed as 'reflective thinking'.

3.1   LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Cognitive learning theories, which describe an individual's psychological processes and the learner's active role in the learning process, have replaced the earlier behavioral theories, and the current paradigm in learning emphasises constructivism as one of the most valid theoretical frameworks for learning. The constructivist theory has its roots in pragmatics and in theorists such as James, Dewey and Mead, as well as in the Gestalt psychology of Bartlett, Piaget and Vygotsky, and in cognitive theories of Miller, Bruner and Neisser (von Wright 1992).

In the center of cognitive approach to learning is the notion that knowledge cannot be transmitted, but that information only becomes knowledge when it is perceived, selected, and interpreted by an individual, understood in the context of the individual's world view, and linked to the individual's activities (von Wright 1992). Individual's personal goals and the previously formulated schemas, activated by the learning situation and subjective experiences, define what is being perceived and what action takes place. Therefore, what we perceive is actually 'constructed' rather than simply 'registered', and learning is thus an activity that changes learner's conceptions about the phenomenon at hand   (Neisser 1982; Marton et al. 1980). Consequently, current knowledge is used to construct new knowledge; any transfer of knowledge depends on the organisation of the knowledge and skills. A direct implication to education can be seen from the notion that curricula should be flexible enough to recognise learners' readiness, as the learner's ways of interpreting and conceptualising information are constantly changing. Constructivist approach to learning also emphasises social interaction; in interaction a learner is prompted to reflect on his/ her knowledge and experiences. By facilitating interactive learning situations, students could both give and receive support by discussing and negotiating meanings (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 15; Tynjälä 1999, 65).

As understanding is usually a prerequisite for adequate knowledge construction in acquisition of new knowledge, according to von Wright (1992), the work of Marton et al. (1980) on students' approaches to learning, which can vary from deep learning to surface learning, should be briefly explored. In the deep approach, students aspire to understand the phenomenon, grasp the main point, make connections and draw

conclusions. In the surface approach students concentrate on the discourse itself, and essentially try to learn by memorising facts; this is associated with passive approach to learning and often results in regurgitating facts rather than gaining new knowledge. Furthermore, Marton et al. (1980) noted another dichotomy, which categorises learning as holistic or atomistic, related closely to the deep/ surface dichotomy. Students who have a holistic approach emphasise overall meanings, looking for the key arguments, and conceptualising the new information to what is already known. Students who have adopted an atomistic approach focus on detail and on sequence, following the serialist approach. According to Marton et al. (1980) the holistic approach is often linked to the deep learning approach and the atomic approach to surface learning.

3.2 INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Harvey and Knight (1996) have taken the idea of learning beyond deep/surface approach developing the notion of learning as transformational, the focus being on critical thinking. "Developing critical thinking involves getting students to question the established orthodoxy and learn to justify their opinions"; students are encouraged to consider knowledge as a process in which they are engaged, becoming 'intellectual performers' (Harvey & Knight 1996, 9-10). Ramsden (1992) summarises the intellectual learning outcomes as content-related expectations, which include the disciplinary and professional abilities, and general intellectual growth.

Perry's (1970) nine positions of intellectual development provide us with an in-depth account on students' progress from a stage of duality to confusion about the nature of knowledge to the highest level of intellectual being, where one can commit to personal values and acknowledge the existence of interpretations of 'reality'. In Perry's early stages, students conceptualise knowledge as given, 'correct answers' to be gained from the authorities for reproduction purposes. Gradually, students' conceptions about knowledge change from the absolutistic view to relativistic view on knowledge, where knowledge is always seen as provisional and authoritative 'truth' as inexistent. It is understood that the highest stage of thinking is one where synthesis of provided knowledge and one's own judgement come together in a reflective manner (Perry 1970; King & Kitchener 1994). Säljö's (1982) studies also correspond with Perry's

observations; the early stages imply that learning is external to the learner, and that knowledge is merely transferred from an authority to the learner. The latter stages emphasise the internal aspects of learning; the learner's actions result in understanding reality, and thus increasing knowledge. Whereas Piaget emphasised the development of logical thinking, King and Kitchener (1994) discuss how epistemological conceptions about knowledge change.

Following on from the theory of learning and students' approaches to learning, and understanding the intellectual development, we arrive at the notion of 'critical thinking'. Depending on the perspective, and the main point of departure, the concept of 'critical thinking' has been called 'reflective thinking', which Dewey (1933) presented as the main goal of higher education, 'reflective judgement' (King and Kitchener 1994), or 'critical reflection' (Mezirow et al 1990), for example. Explanation of the term 'reflection' gives another dimension to it:

> Examination of the justification for one's beliefs, primarily to guide action and to reassess the efficacy of the strategies and procedures used in problem solving (Mezirow et al 1990).

In short, reflection means the higher order mental processes. Therefore critical reflection is assessment of the validity of the presumptions when interpreting the meaning of an experience, as well as examination of their sources and consequences. Mezirow et al. (1990) give a very down-to-earth explanation on the issue of critical thinking: critical thinking is basically logical and academic thinking and problem solving, as well as learning the specific language and expectations of a dialogic community. Furthermore, echoing Atkins's (1995) purpose of higher education in developing the affective, moral and creative aspects of personality, the rather convoluted terminology around 'critical thinking' or 'reflective thinking' has been summarised, as follows:

> Current concepts of critical thinking need to be re-construed into the much broader concept of "critical being" and applied to higher education. Under this construct, critical persons (students) become more than just critical thinkers; they engage critically with the world and with themselves; they not only reflect critically on knowledge, but also develop powers of critical self-reflection and critical action. Concurrent with the concept of critical being is a form of social and personal epistemology; the belief that through higher education students can be changed as persons by their experiences. (Barnett 1997)

3.3   METHODS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

A few words need to be said about the methods of learning and teaching in higher education, particularly in the light of cultural differences in the Finnish and British systems. Teachers can choose from a variety of methods and modes of delivery, ranging from mass lectures to individual tutorials, depending on their approach to learning, as much as the resources available. Although it is a common impression that teaching and learning in higher education is more or less uniform across western societies, institutional structures, administrative and degree systems and assessment systems vary markedly across countries; culture specific features of educational systems are reflected in the methods, or genres of study (Mauranen 1994). Mauranen's (1994) studies raise a similar issue, as arises later in attempt to define assessment; the study genres with the same names in the British and Finnish context share a number of features, yet also manage to hide considerable differences. Moreover, it is not clear, nor always necessary, how to separate learning and teaching methods from methods of assessment, as particularly in the Finnish higher education these are often seen as one. The Figure 1 shows how individual modules, or units of study, are normally organised with regards to learning and teaching.
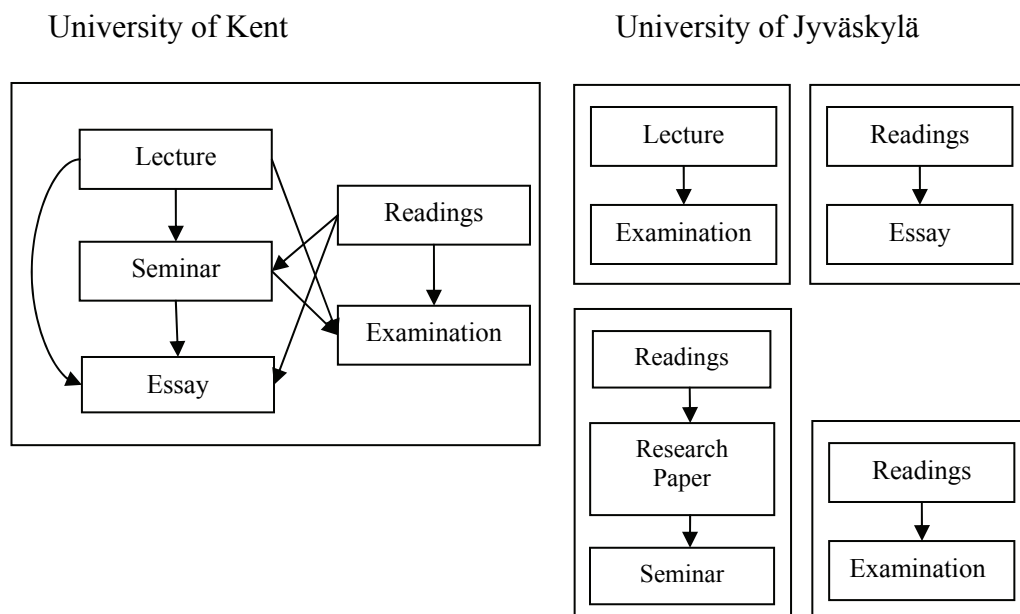
Figure 1: Major Study Genre Systems at the Universities of Kent and Jyväskylä (Mauranen 1994)

In general, in the British undergraduate framework, a certain number of these units, "modules", form a year, three completed years constitute a degree. In Finland, the units, "courses" are normally smaller and cover only few methods of learning, teaching and assessment. These units then form large entities, which in turn form stages in the study system, and completing all the stages result in a degree (Mauranen 1994).

Lectures are a regular method of teaching both in Finland and in the UK. Lectures are seen as an efficient way of teaching facts and basic concepts to students, in a time and resources saving fashion. The cultural differences between Finnish and British practices are highlighted in the aftermath of lectures; a lecture series is normally followed by an examination in Finnish universities, whereas in the UK the topics are further discussed in the abovementioned seminars and tutorials. The seminar in Britain revolves around a topic, whereas in Finland discussions normally arise from research papers presented by students; in Britain preparatory reading come from authorities, in Finland from student work (Mauranen 1994). In Britain seminars are a central method of teaching and learning from the beginning, accompanying lectures within almost every module, while in Finland they are regular but infrequent research forums after the middle stage of studies. Seminars are organised differently as well; in Finland seminars are clearly structured around opponent-respondent framework resembling a panel, whereas the British equivalent is clearly a discussion forum (Mauranen 1994).

Myllyntaus (2002) also provides us with an illuminating example, familiar to any Finnish student: the average week of a student at University of Jyväskylä entails attending lectures and preparing for examinations ('*tentti*'), whereas in Oxford students rarely attend lectures, as tutorials and intensive small group seminars, in which students discuss the subject issues, are the prevailing teaching methods. Tutorials are meant to complement lectures, and often the main topic is the students' assignment and the solutions to the problem at hand (Biggs 1999). It is notable that in these tutorials and seminars the main emphasis is on students' ability to articulate and defend their views and define central concepts. One of King and Kitchener's (1994; 228) basic assumptions in promoting reflective thinking is that interactions with the environment strongly affect an individual's development. By providing this type of learning

environments the types of intellectual challenges and support offered, as well as the clarity and quality of feedback in a non-threatening practice situation, foster higher-level thinking.

Finally, tutoring as a term is again subordinate to cultural interpretations. It has been an integral part of British higher education since the 18th century (Earwaker 1992, Goodlad & Hirst 1989, 22-26), and Britain has been acknowledged to be the leading country in tutoring practice since then. Tutoring is a distinct role of all teaching staff across higher education in the UK, and often teachers in higher education are actually called tutors. British higher education institutions normally provide a Personal Academic Tutor system, which allocates each student a single point of contact in their home institutions with whom to discuss issues relating to their personal or academic development throughout their studies. In the Finnish educational discourse tutoring has a somewhat broader meaning as a generic student support and guidance term (Lehtinen & Jokinen 1996; Tenhula & Pudas 1994).

In Finland, the official student support mechanisms were introduced to universities in early 1960s; they usually consist of central student office's services, career and recruitment services, international office, employment services, faculty and department level student services and nationally organised health services provided for students in higher education (Lairio & Puukari 1999). Tutoring, which in Finland is a fairly new phenomenon and only started in a small scale in early 1990s, is defined by Earwaker (1992) as 'pastoral care', and is a very British form of student support. However, Tenhula and Pudas (1994) define tutoring as support, advice and guidance provided by teachers and peer-tutors, enabling students to reach their personal goals and integrate into the learning community. Tenhula and Pudas (1994) divide tutoring into four distinct functions: subject matter related, study skills oriented, integration into the learning community and psychosocial. A tutor is a more experienced person whose purpose is to assist students in developing their skills and strategies in becoming a more independent learner (Wankowski 1991; 97). Tutoring can be organised as individual or group tutoring. Peer tutoring is a feature of Finnish higher education, where students receive guidance from more experienced students in the early stages of their studies. Peer-tutors introduce the newcomers to the institution, student support mechanisms,

their duties and responsibilities, and guide them with questions related to planning of their studies.

Whereas the British system might be perceived to possess a more holistic view on learning, the independent 'lectures + examination' model has its undeniable benefits; this flexibility provides more opportunities for students, and overall, students have the freedom to choose from independent study or teacher-led provision according to their own needs and learning styles. Students can more freely decide their assessment schedule, and spread the examinations evenly across the year to avoid particular, stressful assessment periods. Students can then effectively enter the assessment point when they feel they are ready and well prepared, a viewpoint emphasised by Karjalainen (2001).

The above account gives a clear picture on how superficially identical methods of learning and teaching can differ considerably from one culture to another. These differences are an evident proof of the underlying differences in the educational goals and ideals. As Mauranen (1994) rightly reiterates, the Finnish university system seems to reflect a more research-oriented tradition, where the primary goal is to train academics to embark original research. The whole system denotes independent learning in a self-directed manner. On the contrary, the British system still seems to be more education-oriented: the British university trains graduates to "digest and evaluate information from academic research, and express their views on it" (Mauranen 1994).

4. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

As the main research questions revolve around feedback, and assessment and feedback are intrinsically interwoven concepts, the following chapters will firstly explore the functions of assessment and then continue to provide the theoretical backdrop for the usage of feedback. One might say that the Finnish usage of the terms, 'assessment' and 'feedback', particularly 'assessment', is not as fixed and clear-cut as their usage in the UK and in the English language. Therefore, some clarification on that part is needed. In English, perhaps the most evident difference lies in between evaluation and assessment. They are very often used inter-changeably even though a variety of definitions can be found for both from a range of sources. Evaluation is sometimes seen to be concerned with the process, whereas assessment is concerned with the outcomes; however, portfolio for example, a form of evaluation, as it evaluates both process and the end product, is more often called assessment than evaluation. These fine differences, however, are peripheral to this study and the semantics are left without any further discussion, as the study adopts the term assessment, as used in the British higher education system. In Finnish, the term '*arviointi*', which includes both assessment and evaluation, is normally used to describe what here is called assessment, whereas the term '*arvostelu*' often has negative connotations and perhaps a more limited meaning.

Student learning is affected by various factors of which assessment is not the least valuable. In fact, a number of studies have demonstrated that assessment methods and requirements have greater influence on student learning than any other single factor (Boud 1988; Ramsden 1992; Chalmers & Fuller 1996). Assessment has various functions, such as revealing the level of competences for the students themselves, and motivating and directing student learning among others. As Chalmers and Fuller have put it

> It guides their [students'] decisions about what is important to learn, affects their motivation and perceptions of self-competence, influences their approaches to learning, directs their timing of personal study, consolidates learning and affects the extent to which enduring learning strategies and skills develop. (Chalmers and Fuller 1996, 45)

Very often, the actual term reflects the perspective from which the phenomenon is viewed, as an account on the work of Karjalainen will reveal. Karjalainen (2001) has noted six basic theoretical perspectives on assessment in his attempt to form a comprehensive theory concerning the inner structure of 'examination'. Although he has chosen a more theoretical viewpoint, and rather surprisingly, abandons the term 'assessment' as subordinate to the concept of 'examination' ('*tentti*'), his initial perceptions are a useful starting point here. An examination [assessment] can be seen as:

1. A psychological issue from both the examiner's and examinee's individual perspective, bringing in individual features, fears and anxieties.
2. An interactive, communicative situation between the examiner and examinee. From this perspective, an examination can be a ritual, a behavioural model, which can be learned and rehearsed.
3. Measuring a performance, bringing in the issues of validity, reliability and objectivity. The criteria behind the (numerical) judgement are the set learning objectives.
4. A didactic tool as a part of the learning and teaching, having both positive and negative effects on learner's learning and actions. This perspective enables the examination to be seen from the perspective of different learning theories and theories on motivation, support and guidance and assessment.
5. A tool of educational politics, as well as of wider social politics. This viewpoint stresses the examination's role as a device of political and administrative moderation; progression, career pathways and professional positions can be defined through examinations.
6. An instrument of societal power; it can be seen as a complex staging area of asymmetrical power relations, from the examiner-examinee relationship to the class issues in the society; through succeeding in examinations an individual can obtain a certain status, a membership of a (professional, political or societal) class. (Karjalainen 2001, 50-53)

The aspect of grading and selecting student material is an integral part of assessment, which has more to do with control, power and bureaucracy than enhancing student learning. There are a variety of assessment types teachers in higher education can choose from, and attention should be paid to the choices and motivation behind them.

The assessor should always be aware that assessment also means power and responsibility over the future of students, and therefore should recognise the assessment's conscious, rationalised and subconscious foundation (Koppinen, Korpinen & Pollari 1999, 25; Race 1995, 3; Karjalainen 2001).

Feedback ('*palaute*') can be also be rather ambivalent a term, particularly in the Finnish context, and the complexity of the terminology on evaluation, assessment and feedback is merely underlining the complexity of the phenomenon. Particularly concerning trend is that as the quality assurance aspects of higher education are getting more prominent, assessment ('*arvointi*') and feedback ('*palaute*') in the context of the Finnish higher education, are often understood as assessment of quality of higher education and student feedback on the quality of teaching. However, feedback is essential for learning and can play a significant role in students' development by providing knowledge required for improvement (Gibbs 1991; Hinett & Weeden 2000). Furthermore,

> One of the most useful benefits of assessment for students can be feedback on their performance, the skills they are expected to develop, and their understanding of theories and concepts (Race 1995).

Raaheim (1991, 19) states that even when students are given different forms of assessment to choose from, they find that their own progress is hard to judge because of the lack of feedback. Therefore, students must be provided with

> information on their ability to take a critical attitude, to make fair judgements, and to give a balanced and mature presentation of the broader perspectives of a problem area (Raaheim 1991, 20);

not only information on how the student has reproduced the textbook information. Feedback is often given mainly in the form of a 'pass or fail' judgement or numerical representation, which provide students with little qualitative information on the performance or their progress. As Heywood (2000, 152) says, "feedback which helps a person improve their performance is likely to enhance learning". There are numerous studies that show that the lack of feedback can cause anxiety in students and decline in performance (e.g. Heywood 2000; Wankowski 1991). Also, a lack of motivation and commitment are a threat when students do not know what they are doing and how; meta-competences which are vital in gaining good self-confidence in studies, and later entering the labour market, are left under-developed. In other words, in the absence of

feedback, students may doubt their abilities and may not perform according to their best abilities.

4.1 THE TWO MAIN FUNCTIONS OF ASSESSMENT

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice (2000) on assessment states that assessment is usually construed as being diagnostic, formative or summative; diagnostic assessment merely provides an indication of a learner's aptitude, and preparedness for a programme of study, for example. As the QAA (2000) states, "formative assessment is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development, but does not contribute to the overall assessment [grade]", whereas "summative assessment provides a measure of achievement or failure made in respect of a learner's performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes of the programme of study" (Quality Assurance Agency 2000). It is the institution's tool to grade students, and to certify that they have met any course requirements, which is the most recognised function of assessment (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 41). It must be noted here that any assessment can involve all these elements; for example, coursework is often formative by nature, as it provides an opportunity for feedback but also counts towards the credit being accumulated for a summative statement of achievement (Quality Assurance Agency 2000). Thus, assessment has two major functions in education: support student learning and provide summative judgements about the level of student learning; it is vital that these two functions are recognised and acted upon accordingly (Chalmers and Fuller 1996). The aim of this formative function, i.e. assessment as a support mechanism, is evaluating the quality of students' learning, providing students with feedback, and suggesting ways in which they can improve their learning (Chalmers and Fuller 1996, 41; Race 1995, 3-6; Biggs 1999, 142).

In practice, these two quite distinct and somewhat conflicting functions of assessment have numerous implications on students' approach to learning. In assessment situations where the purpose is enhancing student learning, the potential lack of understanding or skill demonstrated by students has a very different significance than when simply grading students (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 42). On one hand, failure in an exam or assignment is an indication of an aspect of learning that needs attention. Consequently,

it is an opportunity for both students and teachers to monitor the learning, and it is a useful tool in student support. On the other hand, when the purpose of assessment is grading, revealing insufficient knowledge and understanding may be costly for students; gaining good grades demands concealing the failings in learning. Heywood (2000, 50-51) describes Alverno College's ability-based curriculum, which "merges the formative with the summative so that the needs of learners are supported in a dynamic way". Notably, in mid-1980s, the Alverno College assessment was given outside from the Assessment Centre, which assessed broader entities than just single courses, or modules. It also provided interpretative feedback for the students throughout the year. Though how manageable this type of externalised assessment really might be on a larger scale, is another story.

In the UK, student assessment has been changing in the recent years because of the continuing emergence of national policy on assessment. Holroyd (2000) gives a concise summary of the general patterns of change. Increasingly, the emphasis is on the learning enhancement purpose of assessment, not in certification, which naturally leads to increased attention to formative, rather than summative, forms of assessment, as well as deploying a variety of assessment methods instead of one main method. More emphasis is put on standards model assessment, involving criterion-referenced assessment. Also, more frequent provision of descriptive comments and constructive feedback has been noted at the same time, as less reliance is put on teaching staff, by involving self, peers and workplace assessors in the work. Finally, increased emphasis on assessment as integral to teaching rather than a separate activity occurring after teaching has been noticeable (Holroyd 2000).

4.2 METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

The type, or a method, of assessment has a great effect on student learning. There is a wide range of assessment available to university teachers such as essay tests, objective tests, projects, practical examinations and critical reviews (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 44). Cumulative assessment, for example portfolio, is an effective way to monitor students' development (Heywood 2000; Karjalainen 2001). Students have assumptions on the demands of different tasks, and act accordingly when studying. Even more than

the type of assessment, the perceived level of understanding what is required, affects the student approach to tasks. Ramsden (1992) in Chalmers & Fuller (1996, 42) reports that the way the courses are assessed affect what and how students *intend to* learn. If students expect the examination to measure only the ability to reproduce the learned material, they are likely to study the facts superficially without thriving for a deeper understanding. On the contrary, when they expect good grades demanding reflection and critical understanding of the subject matter, they abandon the surface approach and adopt a deep approach to learning (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 43). Thus, students' expectations on assessment obviously have significant consequences on learning. Therefore, teachers should be cautious in choosing assessment that students perceive as less demanding, such as multiple-choice examinations, since it may enhance surface superficial and low quality learning (Heywood 2000; Biggs 1999).

Chalmers & Fuller (1996, 47) report that an effective way to enhance student learning in assessment is involving students in the decision making process, what type of assessment will be used or what topics are accepted in essays, for example. This is also widely used to diminish the risk of plagiarism, which has been recognised as a growing problem in education in general. Raaheim (1991, 32) also emphasises that co-operation and mutual contracts between students and the teacher are important in the learning process, which means mutual understanding in that students hand in their essays and assignments in time but also that the teacher returns the essays, with comments and feedback, in a timely fashion.

It is notable, again, that there are cultural differences what students understand by any method of assessment. Mauranen (1994) reports that the British essay is more of an answer to a question, whereas the Finnish equivalent is a summary of readings; it seems that the focus of written work in Britain is on interpreting source materials and arguing for a perspective, while in Finland it is on indicating the acquisition of relevant knowledge, and reporting original research (Mauranen 1994). The main cultural difference between the UK and Finland regarding essays is that in Finland essays are often seen as much as a method of learning, as a method of assessment, as an essay can substitute module attendance or an examination; in Britain it is clearly a routine part of the modular methods of assessment. The written seminar paper, which is not known in Britain, has major importance at the latter part of studies in Finland.

The frequency of assessment is yet another important factor in student learning; the positive effects on student learning can be lost if students are over-assessed (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 43). When an exam is coming up, students are likely to concentrate on studying the subject matter but when assessment is too frequent it is hard for students to allocate enough time to study the subject matter properly; this, in turn, could result in weak and superficial understanding. Hence, students should be provided with frequent opportunities to be assessed in purpose of monitoring, and facilitating, their progress but over-assessment in purpose of assigning grades should be avoided. Also, feedback in non-threatening situations should be provided shortly after assessing to make the assessment worthwhile for the student learning (Chalmers & Fuller 1996). It is evident that the resources available to the teaching staff affect the type and frequency of assessment, as well as feedback.

Self-assessment can be a useful method of assessment in higher education. Heywood (1989, 283) reports Boud's (1986) definition of self-assessment firstly, as identifying standards and criteria to apply to work and secondly, making judgements about meeting these standards and criteria after the work is done. The most important questions thus are: what to assess, which criteria to use and how to apply the criteria (Heron 1988). According to Heywood's studies students find self-assessment difficult; Heron (1988) recognises that most people are not used to criterial thinking in the prevailing authoritarian system, and when many teachers have difficulties in using criteria explicitly, what can we expect from students. Nevertheless, he suggests that self-assessment is a skill to be learned through training.

Peer-assessment is seen to bring other useful characteristics into learning as well. Facilitating co-operation between students in carrying out a task promotes learning and motivation (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 47). As Race (1995) points out, with increasing student numbers and workload, academic staff is able to devote less and less time to giving students detailed feedback; for this reason particularly, it is worth considering alternative forms of assessment, such as peer-assessment. Self- and peer-assessment are a useful way to provide feedback for students even in the modern mass education. Furthermore, they are useful tools in developing reflective judgement, as students get new insight into their own work when they judge the work of others (Heywood 2000, 373-385). This principle is strongly supported by King and Kitchener (1994) in their

account on the seven assumptions on which they base their suggestions for promoting reflective thinking, as interactions with the environment strongly affect an individual's development.

> Teachers who design learning environments to foster reflective thinking attend to such factors as the types of intellectual challenges and support offered, the clarity and quality of feedback, and opportunities for practice without fear of being penalised or failing. (King & Kitchener, 1994; 228)

Thus, this is an assessment form, which should enable learning while doing, getting manifold feedback, learning responsibility for one's own learning and also learning teamwork. Many teachers fear group work and peer-assessment because they think it is hard to grade individual students, as well as it might be difficult to reassess. However, it might just be healthy for teachers, and moreover for institutions, to remember what teaching and assessing should essentially be for: learning. There is plenty of evidence of enhanced learning resulting in peer-assessment. Heywood's reports on various studies conclude that the students learned to be more critical, and also work in a more structured way, when using peer-assessment.

An important aspect with regards to assessment has been neglected so far: the double structure of assessment. Students can learn the 'ritual' of assessment, and demonstrate pseudo-competences, as they learn how to act and react in the structures of assessment without possessing real subject knowledge (Karjalainen 2001). Karjalainen (2001) separates 'natural' assessment from 'artificial'. In natural assessment the assessment task is in a problem form, and in the ideal situation corresponds with a real life problem situation; the problem at hand has to be first divided into sub-questions in order to arrive to the natural solution. 'Artificial' assessment, in which the problem has been diminished into more structured, narrow questions, the original problem disappears and simply answered questions remain. If close attention is not paid to the methods of assessment, the latent double structure of assessment may enable students to perform well, acquire good grades but learn very little of the actual subject at hand, as students become competent in dealing with the structures and rites of assessment (Karjalainen 2001).

Clear and explicit criteria should be presented to students before the assessment takes place so that students know what is expected of them. One way of doing this is setting a marking key that is used in assessing student work (Chalmers & Fuller 1996, 47). The QAA (2000) states that institutions should publish, and implement consistently, clear criteria for the marking and grading of assessment. Nevertheless, this is not enough; only by returning back to these criteria with feedback, students can really see in detail, how they have met the criteria. The importance of assessment criteria becomes ever more evident, when one considers the link between assessment and effective feedback. Hounsell (in Norton & Norton 2001) stresses that tutors' and students' perceptions of marking criteria can be somewhat different and consequently, any written feedback may fail. Feedback should always be closely linked to the marking criteria used.

The marking criteria can be generic criteria for each level of studies, to which students and assessors can reflect the submitted piece of assignment, or it can be very subject specific. Appendix 3 provides an example of generic assessment criteria used at University of Chester (2006), against which all assessment must be judged. The equivalent readily available criteria at University of Jyväskylä (2007) are only available for dissertation work (Appendix 4); generic level-related assessment criteria is not available for students. These criteria have been included merely to illustrate how assessment criteria could be made accessible to students to guide their work. It must be noted, that the usage of such explicit assessment criteria, or assessment matrix, is significantly wider in the British context than the Finnish equivalent.

4.3 CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

As was mentioned earlier, assessment really becomes an effective part of the learning process only when appropriate feedback is associated with it. Juwah at al. (2004) report on the seven principles of good feedback practice, established by the 'Student Enhanced Learning through Effective Feedback' project of the British Higher Education Academy. Good feedback practice:

1. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning.
2. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning.
3. Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards expected).
4. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.
5. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.
6. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching. (Juwah et al 2004)

Many students feel that they do not know whether they are "on the right track" in their studies. Qualitative feedback might provide students the much needed "counselling" on their career choice, whether the subject studied is the right choice in the end, as well as the immediate task at hand. This is a frequent problem in the Finnish higher education particularly, as students are given little verbal or written feedback on their work until the very late stages of their studies in the form of seminar work, as also noted by Mauranen (1994); however, delaying feedback till the later stages of studies might be somewhat detrimental, as students seem to need thorough feedback the most in the beginning of their studies, as Lammela et al. (2000, 19) underline. In order to learn from their mistakes and become better processors of information, students need feedback on their study techniques and, of course, on how they deal with the actual subject matter, theories and concepts. In time, it is appropriate to lessen the quantity of feedback and emphasise and support independent self-reflection. Surprisingly though, studies at the University of Bergen (Raaheim 1991) showed that even though students felt the need to receive more feedback, they were somewhat hesitant to participate in a 'test-examination' that would have given them feedback on their academic work before the actual examination.

Feedback has an officially recognised role in the British higher education, as can be seen again from the Code of Practice given by the QAA (2000), to which all higher education institutions should adhere to. It states "Institutions should ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement" (2000, 9). According to the QAA, institutions must consider:

- the timeliness of feedback;
- specifying the nature and extent of feedback that students can expect in relation to particular types of assessment, and whether this is to be accompanied by the return of assessed work;
- the effective use of comments on returned work, including relating feedback to assessment criteria, in order to help students identify areas for improvement as well as commending them for evident achievement;
- the role of oral feedback, either on a group or individual basis as a means of supplementing written feedback;
- when feedback may not be appropriate. (Quality Assurance Agency 2000)

Mauranen (1994) once again has captured the cultural differences in feedback systems. She reports that in Kent University essays were always returned with extensive feedback in the form of written annotations and comments on each essay; tutorials were available for any oral feedback. In contrast, at University of Jyväskylä the only "feedback" students received on essays was the actual numerical grade. However, in Jyväskylä, at later stages of their studies, students were provided with extensive feedback on their seminar papers which were always distributed to all seminar participants, and given individual feedback by the teacher, and peer-feedback by the whole group (Mauranen 1994). In this way, students learn from their peers, both from their work and their feedback.

It is not always appreciated that the nature and delivery of feedback affects how efficient it is when it comes to enhancing student learning. Naturally, different people handle feedback very differently, and even need different amount of feedback, but some studies imply certain general rules. Feedback has two major properties: the informational and hedonistic components (Falchikov 1995). The informational component enables recipients to modify, adapt and improve their work whereas the hedonistic component influences students' motivation. Particularly, when positive and negative feedback is mixed, the delivery, and its sequencing, itself has significant importance.

Falchikov (1995, 158) suggests that positive feedback reinforces positive action while negative feedback can cause self-devaluative responses and interfere the information of

feedback. Negative feedback may also lead to denial which annuls the objective of feedback. Furthermore, she reports that negative verbal feedback may also cause anxiety in students. Higgins (2000, 4) summarises that "receiving feedback is also an emotional business". By this he means firstly, that as not only cognition, action and intuition, but also emotion, affect learning and as, for example, writing might be intensely personal activity, the effects of feedback may cause confusion, anxiety or crisis of confidence. Secondly, students may connect evaluations of their work to themselves, when the tutor, or teacher, is perceived as an authority in a novice-expert scenario. When striving for effective feedback, Falchikov (1995) stresses the importance of the delivery. Providing the positive feedback first decreases anxiety and increases self-esteem. Moreover, Falchikov claims that ordering of feedback also affects the credibility of the deliverer. Chalmers and Fuller (1996, 47) emphasise the immediate nature of feedback; it should be provided as soon as the task is completed, when it still is relevant. They also stress that students should be given an opportunity to improve their learning by resubmitting after feedback.

It is also notable that written feedback is different from verbal feedback; in particular, it is persistent in time and resistant to faulty memory (Falchikov 1995, 159). One can always revise written feedback without having to resort to the often quite selective memory; this perhaps also suggests that written feedback is more resistant to feelings of confusion and anxiety. Also, as mentioned before, the language of feedback is often overlooked even though it is an important variable in getting the message through. Scant comments such as 'good' wont do; it is not feedback.

4.4 ISSUES IN GIVING AND COMMUNICATING FEEDBACK

There are various obstacles in providing effective feedback in real life situations even when the intention is right. Lammela et al. (2000, 13) point out that from a practical point of view, the Finnish regulations about the obligation to store official documents, such as examination papers, make it impossible to return the papers to students in order to revise and learn from their mistakes and the teacher's annotations. Furthermore, the resources available dictate the quantity and the quality of feedback; group sizes, the number of teachers and the time limits hopelessly narrow down the possibility to

provide the needed feedback. Lammela et al. (2000, 15) give a striking example of this: one module can comprise 500 students writing individually, or in small groups, a ten page long essay. If there are approximately 250 essays all together to be marked and commented on, three teachers would have to read 850 pages and write 80 feedback forms each in three weeks. Also Heywood (2000) is concerned by the enormous strain on staff, and its implications on assessment, feedback and overall student learning:

> … This [strain on staff] necessitates substantial changes in teaching and the requirements for assessment can introduce rigidities and reduce the flexibility required for multiple strategy assessment and instruction. It may also reduce the time for the development of skill in reflective thinking. (Heywood 2000, 170)

Lammela et al. (2000) suggest shared group feedback, which is given to the group dealing with the most general mistakes and deficiencies. Naturally, this is not as beneficial to the individual student, as personal feedback would be but better than complete absence of feedback.

Do students and teachers speak the same language then and is the given feedback really received in a way which truly enhance learning, as intended? Studies have been conducted on how well actual feedback, for example, tutors' comments on essays are understood by students and research has shown that there often is a considerable gap between the intended and understood meaning, and teachers often write confusing, contradictory or plain superficial comments (Chanock 2000; Falchikov 1995). It is noticeable, that 23 per cent of the students in Chanock's studies noted that much more detailed comments on their essays explaining what they ought to have done were needed (Chanock 2000, 103). Contradictorily, the same study detects that students rarely acted upon the feedback; they barely even read it.

Misinterpretations of feedback are frequent. It is widely recognised that tacit, academic discourse, which underpin feedback comments, vary between disciplines which may have very different criteria for what is appropriate, and what constitutes a good essay or, what is considered as analysis, for example (Chanock 2000, 97; Baynham 2000; Higgins et al. 2001).

> The feedback comments convey a message based on an implicit understanding of particular academic terms, which in turn reflect a much more complex

academic discourse, which in turn may be only partially understood by students. (Higgins et al. 2001, 272)

Therefore, students can often be quite baffled when they submit the same level of work for two different disciplines but get a good grade on English literature essay, for example, but a poor one on history. Hartley and Skelton (2001, 272-273) also recognise the complex learning context of today; the modularisation of university studies and students switching between disciplines are problematic in getting the feedback through to students. This is an issue in the Finnish higher education in particular, as the system of 'one major and minimum of two minors' "forces" students to deal with different discourse cultures. Perhaps this is one of the reasons, why students fail to use feedback to its full potential; they simply do not understand it. Lammela et al (2000, 20-22) mention some seemingly small but serious flaws in feedback techniques; it's not enough that different faculties, different departments and different teachers use the same markings meaning different things but the interpretation is left to students too. Some teacher may, for example, underline a good, down to the point sentence on an essay, whereas another teacher may do quite the opposite and underline unclear or false sentences, and students are left without any clues how to interpret these notes.

Consequently, Higgins et al. (2001) see the problems in feedback first of all as problems in communication; feedback itself is a process of communication. Most research is worried about the 'outside-in' approach in considering the problems in feedback whereas Higgins et al. (2001) suggest 'inside-out' approach. Instead of worrying about the external factors such as how heavy workloads and modularisation disrupt the process of feedback or how consumerism mediates students' receptiveness to feedback, the focus should be on problems in the actual communication (Higgins et al. 2001, 271); communication in assessment feedback should not be linear transfer of information from a sender to a recipient via a medium, usually written comments. Communication in feedback should be dialogical and ongoing including discussions, clarifications and negotiations between a student and a tutor (Higgins et al. 2001). It is also not sufficiently recognised that teachers need constant feedback on their teaching as well. This dialogical feedback would profit the teachers and their self-reflectiveness as much as their students.

An alternative way of providing feedback on students' development is peer feedback (Falchikov 1995, 157-166). Falchikov (1995) quite rightly remarks that the expanding educational system makes it difficult to maintain the levels and quality of feedback needed and presents a study of peer feedback marking (PFM). She studied third year students in their individual oral presentation assessment and found that staff and peer given marks resemble each other, and two-way positive effects could be seen. Firstly, the students claimed major increase in autonomy and in learning when participating in PFM. Secondly, Falchikov (1995) argues that the feedback teachers give improved as well; teachers could learn a great deal about the level and quality of feedback from students themselves. The PFM study strongly suggests that peer feedback marking is a useful tool for students in their learning and for teachers in improving their teaching skills.

5.   CONDUCTING THE STUDY

As the literature review of this study has now laid the background against which the phenomenon of assessment feedback will be examined, the following chapters will focus on how the study was conducted and what the main findings were. The research topic for this study was inspired by my personal experience in taking part in the Erasmus Exchange Programme in Britain in 2000. The seemingly great differences in methods of learning and teaching, and particularly, in the utilisation of feedback in Finland and Britain urged me to investigate these differences further. I wanted to explore how students, who had been in the same position as I had, had perceived the differences between the Finnish and British higher education. Therefore, the perceived cultural differences provided the background against which the issue of assessment feedback in the two cultural settings could be judged. Subsequent to a literature review on the cultural differences on higher education traditions, I could ascertain that the perceived difference in my learning experience in the Finnish and the British context was valid. From this, the following main research questions arose:

1. How do students who had experienced the Finnish and British higher education setting perceive the main differences in the two educational settings, with a particular focus on assessment feedback?

2. How do students perceive learning in higher education and how does assessment feedback relate to the student's personal learning experience?

3. What is the perceived meaning and value of assessment feedback, as experienced by the students and what role does feedback have in the construction of the student's academic self?

The intention was not to formulate a theory, but to gain insight into other people's experience on the issues at hand. As Patton notes

> There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and a person's reality. (1990, 69)

Therefore, a qualitative approach was adopted. The natural, and sometimes the only, way to understand another's experience, is to converse directly to people who had had

the same experience (Moustakas 1990, 1994; Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86). I decided to interview Finnish exchange students who had experienced both university models and had had front seats in viewing the differences in the educational settings. Thus, the methodological point of departure in this study was to explore the meaning of a shared experience using the semi-structured interview. The approach allows, and indeed welcomes, the involvement of the researcher; in fact, a lived experience of the researcher may become the focus of the research. Herein, the focus was a shared experience, by both the interviewees and the interviewer. Taajamo (1999) emphasises in his research in study abroad, that if the researcher identifies her/ himself with the participants, it can deepen the understanding of the phenomenon, and even add to the initial research data. Identifying with the participants enable deep interaction, and implicit sharing of experiences. There is no pretence of an unbiased, objective observer.

To begin with, general literature on the issue at hand was consulted in order to construct a conceptual framework. Moreover, I spent countless hours discussing questions related to cultural 'definitions' of methods of learning, teaching, assessment and feedback in various contexts. Namely, I engaged in discussions with numerous colleagues at the University of Jyväskylä, where I was both studying and working at the time, and with friends, of whom the majority had had similar experiences and scope to compare different practices in Finland and abroad. These discussions took place mainly during the spring and summer 2002. They were mostly informal conversations but I was also invited to discuss these issues formally in departmental meetings and training sessions, as a part of staff development offered to the academic staff at the university. These discussions with experienced research and teaching staff were of great value to this research.

5.1 METHODS USED

I opted for a semi-structured research interview, in which the depth of meaning is central, with only some relevance to representativeness, as the intention is not to give a comprehensive account of the phenomenon per se (Gillham 2000, 11). Semi-structured interview is often used, when participants have experienced a similar situation or a

phenomenon, and the researcher wishes to explore the interpretations and meanings the participants attach to the experience.

Semi-structured interview is ideal when the researcher wishes to reach the participants' own perceptions without limiting the answers with given alternatives. Also, often the dynamic interpersonal exchange between the participants can evoke new thoughts and provide a verbal form for formerly vague thoughts. Thus, the semi-structured interview is ideal when the values and opinions of the participants are poorly recognised, concealed. (Hirsjärvi &Hurme 2000, 35) The method also enables the researcher to clarify the reasons and motivation behind the participants' answers (Cohen & Manion 1995, 293).

A phenomenon can be investigated in the light of identified themes; in the semi-structured, or semi-standardised, interview the themes and the question frame have been identified prior to the interviews but the questions do not have a precise form or order and the researcher is free to probe for more information (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, Gilbert 1993). This way the interview is less constrained. The themes normally arise from the background literature, or from the researcher's own experiences but often more themes and sub-themes appear, as the analysis proceeds (Ryan & Bernard 2000). Thus, the themes are living constructions, which can be amplified continually before, during and after data collection.

The main themes of the interview protocol for this piece of research naturally arose from the three main considerations, which formed the main sections of the research: cultural differences of university traditions, the role of higher education and assessment and feedback (Appendix 1: The core themes and interview questions). The initial question frame emerged from the background literature. Additionally, the following statement was devised to deliberately provoke responses in students: *A good student does not need feedback. S/he is self-directed, and s/he knows his/her own strengths and weaknesses. S/he is proficient in planning his/her studies in reaching his/her goals, and is capable in evaluating his/her learning and overall development of thought.* [i]

As mentioned above, the role of the researcher in using the semi-structured interview is substantial, and adequate skills in interviewing must be attained prior to the interviews.

Also, it is necessary to ensure that the themes and questions function in practice. Prior to conducting the actual interviews, it is beneficial to trial the functionality of the questions (Gillham 2000). In my Dissertation work this was done informally using peer-feedback, and also expert advice was sought from the Centre for Educational Research. Furthermore, the interviews were piloted to gain practical experience on the interview protocol. The pilot interview already provided valuable input to the overall pool of data, and thus it is included in the definitive research data.

5.2 PARTICIPANTS

As I wanted to interview students who had first-hand experience in both Finnish and British higher education, I requested a list containing contact information of every University of Jyväskylä student who had participated in the Erasmus Exchange Programme to Britain from autumn 1999 till spring 2002 from the International Office of the University of Jyväskylä resulting in 96 students in total, of which 73 were female and 23 were male. This time frame was selected so that all interviewees would have had the exchange experience fairly recently. I selected the group of ten interviewees, of which eight were female and two male; the criteria for selection of the interviewees were gender, their home department and major subject, as well as the exchange institution in the United Kingdom. As it is common knowledge that Faculties and Departments differ from each other pedagogically due to different discipline specific discourse traditions (see e.g. Chanock 2000; Higgins et al. 2001), the intention was to have a representative from each Faculty. Although the research was not aiming to generalise the retrieved information, it was important to investigate, whether there were any fundamental differences in perceiving the same experience between students from different disciplines. The balance in the gender of the interviewees roughly reflected the reality, and thus no attempt to have equal representation was made. Two of the interviewees had graduated very recently; the others were third to sixth year students, between 23-33 years of age, the average age being 25,7. One of the interviewees was of other origin than Finnish, though no cultural difference in the responses could be perceived, and the interview was successfully conducted in Finnish with an occasional English addition.

In my final group of interviewees there were six out of the seven University of Jyväskylä Faculties represented, as from the whole School of Business and Economics only two students had participated in Erasmus Exchange in Britain during the selected time period, and those two could not be reached. The distribution of the participants according to Faculties and Departments was as seen in Table 1. Furthermore, Table 1 presents participants by their major (in bold font) and minor subjects, totalling in 29 different subjects. Although the major subjects represented seven different Departments with possibly differing study cultures and pedagogical foundations, all participants had experienced on average 2,7 minor subjects, at least one subject always outside their home Department and Faculty.

Table 1: Participants by Faculty, Department and Major and Minor Subjects

	Faculty	Department	Major* and Minor Subjects of Study at Home Institution
A	**Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences** (4 Departments)	Social Sciences of Sport	**Sport Sociology**, Economics, Intercultural Studies
B	**Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences** (4 Departments)	Social Sciences of Sport	**Sport Sociology**, Social Politics
C	**Faculty of Humanities** (5 Departments)	Communication	**Speech Communication**, Drama Education
D	**Faculty of Humanities** (5 Departments)	History	**General History**, Politology, Intercultural Studies, Cultural Anthropology, EU-Studies
E	**Faculty of Social Sciences** (2 Departments)	Social Sciences and Philosophy	**Sociology**, Psychology, Speech Communication, Women's Studies
F	**Faculty of Social Sciences** (2 Departments)	Social Sciences and Philosophy	**Sociology**, Politology, Women's Studies, Education, Journalism
G	**Faculty of Education** (4 Departments)	Teacher Education	**Teacher Education**, Drama Education, English, Special Education
H	**Faculty of Education** (4 Departments)	Early Childhood Studies	**Early Childhood Studies**, Physical Education for Children with Special Needs, Drama Education, Finnish Sign Language, Integration of Creative Subjects in Education
I	**Faculty of Information Technology** (2 Departments)	Computer Science and Information Systems	**Computer Science and Information Systems**, Marketing, Organisational Communication and PR
J	**Faculty of Mathematics and Science** (4 Departments)	Bio and Environmental Sciences	**Environmental Sciences**, Biochemistry, Chemistry, Hydrobiology
Total: 10	**Total Representation of Faculties 6 (7)**	**Total Representation of Departments 8**	**Total Representation of Subjects Studied by Participants: 29**

* Major subject first, in bold font.

Table 2 presents the exchange institutions totalling in seven higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland); these institutions further represent the local division between old 'Elite' universities, respected 'Red Brick', Universities and the 'New' Universities (refer to Chapter 2.3). The exchange institutions have not been linked with the interviewees and their subjects studied in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Table 2: Exchange Institutions

Exchange Institutions	Type of Institution
University of Edinburgh	'Elite' or 'Ancient'
Queen's University Belfast	'Red Brick'
University of Wales	
University of Aberdeen	
Chester College of Higher Education[3] (University of Liverpool University)	('New'/ 'Red Brick')
University of North London	'New'
University of Sunderland	
Total Representation of higher education institutions in the UK: 7	

Although there is no real consensus of the 'right', or adequate, number of interviews for a qualitative piece of research, I argue that for this piece of study ten was an adequate number of participants. Firstly, all but one Faculty within the University of Jyväskylä were represented by a major student, and all Faculties were represented in terms of subjects that were studied by the participants. Secondly, in two cases, a single Department, a single major subject and a single exchange institution was represented by *two participants*, which offered the researcher a vehicle to observe any potential differences between the opinions of seemingly very similar students. Thirdly, according to Eskola & Suoranta (1998, 62) the adequate number of interviews, a saturation point, has been reached when the interviews begin to repeat one another, and no more new information can be attained by conducting further interviews; the interviews themselves

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[3] Chester was granted the Taught Degree Awarding Powers in 2003, and subsequently, a university status in 2005, i.e. a 'New' university on the face of it; however, it has a well-established 'Red Brick' background as a College of Higher Education of a 'Red Brick' University (Liverpool), and it was the first teacher training college in Britain, founded in 1839.

proved to reach the point of saturation by the last interview with little variation in participants' experiences, and very little new information.

The initial contact was taken via e-mail, and an interview schedule was formulated. The interviews were conducted between June and November 2002, mostly in public places familiar to the students, such as the university Library, with one exception, when the interview took place in the participant's home. Nevertheless, no problems were encountered regarding the practical arrangements of the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed personally immediately after the interviews had taken place. Albeit transcribing can be a very time-consuming task, which in this case took approximately 35 hours in total, and resulted in 140 sheets of text, it provides the researcher an important initial immersion to the data. Often the participants commented further after the interview, more informally, when the tape recorder had already been switched off, in which case, notes were taken and attached to the transcription. All the transcriptions were sent to the participants to be checked for accuracy and for any further comments; this was done via e-mail. Consequently, only clarifications to expression were made, and no further data was gained this way. Brief notes were also made during the interviews to capture the initial insights arising from the data.

I was careful to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees at all times, as recommended by Eskola & Suoranta (1998). All tapes and transcriptions were only handled confidentially by the researcher at any time, and the anonymity of interviewees is ensured by referring to them by an alphabet from A to J rather than by name. Eskola & Suoranta (1998) emphasise that making identification of interviewees as difficult as possible when reporting results can ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of interviewees. Therefore, relevant detail only has been enclosed; for example, the gender, or nationality, of the interviewee was not relevant to the interpretation of data, and therefore has not been disclosed at any time.

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

There are no off-the-shelf methods for qualitative analysis for the data acquired by semi-structured interview. The important feature of qualitative research is that the

researcher can adopt several different approaches to retrieve the essential. The challenge is to make sense of the data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton 1990, 372). The content analysis can be approached by themes and/ or types arising from the data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 173-174). The data can be organised by common themes arising from the data, or by a specific interesting theme, relevant to the research questions. Transcriptions can also be categorised by certain common features of the respondents, and thus arrive to typologies of characters where the primary purpose is to describe (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000; Patton 1990). Although the data was already naturally presented by themes due to the structure of the interviews, I wished to find 'deeper structures', themes raised by the interviewees rather than the researcher.

The data analysis began with returning to the transcribed texts over and over again to check the depictions of the experience in order to derive common themes. The transcriptions were collated and reorganised by the themes of the interview framework for the ease of analysis. In addition to the main themes, further issues arising from the interviews were collated as additional themes. Individual depictions of participants' experience were constructed in the form of written synopses of each interview in order to derive the essential features of that particular interview; subsequently, I returned to the individual depictions and formed categories by looking at the depictions as a group, by type, rather than by individual.

In order to illustrate how the researcher reached the interpretations and conclusions quotations are used; quotations also bring the participants closer to the reader, who then can immediately understand what the researcher means by the analysis (Ryan & Bernard 2000). A decision had to be made on how to report the data, as the language of all interviews was Finnish, and all original transcriptions from which all quotations were derived from, were in Finnish, whereas the language of the study is English. As soon as a suitable quotation was identified, I translated the quotation in English, attempting to retain the accuracy, as well as the 'spoken character' and the feel of the comment; all English quotations are linked to their original Finnish version by an endnote (Appendix 5).

6. RESULTS

From reading the transcriptions over and over again, particular themes and typologies arose from the interviews. Based on the data handling methods described above, two main, overriding themes could be extracted from the interview material. Firstly, the theme of *'critical balance of student support'* characterised the differences in the two educational settings, providing an answer to the first research question: how do students who had experienced the Finnish and the British higher education setting perceive the main differences in the two educational settings, with a particular focus on assessment feedback. As the heading for the theme suggests, the quality and quantity of student support was perceived as the overriding difference between the two educational systems; the British higher education seemed to present itself to the students as a very 'pastoral', almost patronising culture, whereas the Finnish higher education was described through the term 'academic freedom', quite as the literature review, particularly Chapter 2, would suggest. Feedback was seen as one of the support mechanisms which featured strongly in the British context but which was seen as lacking in the Finnish equivalent. The interviewees were not explicitly asked wider questions on methods of learning and teaching, however, most of the students naturally brought up the British holistic approach to learning, as described by Mauranen (1994), whereby feedback was seen to intrinsically link to the methods of learning and teaching. It was clear that the two educational settings represented the far ends of a dichotomy, and that these two extremes should be brought closer to each other in order to benefit and learn from the best of both worlds.

Secondly, the theme of *'constructing a personal worldview'* could be generalised to portray the interviewees in their approach to learning, teaching, and particularly assessment and feedback, in higher education, linking the theme to the second research question on the relation between the meaning the students attached to higher education and the role of feedback in the overall student experience. The students' narratives echoed the ideals of becoming a 'critical being', learning to think for oneself (see Atkins' 1995; Barnett 1997; King & Kitchener 1994; Ramsden 1992), and in this, the students identified the role of the higher education as crucial. Moreover, some students saw the development into such a being be highly supported by constructive feedback;

feedback, was seen to provide students the crucial 'wider perspective' on matters at hand, so that deeper, more personally meaningful learning could take place, and the affective, moral and creative aspects of personality could develop.

The next step in presenting the results will be to explore the question on the perceived meaning and value of assessment feedback, as experienced by the students. I will present the three different functions students attached to feedback. It seems that the interviewees saw feedback as *'developmental'*, *'instrumental'* or *'inspirational'*, which all seem to represent different facets of good feedback practice (see Juwah et al. 2004) and which are by no means exclusive to each other. In fact, although these approaches to feedback often overlap, it was clear that further analysis of the data connected these different approaches to a further typology of learners that arose from these interviews.

The main results of this piece of research are then summarised and presented through the typology of Type A, '*Pragmatically orientated',* student, and Type B, '*Learning for Life'*, student. All the original themes, the differences of the Finnish and British higher education, the role of higher education in cultivating the student mind and approaches to assessment and feedback, as well as the overriding, emerging themes from the results, could then be brought together through the depiction of the two types. Furthermore, the typology will draw to close the original research questions and the findings of this empirical study.

6.1 THE CRITICAL BALANCE OF STUDENT SUPPORT

Throughout the interviews, the interviewees' responses were conveyed through the perceived differences in the Finnish and British higher education, comparing and contrasting any given issue from the cultural viewpoint, which reflected Cabal's (1993) account of different university models. The tension between the familiar ideal of autonomous learners, and the experience of structured, closely guided and prescribed education featured strongly in the interviews. The Humboldtian research focus of the Finnish university featured very prominently in the students' responses. The notion of academic freedom, deliberately placing the responsibility on students, and the general sophisticating function, learning for learning's sake, described the Finnish university.

The British higher education was seen as a rather rigid, school-like system, where both the content and delivery was prescribed outside the student, a finding strongly supported by the research by Sagulin (2005, 75) on students' exchange experiences.

> It was a really rigid system actually, as for the Bachelor's degree, for example, you have *exactly* three years and 120 local credits per year, and even if you wanted to study more, you couldn't. You couldn't do any less either. If you compare this to the Finnish, nobody's telling you what you must study this year. [ii]

Little academic freedom presented itself, for example, in the form of compulsory attendance and teacher-centred methods of learning and teaching in the British system. Vast student choice and the opportunity to in-depth study in a range of areas in their home institution were highly appreciated, whereas the student experience in the British context was often seen somewhat superficial, as the modular structure presented larger entities where topics easily remained at a generic level. All students emphasised the more discursive nature of learning and teaching in the UK, always featuring small-group seminars, tutorials, group-work, presentations, and even compulsory attendance in lectures. The holistic approach to learning and teaching that prevails in the UK (Mauranen 1994; Sagulin 2005) was commended on in all ten interviews. A common feature in both Finland and in the UK was the centrality of written mode in assessment, as also noted by Mauranen (1994).

Regardless of the student's exchange institution, whether an established 'Red Brick' university or a 'New' university, the British higher education was seen to resemble the Finnish Polytechnic in many ways. Firstly, students generally agreed that there was a strong practical, or vocational, element in all subjects in their exchange institutions, and thus the three-year undergraduate degree was more employment focused than academic study generally in Finland was. The notion that the student experience might differ whether the place of study was a higher education college or a university was not really supported by the participants; still, colleges were seen as "teaching divisions" of universities, having a more teaching focused role than the more research focused universities. Secondly, the British 'teen institution', to quote, seemed to be based on a strong support culture and the idea of pastoral care, as Earwaker (1992) suggests. All aspects of student life were seen as pre-organised and steered in the UK. It was felt by some that the British system underestimated students in preventing them to take

responsibility over their studies, whereas in Finland higher education was clearly seen as adult education, offered to 'able grown-ups'.

> …the majority of students live on campus... They also move out of their parent's homes for the first time when they go to the university. They get a bit intoxicated by all the sudden freedom. And they have cleaners and they eat in the canteen, so that they're not given an opportunity to take responsibility over their everyday life, let alone their studies, and when the sense of responsibility isn't developed, it's reflected in their jovial attitude towards their studies. It's not real life. [iii]

Even leisure time, extra-curricular activities that students engaged in, were organised and controlled by the institution, as again reported by Earwaker (1992), and reflected in the following quote.

> Then they had a lot of these clubs and societies. I think our activities aren't that organised, particularly by areas of interest. There [in the UK] it was a lot more social, communal. Anyone who happened to be interested in football, for example, could play football [in a club], and the students would come from any faculty of study. [iv]

It was pointed out time and time again that the young age of students in the British context might have been the major reason behind the 'somewhat patronising' support and guidance culture; however, the 'spoon-feeding' was seen as a wider cultural issue, as it was felt that close monitoring and guidance were features of the modern British society in general.

The impact the Finnish 'academic freedom' had on the prolonged study times, and how it might be seen as economically inefficient, an issue that has been recognised at a national level (Ministry of Education 2000), was raised by all interviewees; moreover, it became apparent that students often felt alone in their home institution, and this was seen to potentially jeopardise their academic progress. Teaching staff in Finland were often seen to have multiple roles outside teaching, such as strong interest in research, and felt that teachers in the UK seemed more committed to students' learning. The British system, as well as individual teachers, seemed to 'care more'. Considering the respective student staff ratios presented in Chapter 2.5, and the strong research culture that prevails in Finland, this is perhaps not surprising. Although Aittola (2001) and Kallio (2001) have expressed similar concerns over the pressures on academic staff, the

interviewees comments seemed to suggest that, actually, more attention has been paid to student support lately.

> The downside to the Finnish system is that some students can be left behind the expected pace because of the lack of guidance. They can also sort of feel like no one cares how they're doing. Then again, I suppose it's changed a lot since I started, even in our Department. We've now got a sort of a personal tutor or something.[v]

Particularly, the lack of guidance with regards to minor subjects was raised by many. Students felt that as their Finnish studies were so individually determined, advice and guidance on curriculum planning was required. The Finnish take on tutoring seemed to have weaknesses on all four fronts: subject matter related, study skills oriented, integration into the learning community and psychosocial (see Tenhula & Pudas 1994). Many of the interviewees had elected minor subjects based on their personal interest, rather than the suitability of the combination, only to realise the incoherence, and potentially detrimental aspects, of their degree design later on, and thus the British prescribed degree structure, combined with the tutoring system, seemed to have its benefits.

Regardless, all students praised the academic freedom, self-directed study and the openness of degrees of the Finnish university model, and brought it up in various contexts. Many noted how the academic freedom enabled students to pursue almost any subject or discipline area, wherever their personal interests lie, which would not be possible in the British degree structure. Students clearly valued their home institution in placing the trust in the student, providing the opportunity to 'think for themselves' and take responsibility for their own learning, thus grow as learners and as individuals. 'Academic freedom', strongly endorsed by students, seemed to be the preferred model for higher education study; however, it was clear from the responses that more student support was necessary, to guide the student towards good practice.

> It [studying] is really autonomous in Finland but to me it's problematic, because you could essentially almost complete the degree, study for five years and get a '2' for every course, which in itself doesn't tell you anything. But you never get any feedback on anything, you just go to exams or lectures, and then you are expected to do your thesis independently, which is really a bit much. [vi]

The reoccurring appeal arising form the interviews was to bring the two systems closer together, thus creating an enabling learning environment, where individuality and personal choice is embraced in a supportive manner. Throughout the interviews, it was thus clear that whatever the particular detailed differences in the educational settings were, the critical balance of student support seemed to be a reoccurring theme in the students' accounts.

6.2   CONSTRUCTING A PERSONAL WORLDVIEW

The second overriding theme arising from the interviews was the role of the higher education experience in 'constructing a personal worldview', a concept, which consequently was introduced in Taajamo's (1999) work, as one of the main results from study abroad. My research seemed to suggest the same, except, the interviewees did not attribute this development of 'worldview' specifically to the exchange experience but engagement in higher education in general. The following account will provide the reader with an insight to the second of the research questions on learning in higher education, the personal value the students attach to the higher education experience and how feedback relates to the overall learning experience.

As a whole, the students reported that their perception of themselves had changed due to the learning experience in higher education, as implied in Chapter 2. The development into Barnett's (1997) "critical being" was suggested by many; the interviewees felt that they had been changed as persons by their experiences. The majority of students seemed to suggest that they now engage critically with the world and with themselves and the following paragraphs will expand on the idea. Furthermore, the development of this personal worldview seemed to be facilitated by assessment feedback. Students presented the idea of 'perspective': without seeing things through other people's eyes, one was trapped in his/ her ways of thinking. Feedback, in the students' accounts, was central in communicating different perspectives, showing the ways in which the student had failed to think the issues at hand and revealing the other person's point of departure. Feedback, providing this all important 'perspective', seemed to make the learning experience more personally meaningful.

The main role of the university as reported by the interviewees coincided with the personal meaning students gave to their studies; the very skills required for research, such as 'abstract, critical and reflective thinking', and the ability to analyse, were raised as the main benefits of their student experience. Although these qualities naturally develop as we mature, they reported that they had become more analytical and critical of all 'knowledge' due to their exposure to higher education. The students were very articulate on how their conceptions about knowledge had changed from the absolutistic view to relativistic view on knowledge, as suggested by Perry (1970) and King and Kitchener (1994). Knowledge was now seen as provisional, and authoritative 'truth' inexistent; nothing was considered as given anymore but all information must be questioned, and only then an individual can construct the meaning of it. One student simply put it

> I'm more critical towards even the university itself. Nobody really *knows* anything. Nothing can be known for certain. It's only good that nobody knows anything for certain. I don't think there is anything in this world, at least in the human sciences, which can be taken as the final truth in all circumstances.[vii]

The interviewees reported to have a more relativistic attitude; there was more than one solution to a problem.

> My problem solving skills have changed perhaps in that if I had an instant solution to a problem earlier, I now seem to have more scope for choice and I seem to weigh more which might be the best option. But this is related to the stuff I said earlier about critical thinking.[viii]

The students' accounts clearly reflected the overall purpose of university in developing critical judgement, as proposed by many theorists (e.g. Perry 1970; Ramsden 1992; Säljö 1982; Dewey 1933); developing the 'independent thought' and 'developing a personal worldview' featured in all responses in one way or the other. "In a way it's just thinking for yourself so that you can think critically, and construct your own worldview." [ix]

University studies meant much more to the majority of the interviewees than mere academic qualification. Many referred to how their personal identity had been shaped through their higher education experience. One of them felt that her studies had functioned as her 'life's leading star', *'elämän johtotähti'*; by this she meant that she had

learned and realised through her studies where her personal interests lie, shaping the rest of her future. Some of the students emphasised that being socialised to the academic world had opened their eyes and provided them with a wider outlook on life.

The students' approach to academic study reflected their perception of themselves as students; they were highly motivated students who demanded much from themselves. The theme of critical thinking, and constructing one's worldview, was very prominent in most students' accounts. This was even sometimes recognised from a deficit viewpoint, where this aspect of development had not been achieved:

> Despite all the high browed statements on creative thinking and critical and analytical thinking and development of though I've made, it feels a bit like the learning process was left a bit short. Perhaps it was because I graduated too quickly or perhaps it's just my discipline. The University was a slight disappointment in a way.[x]

In contrast, some saw that students in the UK concentrated more on the social aspects of student life than the actual learning. Genuine will to learn seemed to be the driving force particularly behind their comments on feedback.

It was felt that the skills for a profession came from outside the formal education; professional skills were to be acquired after graduation, whereas generic transferable skills acquired in higher education were highly appreciated. Key skills, identified by Nordhaug (1991), such as language and communications skills, inter-personal skills and problem solving skills, were seen as something that the university as an institution could provide.

> I personally think that you get the kind of competencies that you can use later in life, competencies which you would not necessarily acquire in vocational training. Like problem solving skills and creative thinking and ability to think and act autonomously.[xi]

Although the interviewees associated the development of key skills to the overall benefits of learning in higher education, strangely enough, similar benefits were reported by Sagulin (2005) as one of the main benefits of a student exchange experience. As much as students appreciated the overall benefits resulting from the 'self-directed' learning and teaching philosophy in their Finnish institution, it was related to a paradoxical notion of passiveness.

> Self-directedness is an excellent principle, and it works in Finland, as it seems that here university students are more reflective. They sort of think more for themselves rather than settle for given answers. I thought that there was less of this kind of critical or analytical thinking involved in England.[xii]

Students saw that the Finnish system, although allowing students' autonomous engagement in learning in whatever mode or speed, also fed passive methods of learning and teaching. Many students were indeed rather critical regarding the unbalanced diet of lecture-examination pair and the absence of seminars and discussion groups in Finnish system, also particularly recognised by Mauranen (1994); they longed for academic debate and discussions, and generally opportunities to learn and benefit from other people's take on the issues at hand. They reported to have attended few seminars in their home institutions, mostly towards the end of their studies, where the instant feedback provided by the method of delivery had been much appreciated. Students reported that engaging in the more interactive, discursive learning, and receiving generous feedback, seemed to make them more aware of their meta-competences and thus their academic self.

> I think there should be more seminars and generally more contact teaching. At least in our Department there's too much of just lectures and exams. You're not really given a chance at any point to really debate, and study in order to be able to defend your views and really discuss it, so that it wouldn't simply remain as a one-sided opinion based on certain readings written down on a piece of paper at the end of an assignment. In my opinion, it would be terribly important to be able to defend your views against a live person and generally to be provided opportunities to discuss things. [xiii]

The experience of the interviewees mirror the research by Walker & Warhurst (2000), in which their interviewees begun developing 'the hoped for critical perspectives on the topics under discussion' when using class debates as a method of learning and teaching. The experience of the Finnish students in the more discursive British learning context, as described in the above quote, seem to evoke the same response, as seen from Walker & Warhurst's interviews:

> When you went to the debate you listened to both sides of the argument, which I thought was the main strength of the debates, that you do see both sides, rather than just seeing it from one point of view. (Walker & Warhurst 2000)

Although some students saw the close relationship between the teacher and student as somewhat patronising in Britain, they recognised the different needs of different types

of students. Moreover, the combination of different methods of learning and teaching within each module had had strikingly different effect on learning:

> It's exactly those tutorials and seminars and small group discussions that I most miss in the Finnish system. It would be great if we had that system in Finland, where each lecture would be followed by a couple of hours' seminar, like there [in UK], where after each lecture you could discuss all the things and benefit from multiple viewpoints on issues. I also noticed I was thinking about the issues more, and from more than one perspective. [xiv]

The students thus introduced the idea of 'perspective'; the familiar picture of a researcher toiling alone in his/ her chamber depicted the Finnish learning experience, excluding the perhaps more realistic exchange of ideas within the learning community. Learning remained as a single perspective on any given issue of a learner. Students clearly reported of the enhanced learning experience, when other's comments, annotations, 'perspectives' informed the learning; whether this 'wider perspective' was accessed via small-group discussions, informal/ formal peer-assessment and feedback, or constructive feedback provided by the teacher, seemed to make little difference. Aptly, this view ties in with the constructive approach to learning, which emphasises the role of social interaction in learning (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994; Tynjälä 1999). On one hand the interviewees reported that learning in higher education, as well as the exchange experience, had developed a particular worldview; on the other hand, a discursive learning environment and feedback were recognised as further facilitating 'a wider perspective' and thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

6.3 DEVELOPMENTAL, INSTRUMENTAL AND INSPIRATIONAL MEANINGS OF FEEDBACK

From analysing the interviewees' responses to the value and role of assessment feedback, the importance of feedback could be seen as described from the viewpoint of three different functions, thus providing the reader the answer to the third and final research question: what is the perceived meaning and value of assessment feedback, as experienced by the students and what role does feedback have in the construction of the student's academic self. The *developmental* function emphasises the meaning of feedback in developing overall learning, providing qualitative information on the

qualities of what is considered as high-quality work. Feedback, from a developmental viewpoint, enforces the student's academic identity. The *instrumental* function stresses the benefits of raising the learner's awareness of his/ her particular skills for the purposes of enhancing any subsequent work. The third function is concerned with *inspirational* aspects, where feedback has influence on the person at an emotional or motivational level. The developmental view and the instrumental view correspond to Falchikov's (1995) informational properties of feedback, whereas the inspirational view corresponds to the hedonistic properties of feedback.

1. *Developmental function*: knowledge of one's own strengths and weaknesses in order to become a better learner. The benefits of learning *why and how* something was considered as good, or bad, in developing the student's self-awareness, and thus meta-competences.

> It's not enough to say 'that's good', but you have to explain *what* is good about it. It's just that - you don't necessarily know yourself what exactly was good in that particular context. It's important to become aware how my brain has worked this out. [xv]

> I think other people's opinions [feedback] are needed to give the learning a different perspective. Even at this age, my persona and character are changing, and although I roughly know what my strengths and weaknesses are, I learn more all the time. [xvi]

The developmental function emphasises the principles of lifelong learning and 'learning to learn'. It was seen as important that the feedback is detailed and explicit enough, a point made by Chanock (2000), or else the feedback is likely to fail to inform the student at the level required for the developmental function of feedback. Students stressed that "critical feedback is essentially positive, as it is the only way to learn new and develop" [xvii]; only by communicating the deficiencies in the work to students, by providing 'constructive' feedback, can one be sure that a student actually understands where the deficiencies lie. All criticised feedback often being too 'nice' and vague, failing to provide constructive criticism in order to guide further development. The interviewees demanded more detailed feedback, not only on the drawbacks of the performance but also on the advantages of it; a student could also learn from an analysis of what had been done well.

The interviews seemed to suggest that students valued feedback in providing them knowledge about their meta-competences and meta-cognition. According to Nordhaug (1991) meta-competences are knowledge and skills that can be applied in different contexts. For example, communication skills, language skills and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to manage change and tolerate uncertainty, are considered as meta-competences. Heywood (2000) describes meta-competence to be an ability to reflect on one's own competences, and manipulate them in solving problems. "The knowledge they have is that which enables them to understand the competence itself" (Heywood 2000, 50). Whereas meta-competence is individual's knowledge of his or her competences, meta-cognition is individual's knowledge of his or her cognitive strategies and procedures. Meta-cognition develop through maturing, as noted by Vauras and von-Wright (in Kuusinen & Korkiakangas 1995); however, the interviewees raised feedback as essential in constructing students' meta-skills and thus enhancing learning and development of reflective thinking. The more one learns about oneself and one's skills and competences, the less one needs external confirmation and feedback. However, in becoming a self-reflective learner one needs information about one's abilities.

2. *Instrumental function*: awareness of one's own knowledge and skills in order to enhance performance. Some students saw the benefits of feedback as instrumental in improving any subsequent work and perhaps thus gaining better grades. The instrumental function differs from the developmental function in that the interviewee placed little value on the wider 'learning to learn' aspect but focused on the immediate benefits to succeeding in their studies. However, feedback which helps to improve performance is likely to enhance learning (see Heywood 2000).

> You learn to recognise how to write an essay, for example, what it consists of, how you could improve the structure… And I got feedback on the language use as well. [xviii]

> I think feedback is bloody important. For the very reason that if you only get a grade for an essay, for example, you can only guess what the assessor might have been thinking. Verbal or written feedback makes it explicit in pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of the piece of work. That kind of feedback is extremely good, and as you know what you did well, and what not so well, you can do better next time. You'll know what to do to get a better grade. [xix]

Hounsell's (in Norton & Norton 2001) study suggests that a use of essay feedback checklists helps targeting written feedback and is thus worthwhile, as they provide a useful breakdown of the areas where strengths and weaknesses may occur. This was supported by the interviewees who praised the feedback matrices they had experienced in their British institutions; they could see how both assessment feedback, and student feedback, could benefit from a matrix to guide the comments into relevant areas.

> What I thought was incredibly good, was that every time you submitted an essay, you got it back with a separate 'form', which outlined all the strengths and weaknesses of the work. [xx]

The interviewees recognised that availability of explicit assessment criteria could help the assessor to provide more detailed and explicit feedback, as the work could be directly referenced to the existing criteria. Although, for example, Chalmers and Fuller (1996) stress the importance of student awareness of the assessment criteria, the interviewees were often unsure against what criterion staff assessed student work, and what actually was being assessed. Worryingly, some reported of experiences where the preferred style of a particular assessor was the perceived assessment criteria:

> In Britain it was much clearer in that we were given these handbooks at the beginning of the studies, which had all the information of what they assess in an essay, what it should be like, what they look for in exams. Everything was clear, you knew what they were after, no problem; clearer than in Finland. In Finland it's more of a case of guessing what this particular professor might want and what style s/he might prefer. [xxi]

In assessment, the criteria should be explicit in order to the assessment be efficient and justified; feedback might also reveal some of the implicit criteria of assessment to some extent. One interviewee reported of the confusion over the marking of his/ her Master's Dissertation, and pointed out that three different assessors had had three different opinions, and three different grades had been given to the same piece of work in the absence of clear criteria. However, she praised the Department in question for leading development, subsequently, in this area, defining departmental, generic assessment criteria; however, it was seen as vital for the staff to work together on generic assessment criteria across the institution. Students were unanimous that it would be beneficial to provide students with assessment criteria (see Appendix 3 as an exemplar) prior to an assessment task, as had happened in their exchange institution in Britain,

where written feedback form, analysing the performance aspect by aspect, always related back the comments to the assessment criteria. The student perception on the importance of linking feedback to assessment criteria is supported by recent research (e.g. Weaver 2006): ensuring timely feedback, set in the context of assessment criteria and learning outcomes tutors could greatly improve the value of feedback and thus student performance.

3. *Inspirational function:* feedback in providing self-confidence when student is feeling insecure of his/her performance. Students' confidence in what they are doing is 'on the right tracks', both at a task level and more generally in their chosen discipline, could be enhanced by appropriate feedback. This applies particularly where a student has no or little experience of the task or issue at hand. The inspirational view on feedback also implies that positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem can be significantly enhanced by feedback, which according to Juwah (2004) is one of the features of effective feedback. Many students pointed out that feedback was also particularly important where the task at hand had personal significance.

> One could almost say that the more unsure of yourself you are, the more feedback you need. I've experienced it. How for three years I'd worked and worked hard and thought I was never good enough, and in the end, when I raised this with the teacher, I was told that s/he had thought that I was so good that s/he never even thought about mentioning the quality of my work. But you only ever see your own work! [xxii]

Feedback could also support the development of the student's professional self, and provide confidence in the career choice.

> To me feedback has actually been really important because I was so unsure of the career choice. I ended up choosing the discipline by pure chance, and now it's something that I'm really going to get into and for that decision feedback has been crucial. As I now know that it really interests me, more importantly, I also know I'm up for it. [xxiii]

Although the above three functions of feedback surfaced from the interviews, providing an insight to what meanings students attached to feedback, it must be noted that these functions are, by no means, exclusive; overlapping views on feedback could be recognised from the responses. The following chapter will explain the typology of students which could be derived from the research data, further illustrating the links

between the findings so far. It became clear that certain functions of feedback could be attributed to the certain types of students.

6.4 TYPOLOGY OF STUDENTS: THE 'PRAGMATIC' AND THE 'LEARNING FOR LIFE' TYPE

Two types of students, who seemed to have a different approach to learning, and more specifically to feedback, could be identified as the main finding from the interview material, drawing together the earlier findings in Chapters 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3. The *'Pragmatically orientated'*, Type A, represented a very matter-of-fact approach to education, where the focus was on the performance or the immediate *outcome* of learning activity. The *'Learning for life'*, Type B, emphasised the *process* of learning rather than the outcome; furthermore, personal, inter-personal, intellectual and cognitive development was closely related to all academic activity by the Type B student. The distribution of the students between these two types was as follows:

```
Type A        |  x  x              x x  x x|  Type B
'Pragmatic'   |          x   x   x      x   |  'Learning for Life'
```
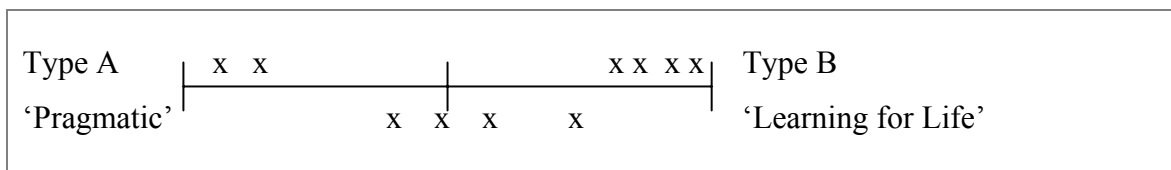
Figure 2: Distribution of Types across the Interviews

In brief, there seemed to be two students who represented primarily Type A and four students who represented primarily Type B out of the ten interviews; three students were located in the mid-range of the spectrum, sharing features of both types, though six of the ten participants clearly represented Type B students. The types have been constructed from a thematic cross-sectioning of the interviews; they were derived from the interviews by colour coding the different types of responses by theme rather than by individual. Also interviewees identities were colour coded so that the researcher's personal bias was minimised. It is important to stress that although both extremes of this spectrum had their archetypes amongst the participants, no one was purely one or the other in all aspects. The Table 3 will summarise the main characteristics of the two types.

Table 3: The Main Characteristics of the Type A and Type B

Type A: Pragmatically orientated	Type B: Learning for life
The role of higher education: research, 'training' of academics/ professionals	The role of higher education: edification, supporting the development of the 'critical mind'
Role of assessment: summative function, grading, measures learning outcomes, motivates/ 'forces' action	Role of assessment: formative function, feedback on, and for, development, a tool for the learner and the teacher
No particular emphasis on feedback; feedback as merely beneficial but by no means essential to learning; instrumental function of feedback	Feedback seen as essential, required for further development and awareness of meta-competences at all levels; developmental and inspirational function of feedback
Performance/ outcome orientated learning; pragmatic motives	Learning for personal development; learning for developing a personal worldview; 'learning for life'
Little reflection; very factual, closely subject-related responses to questions; little reflection on personal growth	Reflective; highly developed reflective thinking, detailed description of the development of intellectual and cognitive skills

Type A thought that the main role and function of the university was to educate future researchers, experts in their field, and thus 'future leaders', as well as to generate new knowledge for the benefit of the society, echoing the account of Välimaa (2001) on the contemporary state of Finnish higher education. The higher education experience was to provide the interviewee with a respectable profession; any feedback would provide the tools in performing better to achieve this goal. The 'Pragmatic' made little reference to personal, intellectual or cognitive development as a result of their engagement in higher education. Perhaps surprisingly, this type of student also emphasised the division of Finnish higher education into universities and polytechnics, implying the inferiority of higher education outside the traditional university.

The pragmatic type felt that assessment had a purely summative function (Quality Assurance Agency 2000; Chalmers & Fuller 1996), and saw it as the 'inevitable bad', the vehicle for the teachers to verify students' acquired knowledge in the subject area; assessment had externally motivating function as well, as it often was the reason for studying. According to this type, assessment had little to do with learning, although some qualitative difference between assessment methods could be seen. According to this type of student, self-assessment seemed to be a 'hype' term, which benefited the

student very little; "self-assessment is often a bit of an add-on…It doesn't really make any difference to your development, does it". [xxiv]

> Assessment measures the student's knowledge in that area, though I'm not sure how good an indicator it is. An exam measures at least the short-term memory capacity. Essay is a bit better indicator of what has been understood about the issue, as you have to write about it a bit further. I don't know, I suppose it's for the teacher to know that the students have bothered to read the course books. I doubt it actually measures much anything but sometimes it's the only way to get people to read anything. [xxv]

As Ramsden (1992) establish a connection with deep and surface learning (Marton et al. 1980) with assessment and feedback, and how the perceived expectations on assessment methods influence how the student intends to learn, and the surface approach is encouraged by assessment methods that emphasise recall or the application of trivial procedural knowledge, it seems to suggest that the Type A has a prevalently atomic, surface type approach to learning. Notably, poor or absent feedback on process encourage students to resort to surface approaches.

The pragmatic type felt that from a personal perspective the quantity and quality of feedback was essentially acceptable in their home institution. S/he recognised that the amount of individual feedback provided in the UK was beneficial but generally felt that s/he did not need feedback as much as others might need.

> Well, no, I don't get enough feedback, very little is provided. But then again, I don't really miss it either. So yes, personally, what I get is enough but people generally need more. In a way, to me it's enough to get the grade. It might be that I'm just used to it. It might be a shock for someone who's actually accustomed to frequent feedback and reflection and such to come and study here because here students are left alone in a sense. To me it's enough to pass an exam and get a decent grade for it. [xxvi]

This type usually considered the function of feedback as instrumental, as described in the previous account on the meanings students attach to feedback; feedback, although not essential, might be helpful in improving the work and gaining better grades. The developmental value of feedback was not recognised by this type. The Type A thrived in the Finnish self-directed higher education culture, and criticised the British system of being too patronising. This student was efficient; course after course were completed

before no time, and learning and teaching methods such as group work were considered as "a bit of a waste of time".[xxvii]

The narration, and description of experience, of the Type A student, was closely subject-related, as opposed to the Type B narration, which discussed the issues at a more abstract, generic level. For example, when asking about the types of things the student had learned in the university, Type A gave a detailed account on the subject-related skills and knowledge, rather than a more generic, overarching picture of what had been learned. In fact, one of the students who was in the middle of the range in Figure 2 recognised that she had maybe rushed through her degree too fast, and that the creative, analytical and reflective thinking might have required more time to develop.

For the Type B, higher education was for edification, cultivation of mind. While recognising the research focus of the university, the Type B emphasised the inter-personal, intellectual and cognitive benefits of higher education for the individual. These were the students who saw 'the leading star' through their university experience, who mostly reported of the change in their character and worldview. These were students with 'critical minds' (Barnett 1997; Atkins 1995; King & Kitchener 1994). The account on the views of Type B will further support, and elucidate, the ideas presented in Chapter 6.2 in responding to the second research question on how students perceive learning in higher education and how assessment feedback relates to the student's personal learning experience.

The role of assessment was integral to learning to Type B; furthermore, they were convinced that different methods of learning, teaching and assessment had a significant impact on the learning process, as research has shown (Boud 1988; Ramsden 1992; Chalmers & Fuller 1996).

> The method of assessment has a big impact. Essay is always better than an exam, although us social scientists don't really have much choice, although we also had some group-assignments during the exchange. Exams sort of feel like you forget everything by the next day. Essay is better for learning, and you can always return to it [for revision], and particularly when you get written feedback on it. [xxviii]

> In writing an essay, the issues at hand are processed perhaps over a longer period of time, unlike in just revising for an exam. The examination situation, and type of questions, however, more often requires just to remember previously learned responses, rather than to apply the knowledge. In contrast, more application, own thinking and evaluation is required for an essay. That's why I believe that, in principal, an essay supports learning better. [xxix]

Assessment and feedback were seen as very closely related terms, and the two were occasionally used almost interchangeably. Therefore, it is fair to say that some of the Type B students actually saw assessment mostly in its purely formative function. One of the interviewees, when s/he was asked about the meaning or value of *assessment*, responded:

> I suppose it's [assessment] really important from a developmental point of view, to receive feedback. At least for me it is. I have faith in these teachers, they are professionals, and they know what they're talking about, and it's interesting to get an expert opinion on the matter. [xxx]

Assessment provided important information for the student of what had been learnt but also acted as a mirror for the teacher on his/ her input. Assessment was considered as "a useful tool for both the teacher and student" [xxxi]. Working on an essay rather than cramming for an examination was seen to generate better learning. The difference between the Type A and Type B being, that the Type B clearly recognises the value of assessment and feedback as a valuable part of the learning process, unlike the Type A.

Feedback was often seen to possess all the different functions described in the previous chapter; developmental, instrumental and inspirational aspects of feedback featured in the Type B interviews. Type B stressed that feedback could make students more aware of the development of their thinking and mental processes, as well as their strengths and weaknesses; therefore, all feedback, whether critical or affirmative, should always be constructive, providing explanation of *why* the work was perceived as it was. One of the Type B students reported of an incident in her home institution, which highlights the importance of feedback in various ways. She had received a very poor grade for an examination, which she thought had been a success; luckily, she had e-mailed the assessor for clarification, and ended up getting the top grade for the work, in addition to detailed feedback.

> It turned out that the assessor must have been asleep, because when he had read it again, the work was a clear '3'. How did this happen! And in his e-mail the assessor had analysed the answer, which was really good. I understand that he must have read about a 100 exam papers, and couldn't possibly give such feedback for all, but it was something that I could really learn from! [xxxii]

The query had prompted the teacher to analyse her responses, and although her answers had already been excellent, further learning took place from the teacher's comments. The Type B clearly emphasised that assessment becomes a genuine, integral part of the learning process only when subsequent feedback is provided (see Heywood 2000; Wankowski 1991; Raaheim 1991). Unfortunately, the above quote also illustrates the constraints of the academic staff in providing adequate and frequent feedback, recognised by both students and current research (see Aittola 2001; Lammela et al. 2000; Heywood 2000).

Not surprisingly, all Type B students kept returning to the continuous feedback that was provided in their exchange institutions.

> Are you going to ask separately about those essays in England? I mean, I just thought it was great in England, as you got written feedback on essays which outlined why you had achieved that grade. The feedback actually analysed the essay, which I've never had before. This is how assessment, an essay or an exam, becomes a genuine learning situation, which it rarely is here [Finland]. [xxxiii]

> The Finnish system could move towards the British in that more feedback should be given and also that students were more consulted on what they want. After all, teaching is meant to be provided for the students' benefit, rather than teaching for teaching's sake. [xxxiv]

The role of contact hours was pointed out; it had not been only the end of the module written assessment feedback but continuous verbal feedback throughout the study unit. They also saw the reciprocal seminar working as a form of continuous feedback. Peer feedback was seen as a significant factor in learning, and wishes to include this in the day-to-day learning in Finnish higher education from early on were expressed repeatedly. Type B thrived in the new educational setting their exchange institution provided; learning from feedback and from peers, whether in seminars, tutorials or study groups, was raised as the main theme throughout the interviews. Self-assessment, or reflection, was seen as a valuable tool as well; for some it was the most important

technique in learning. However, it was recognised that practice is needed; otherwise it might fall short if it is not completely understood, as suggested also by Heron (1988).

> I think that self-assessment is something that you must learn so that you can use it wisely as a tool. As an idea it's a good one but it's meaningless if something doesn't 'click' in your head. [xxxv]

Roughly half of the Type B students felt that they received adequate feedback on their studies and half of them felt that the quality and quantity of feedback provided was inadequate and that might have detrimental effect on their development. It was agreed that they had never really suffered from the lack of feedback; however, all through the interviews a disappointment was brought up by the participants, how further learning could have taken place, should adequate feedback been provided.

The results have now addressed the research questions of this study through the two main themes arising from the interview material, as well as the account on the meanings students attach to assessment feedback, finally culminating in the typology of a 'Pragmatically orientated' and 'Learning for Life' type of student. The next, and last, Chapter will provide a reflection on the study and the main findings.

7. DISCUSSION

In conclusion, the account of the interviews on the perceived differences in the Finnish and British higher education mirrored the existing research and the theoretical, philosophical accounts on the different university traditions (Cabal 1993; Earwaker 1992). The old British 'educating university', the residential model, as well as the German research university, featured in the narration by all participants. Furthermore, the differences in the study cultures, as reported by previous studies on student experience in the British higher education, were supported by this peace of research (Mauranen 1994; Sagulin 2005; Taajamo 1999). Three interweaving levels of findings arose from the interviewees' accounts on the differences of the study cultures. Firstly, the existing themes of the interview protocol could be condensed into two overriding themes regarding student support and aspects of development into a 'critical being'. Furthermore, it became evident that the students attached developmental, instrumental and inspirational meanings to feedback. Further analysis of the interview data revealed that a typology of Type A 'Pragmatic' and Type B 'Learning for Life' approach to learning and feedback could be identified.

The first main theme arising from the results provide an answer to the main research question, 'how did students who had experienced the Finnish and British higher education perceive the main differences in the two educational settings, with a particular focus on feedback'. The 'critical balance of student support' was seen as the main difference of the two educational cultures. On one hand, the British system was heavily criticised for being overly patronising, undervaluing the student and student's abilities both in their personal and academic lives. On the other hand, the British system seemed to offer the highly valued discursive methods of learning and teaching, which the Type B student, particularly, appreciated. The methods of learning and teaching were seen as providing an appropriate level of support and guidance in their studies, essentially, providing them constant feedback in the form of sharing ideas, debating viewpoints, as well as assessment feedback. Focusing on assessment feedback, the British system seemed to offer the kind of detailed and explicit feedback, criticism and comments, which were seen as highly valuable for learning, but which the students felt to be absent in the Finnish system to some extent.

In contrast, the Finnish system was criticised for placing too much responsibility on the student, and more guidance in various forms would be welcome. Firstly, the perceived absence of assessment feedback was raised as an issue in the Finnish system, and it was felt that the frequent assessment feedback they had received in Britain, had had a positive impact on their studies, and the perception of their academic skills and attributes to varying extent, depending on whether the interviewee represented the Type A or Type B student. Secondly, the Finnish system was criticised for the narrow approach to methods of learning and teaching, deprived of social interaction. Learning could be seen as a continuum between highly didactic approach where students make few decisions about their learning to highly responsive approach where students make most decisions about learning (see Boud 1988); the interviews suggested that the Finnish and British higher education reside at the opposite ends of this spectrum.

The second major theme arising from the differences in the two educational settings, and the question on how students perceive learning in higher education was the idea of 'constructing a personal worldview', developing into a 'critical being'. The interviewees felt that the Finnish system fostered the kind of independent, 'critical thinking', which the majority of the interviewees saw as the main role of higher education. The importance of the 'learning curve' the higher education setting in Finland provides was seen as important in constructing a wider perspective on life in general. However, somewhat contradictorily, the interviews also seemed to suggest that it is the very discursive methods of learning and teaching used in Britain, which particularly contribute to the development of the 'critical mind'. Therefore, it is notable that the students themselves linked feedback to the constructive approach to learning, whereby in interaction with other people, the learner is pushed to reflect on his/ her knowledge, and new meanings, new angles, are created. Paradoxically, it was pointed out that they often could detect a lack of this type of thinking amongst their British peers, and consequently, the basic assumptions on promoting reflective thinking by interaction with the environment, as described by King and Kitchener (1994), seem contested. However, in conclusion, the Finnish system, which forces students to take responsibility over their studies at so many levels, forces them to become efficient, self-directed learners, and indeed, result in 'the ideal' student capable of the higher order critical

thinking. Nevertheless, the Type B student noted that becoming aware of one's own competencies via assessment feedback might facilitate the development further.

The students reported of three different types of meaning they attach to feedback. The developmental function of feedback seemed to contribute to the above mentioned development of critical thinking, as a student gains the means to become more reflective. The instrumental function of feedback could be recognised by both student types, and it was recognised that regardless of 'deeper' meanings attached to feedback, student performance could be enhanced by adequate feedback. It must be noted that although Falchikov (1995) described the detrimental effects of negative feedback on the students' ability to use feedback effectively, and moreover, the harmful affective consequences negative feedback might have, all interviewees in this study emphasised the constructive, not harmful, nature of 'negative' feedback. There was a consensus that feedback should be more direct, and that by effectively communicating the shortfalls of student work, feedback could truly fulfil its instrumental and developmental functions. The Type B student, particularly, also attached an inspirational meaning to feedback; feedback has a role in developing the student's academic self and defining their career paths.

How does assessment feedback then relate to the student's personal learning experience and construction of the student's academic self? As the above account on the three different meanings students attached to assessment feedback suggest, feedback has a clear developmental function that can steer student learning; it seems that even the Type A student who denied a particular *need* for assessment feedback, noted that the learning process can be more meaningful and rewarding, where assessment feedback feature. As it is suggested by the constructivist approaches to learning (e.g. von Wright 1992), people do not construct their experiences, learn, in a vacuum but in social interaction. The assessing teacher and the assessed student may thus have quite different perceptions on the matter at hand but when the student receive the exam back with a mark, the mark tells the student little about the correctness, coherence or completeness of his/her view. With feedback the differing views would be made explicit and the situation could be turned into a genuinely good learning situation. Although the 'Pragmatic' type failed to notice any particular effects of feedback in their construction of their academic identity, the 'Learning for Life' type raised this as one of the main benefits of feedback.

In evaluating the validity of the study, the role of the researcher must not be ignored; after all, qualitative research can rarely be completely free from the influence of the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). It is hard to judge to what extent my own experiences might have steered my conclusions but I believe that my experiences provided me an understanding which could be seen as an asset in interpreting the phenomenon. As Taajamo (1999) suggests, I could associate myself with the students' experiences, which enabled implicit sharing of experiences. However, in order to ensure the transparency of the analysis, I have tried to depict the process in detail; also direct quotes from the interview material have been included to illustrate the points made and provide the evidence base for the results. It is also recognised that an underlying weakness associated with qualitative research is the restrictive nature of language through which all phenomena are organised and described, and must also be considered when evaluating the validity of this piece of research. Meanings are conveyed through language, and thus the language has an active role in constructing meaning; a defining feature of language is that expressions have multiple meanings, and we can never be sure that the language and expressions of the 'sender' will be understood by the 'recipient' in the same way (Lehtonen 1996). The educational jargon, such as the terms 'assessment' and 'feedback', might have different meanings to the interviewer and the interviewees, and thus there is a danger of misconstruing the meaning of the experience. As a researcher, I was aware of the non-specialist nature of the interviewees when regards to educational terminology, and where inconsistency of expressions was detected, the personal definition of the term of the interviewee was requested.

As only one Finnish University was represented in the study, as opposed to the seven British institutions, one might criticise the study of comparing the British tradition to the University of Jyväskylä, rather than Finnish, tradition. It might be interesting to conduct further study to explore this discrepancy. However, I would argue that the Finnish University is a fairly homogenous institution and little difference would be found; a view also supported by the literature review.

Writing this piece of research proved to be a long, yet personally rewarding process. All the way through the process, I could see the issues discussed both from a student's point of view and from a quality enhancement and assurance point of view. Working first in the OPLAA! project (project to enhance quality of teaching) in Finland, and later in an

academic quality support unit in a British higher education institution, has provided me with a valuable insight into the subject at hand. However, it is regrettable that 'life happened', ignoring the completion of this piece of research: much has happened between 2002 and today in the Finnish higher education. Essentially, the recent significant changes, particularly with regards to the Bologna process in reforming the Finnish degree structure, have meant that some of the information in this study is already dated. However, Chapter 2.5 'The Finnish Higher Education System' still has intrinsic value to this study, as it provides the context in which the interview data was collected. As the experiences of the interviewees arise from that particular context, I considered it unnecessary to expand the cultural setting to include the recent changes.

However, a quick glimpse to the current state of play in the Finnish higher education might provide some food for thought. The three main priorities of the Bologna process are the introduction of the clear three cycle system (Bachelor/ Master/ Doctorate), quality assurance and, finally, European wide recognition of qualifications and periods of study (European Commission 2007). The aim of the Bologna process is, by 2010, to

> …create a joint higher education system in the Europe, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility, as well as employability. …to engage in the endeavour to create a European area of higher education, where national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students, and more generally of its citizens (Allegre et al 1998).

The Finnish degrees were thus reformed in 2005 to match the first, second and third cycle degree structure, which was already in place in Britain at the time of the students' exchange experiences (Opetusministeriö 2006). To what extent this will affect the everyday life of a student, the graduation times, and presumably, the curriculum design and methods of learning, teaching and assessment, will be the subject of another study. Although the benefits of quality assurance in higher education can be debatable, particularly, from the point of view of increased bureaucracy, which incidentally was recognised as a feature of the British higher education in this study (see also Sagulin 2005), perhaps the Finnish higher education might benefit from the Bologna induced attention to national standards. My personal view is that, although the British take on quality assurance has perhaps been taken a step too far in some respects, there is a lot to learn from the detailed attention it pays to the aspects of learning, teaching and

assessment presented in this piece of research. Much has happened in a short period of time in the Finnish higher education, and the introduction of benchmarking, institutional audits and institutional infrastructures for enhancement and quality assurance of higher education provision has meant that the Finnish system is changing rapidly. Furthermore, as the conflicting pressures to shorten graduation times and further expansion of the 'mass higher education' place more and more pressure on staff, perhaps alternative ways of student support, such as peer-feedback, might be introduced on a larger scale to benefit both the student learning and staff work load.

In conclusion, although all interviewees reported of the fundamentally different higher education experience in the Finnish and British context, and value statements were attached to the level of student support provided, the ultimate difference between the two systems seemed to be the 'superiority' of the Finnish system in developing the 'critical mind'. This was the case, regardless of the value the 'Learning for Life' type put on feedback in developing reflective thinking, and the 'superiority' of the British context over the Finnish system in providing formative feedback. Self-directed learning, indeed, demands the ability to converse with oneself about one's own learning processes (see Tight 1996), and perhaps this is why little attention to feedback has not been generally detrimental to the development of critical, reflective thinking in the Finnish setting. Admittedly, although the researcher should remain as objective as possible, based on the initial impressions made by the interview material, I had nurtured a presumption that the perceived value of feedback in supporting this 'development of thinking' would better place the British system as the ideal context for developing student reflection; this presumption, however, was proved wrong by the further analysis of the interview data. I will conclude with my favourite quote, which elucidates the reasons for choosing the topic for this piece of research, and also hopefully will provide food for thought in relation to the matter of feedback:

> Understanding other ways of seeing things is understanding each other and understanding each other is a highly efficient way of assisting each other in understanding things better. (Bowden & Marton 1998, 293)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW - THE THEMES AND THE QUESTION FRAME

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

    i.   Faculty of study?

    ii.   Subject of study?

    iii.   Year of studies at the time of the interview?

    iv.   Age?

1 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

1   What is, in your opinion, the function/purpose of the university institution?

    i.   In general?

    ii.   In your own life, your subjective view?

2   Has studying at the university changed you in any way?

    i.   Do you think your ways of thinking have changed?

    ii.   Has your ability to solve complex problems changed?

3   What have you learned at the university (formal and informal learning) and how would you describe yourself as a student?

2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OF UNIVERSITY TRADITIONS

4   Where about in Great Britain were you studying, and for how long?

5   What kind of differences, if any, did you notice between Finnish and British higher education?

    i.   Can you see any apparent philosophy behind these differences?

6   Were there any differences between the two study cultures?

    i.   Regarding work?

    ii.   Regarding leisure time?

7   Would you describe studying as independent or guided/supported by nature in Finland/Great Britain?

    i.   Have you had an academic tutor in Finland or Great Britain?

3 ASESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

3.1 ASSESSMENT

8   What is the meaning/purpose of assessment in general?

9   Does the method of assessment influence your learning?

10   Are the assessment criteria explicit before assessment takes place? Compare
         Finland and Great Britain.

11   Have you ever carried out self-assessment? How would you describe your
         experiences in using self-assessment?

12   How well do you feel you are able to evaluate your own development? Do you
         often encounter surprises in receiving grades?

3.2 FEEDBACK

13   What kind of feedback do you receive in your studies?

         i.   Have you noticed any cultural differences?

14   What is the meaning of feedback to you personally?

         i.   Do you feel you receive enough feedback (Finland/Great Britain)?

         ii.   When do you especially feel you need feedback?

         iii.   Do you take advice from the feedback you receive? Do you feel that any
                  given feedback might benefit you in other areas of study?

15   Have you encountered any problems in receiving feedback?

         i.   When receiving feedback, have felt it was ambiguous/unclear?

         ii.   Have you always understood the comments and corrections made?

         iii.   Have you ever had the feedback in a structured form of a feedback
                  checklist/matrix?

16   What do you consider as good and as poor feedback?

17   Have you personally given any feedback (Finland/Great Britain)?

         i.   Peer-feedback?

         ii.   Module/course feedback?

         iii.   Do you feel that the feedback has been taken into account and made a
                  difference?

18   I am going to read you a statement of opinion now and I would like you to
         comment on it. "A good student does not need feedback. S/he is self-directed,
         and s/he knows his/her own strengths and weaknesses. S/he is proficient in

planning his/her studies in reaching his/her goals, and is capable in evaluating his/her learning and overall development of thought."

    i.   To what extent do you agree/disagree?

SUMMA SUMMARUM

19   How would you recapitulate the differences between Finnish and British higher education?

20   Can you think of any other relevant experiences we have not touched yet, or would you like to clarify anything or return to any issue discussed?

APPENDIX 2: TEEMAHAASTATTELUN TEEMAT JA KYSYMYSRUNKO

TAUSTATIETOJA

    i   Tiedekunta?

    ii   Oppiaine?

    iii   Monesko opiskeluvuosi haastatteluhetkellä?

    iv   Ikä?

1 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

1   Mikä on mielestäsi yliopiston tehtävä?

    i   Yleisesti?

    ii   Henkilökohtaisesti omalla kohdallasi?

2   Millä tavalla yliopisto-opiskelu on vaikuttanut sinuun, muuttanut sinua?

    i.   Onko ajattelusi mielestäsi muuttunut opintojen aikana?

    ii.   Onko ongelmanratkaisutaitosi muuttuneet?

3   Mitä olet oppinut yliopistossa (formaali ja informaali oppiminen) ja millaisena opiskelijana pidät itseäsi?

2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OF UNIVERSITY TRADITIONS

4   Missä olit vaihdossa ja kuinka kauan?

5   Minkälaisia yleisiä eroja huomasit suomalaisen ja brittiläisen yliopiston välillä?

    i.   Näetkö mitään erityistä filosofiaa erojen takana?

6   Millaisia eroja opiskelukulttuureissa?

    i.   Opiskelu?

    ii.   Vapaa-aika?

7   Onko opiskelu itsenäistä vai ohjattua?

    i.   Onko sinulla ollut opettajatutoria? Suomi? Britannia?

3 ASESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

3.1 ASSESSMENT

8   Mikä merkitys mielestäsi yleensä on arvioinnilla?

9   Vaikuttaako arviointitapa oppimiseesi/opiskeluusi?

10   Onko arviointikriteerit selvillä ennen arviointia? Vertaa Suomea ja Britanniaa.

11   Oletko tehnyt itsearviointia? Kokemukset?

12   Osaatko arvioida omaa kehitystäsi? Tuleeko usein yllätyksiä arvosanoissa? Odotit hyvää, tuli huono tai toisinpäin?

3.2 FEEDBACK

13   Millaista palautetta saat opinnoistasi?

       i.   Huomasitko mitään kulttuurieroja?

14   Mikä on palautteen merkitys sinulle?

       i.   Saatko tarpeeksi? Vertaa Suomi/Britannia.

       ii.   Milloin erityisesti kaipaat palautetta?

       iii.   Käytätkö palautetta hyödyksesi opinnoissasi? Siirtovaikutus muihin opintoihin?

15   Oletko törmännyt ongelmiin palautetta saadessasi?

       i.   Onko ollut epäselvyyksiä?

       ii.   Oletko ymmärtänyt, mitä merkinnöillä tarkoitetaan?

       iii.   Oletko saanut palautteen strukturoidussa muodossa, kuten palautelomakkeen/ matriisin muodossa?

16   Mikä on hyvää, mikä huonoa palautetta?

17   Oletko itse antanut palautetta?

       i.   Vertaispalautetta?

       ii.   Palautetta opetuksesta (kurssipalaute)? Vertaa kokemuksia Suomessa/Briteissä.

       iii.   Otetaanko palaute huomioon?

18   Aion antaa sinulle nyt väittämän ja tahtoisin sinun kommentoivan sitä. "Hyvä opiskelija ei tarvitse palautetta. Hän on itseohjautuva ja tietää omat vahvuutensa ja heikkoutensa. Hän osaa suunnitella opintonsa itselleen edullisella tavalla ja osaa arvioida omaa oppimistaan ja ajattelun kehitystään."

       i.   Missä määrin olet samaa mieltä/eri mieltä?

SUMMA SUMMARUM

19   Miten tiivistäisit suomalaisen ja brittiläisen yliopiston ja yliopisto-opiskelun erot, hyvät ja huonot puolet?

20   Tuleeko mieleen jotakin muita kokemuksia , joita haastattelussa ei tullut vielä esille tai haluaisitko selventää jotakin tai palata vielä johonkin aiheeseen?

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER)

1.1.1 University of Chester Generic Marking Criteria (2006) – Levels One, Two, Three

	Knowledge and understanding	Intellectual / cognitive skills	Practical skills	Transferable / Key Skills
90-100%	Develops new knowledge or novel perspective going beyond the literature Far-reaching investigation and insight Work produced could hardly be bettered when produced under parallel conditions	Outstanding level of original synthesis, analysis, argument and evaluation Work produced could hardly be bettered when produced under parallel conditions	Mastery of specialist skills and technical understanding and judgement Work produced could hardly be bettered when produced under parallel conditions	Exceptional clarity and coherence Highly sophisticated expression Complete accuracy in presentation Highly autonomous, thorough and well-managed approach Work produced could hardly be bettered when produced under parallel conditions
80-89%	Extensive subject knowledge with detailed insight into and understanding of relevant theory Comprehensive research and coverage of topic integrating wide range of academic sources	Creative, innovative synthesis of ideas Challenging, comprehensive critical analysis sustained throughout Authoritative and persuasive argument Rigorous evaluation	Outstanding expertise and flair in the application of specialist skills Excellent technical understanding and judgement Extremely high level of professional competence	Extremely well-written, with accuracy and flair Highly sophisticated, fluent and persuasive expression of ideas Great clarity and maturity of presentation Independence in extensive planning and preparation
70-79%	Excellent command of highly relevant, extensively-researched material Extensive, thorough coverage of topic, focused use of detail and examples Excellent, very sound understanding of complexities of key theoretical models, concepts and arguments Excellent understanding of artistic/critical context Strong engagement with text	Convincing ability to synthesise a range of views or information and integrate references Sophisticated perception, critical insight and interpretation Very good depth and breadth of critical analysis; sustained, thorough questioning informed by theory Clear, coherent structure and logical, cogent development of argument	Expert demonstration, accomplished and innovative application of specialist skills Thorough technical understanding and judgement Exceptional level of competence in use of materials and appropriate application of working processes and techniques Coherent relationship between content, form and technique	Very clear, fluent, sophisticated and confident expression; highly effective vocabulary and style Near perfect spelling, punctuation and syntax High standard of presentation All sources acknowledged and meticulously presented Evidence of thorough planning, preparation and organisation

	Knowledge	Analysis / Organisation	Performance	Communication / Presentation
	Exceptional thoroughness and understanding of subject convention, procedures and approaches	Excellent organisation of ideas High quality evaluative skills Independence of thought, pertinent personal analysis and comment Imaginative, insightful, creative	Excellent design/layout Highly critical analysis of performance Very high level of professional competence Skilled integration of theory and practice	Excellent ability to stimulate and enable discussion Thorough appreciation of learning gained and impact on self Sophisticated reflection on personal and professional practice
60-69%	Wide range of core and background reading, effectively used Breadth and depth of coverage, accurate and relevant in detail and example Clear, sound understanding of subject matter, theory, issues and debate Comprehensive understanding of artistic/critical context Good engagement with text Clear insight into subject conventions, procedures and approaches	Ability to synthesise a range of views or information and incorporate references Perceptive, thoughtful interpretation Consistent development of critical analysis and questioning, using theory Logically structured, coherent argument; well-reasoned discussion Good organisation of ideas Good evaluative approach, some independent ideas and personal comment Freshness of insight, some creative thinking and imagination	Very good performance, capable and confident application of specialist skills Mostly accurate technical understanding and judgement High level of competence in use of materials and appropriate application of working processes and techniques Strong relationship between content, form and technique Good design/layout Critical analysis of performance Substantial level of professional competence Useful links drawn between theory and practice	Clear, fluent, confident expression; appropriate vocabulary and style High standard of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and syntax Good standard of presentation Sources acknowledged and accurately presented Well-organised; relevant planning and preparation Clear evidence of ability to stimulate and facilitate discussion Good awareness of learning and self development Clear understanding, reflection and evaluation of implications for personal and professional practice
50-59%	Reasonable range of reading; references to relevant but not wide variety of sources Content generally relevant and accurate, most central issues identified; basic knowledge sound but may be patchy	Evidence of drawing information together Primarily descriptive and factual explanation; ideas tend to be stated rather than developed Some attempt at critical analysis using theory, but may be limited and	Mostly competent and informed application of specialist skills Partially accurate technical understanding and judgement Satisfactory level of competence in use of materials and appropriate application of working processes and	Clearly written, coherent expression; reasonable range of vocabulary and adequate style Overall competence in spelling, punctuation and syntax, although there may be some errors Presentation generally sound, maybe some weaknesses

Mark	Knowledge	Analysis	Skills/Techniques	Presentation
	Acceptable level of understanding of subject matter, theory and ideas; main issues satisfactorily understood / Sound but limited understanding of artistic/critical context / Some ability to respond to text / Some awareness of subject-based conventions, procedures and approaches	lack consistency or conviction / Attempt made to argue logically with supporting evidence, although some claims may be unsubstantiated / Reasonable structure but organisation may lack some cohesion / Some evaluation attempted; may show a little indication of originality or personal engagement	techniques / Generally sound relationship between content, form and technique / Fair design/layout / Good analysis of performance / Sound level of professional competence / Consideration of both theory and practice	Referencing may not be entirely accurate / Fairly well-organised; basic planning and preparation / Capable attempts at participation in discussion / Some awareness of learning and self development / Some attempt at reflection on personal and professional practice
45–49%	Background reading relevant but over-reliant on few sources / Fairly basic knowledge, limited consistency of depth and accuracy of detail; not all aspects addressed, some omissions / Partial understanding of subject matter, core concepts and relevant issues; basic reference to theory / Partial understanding of artistic/critical context / Uncertain familiarity with text / Limited appreciation of subject-based convention, procedures and approaches	Little discrimination in use of material; limited perspective or consideration of alternative views / Little interpretation or insight, largely descriptive, superficial; excessive narrative, over-reliance on anecdote for explanation / Some evidence of rationale, but no significant critical reflection applying theory / Some ability to construct an argument but may lack clarity or conviction, with unsupported assertion / Basic consistency to structure, but may be some repetition or deviation / Little attempt at evaluation; independence of thought or personal engagement only very slight	Some evidence of developing specialist skills / Only partially accurate technical understanding and judgement / Adequate level of competence in use of materials and appropriate application of working processes and techniques / Superficial relationship between content, form and technique / Some evidence of analysis of performance / Adequate level of professional competence / Uneven balance between theory and practice	Expression, vocabulary and style reasonably clear but lack sophistication / Inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and syntax do not usually interfere with meaning / Some confidence in presentation, with some lapses / References not always correctly cited/presented / Thin organisation, planning and preparation / Basic participation in discussion / Slight awareness of learning and self development / Limited reflection on personal and professional practice issues
40–44%	Limited reading and reference to sources, possible inaccuracies in evidence	Little, if any, integration and synthesis; weaknesses in comparison of information	Some evidence of limited skill development	Expression may undermine meaning; vocabulary and style minimally adequate

	Knowledge general rather than subject specific; content partially relevant, with some deficiencies Superficial understanding of subject matter, ideas and issues, may display inaccuracies of concepts and basic theory Superficial understanding of artistic/critical context Scant familiarity with text Limited regard to subject-based convention, procedures and approaches	Very little interpretation; descriptive, anecdotal Simplistic attempt at analysis, may lack consistency; minimal attempts to examine strengths and weaknesses of an argument Structure lacks coherence, underdeveloped; some repetition, inconsistency or possibly confusion Little sustained or convincing argument Derivative, lack of personal engagement	Little technical understanding and judgement Basic competence in use of materials and limited application of working processes and techniques Slight relationship between content, form and technique Partial or vague analysis of performance Evidence of minimal professional competence but lacking in theoretical analysis of practice	Frequent inaccuracies of spelling, punctuation, syntax Presentation skills need developing Referencing style barely adequate Basic planning and preparation, may be disorganised in parts Minimal discussion of own learning Limited evidence of reflection on personal and professional practice
30-39%	Scant evidence of background reading; weak investigation Contains very slight detail; content may be thin or irrelevant; issues poorly identified Very little understanding of subject matter, ideas and issues; may be issue of misreading/misinterpretation of question Very slight understanding of artistic/critical context Little awareness of text Little heed paid to subject conventions and approaches; poor handling and account of procedures	Superficial use of information, minimal association; references not integrated Little attempt to interpret material, heavily descriptive; explanations may be muddled at times Limited breadth and depth of analysis, inadequate critical skills; shallow and superficial Poorly structured, little logic Weaknesses in argument, eg unsubstantiated conclusions based on generalisation Minimal appraisal or evaluation	Little evidence of skill development or application Slight technical understanding and judgement, possible inaccuracies Lack of competence in use of materials and erroneous application of working processes and techniques Unresolved relationship between content, form and technique Very thin analysis of performance Questionable level of professional competence, eg may be some evidence of unsafe practice Little appreciation of theory in practice	Expression of ideas insufficient to convey clear meaning; inaccurate or unprofessional terminology Many errors in spelling, punctuation and syntax Few presentation skills Referencing incomplete or inaccurate Weaknesses of organisation, planning and preparation Little constructive participation in discussion Little or muddled awareness of learning and self-development Thin discussion of personal and professional practice issues

20-29%	No evidence of relevant reading Little relevance of content; unacceptably weak or inaccurate knowledge base Significant weaknesses and gaps in understanding of subject matter, ideas and issues; misunderstanding of question Lack of understanding of artistic/critical context Misunderstanding of text Lack of awareness of subject-based convention, procedures and approaches	Incorrect use of material or data Purely descriptive, feeble discussion Lacking or erroneous analysis of material; negligible evidence of thought Structure confused, illogical or incomplete Poor if any relationship between introduction, middle and conclusion Lack of evidence to support views expressed; claims unsubstantiated Almost no attempt at evaluation, topic issues are not compared contrasted or appraised in any way	Negligible evidence of specialist skill development Feeble technical understanding and judgement Incompetence in use of materials and erroneous application of working processes and techniques Unresolved relationship between content, form and technique Little awareness of performance Lack of professional competence Relationship between theory and practice not evident	Lack of clarity, very poor expression; style inappropriate, terminology inadequate and inappropriate Many serious errors of spelling, punctuation and syntax Ineffective presentation skills Referencing inaccurate or absent Serious deficiency in organisation, planning and preparation No attention given to discussion Discussion of own learning and development incoherent Slight, if any, reflection or reference to personal and professional practice
10-19%	No evidence of reading Knowledge base extremely weak; content almost entirely irrelevant or erroneous Devoid of understanding of subject matter, ideas and issues No reference to artistic/critical context No reference to text Little or no evidence of awareness of subject-based convention, procedures and approaches	Little or no use of material or data Any attempt at discussion limited to personal view; no discernable insight Isolated statements indicating lack of thought Lack of recognisable structure or reference to argument; no related evidence or conclusions Evaluation of issues not detectable	Minimal evidence of specialist skill development Almost no technical understanding or judgement Serious incompetence in use of materials and erroneous application of working processes and techniques Unacceptable understanding of relationship between content, form and technique Lack of awareness of performance Serious lack of professional competence No awareness of theory in practice evident	Inaccuracies of expression and vocabulary render meaning of written work extremely unclear Many serious errors of even basic spelling, punctuation and syntax Inadequate presentation skills No attempt at referencing Almost no evidence of organisation, planning or preparation Little evidence of communication or awareness of others Very little evidence of self-awareness

0-9%	No use of sources	Lack of evidence of reasoning	No evidence of skill development	Incoherent expression; heavily inaccurate and inappropriate use of language
	Material not relevant or correct; no evidence of knowledge	Statements completely lack coherence and logic	No technical understanding or judgement	Presentation totally ineffective
	No relevant understanding evident; response to question virtually nil		Uninformed and arbitrary use of material, methods, processes and techniques	No evidence of organisation, planning or preparation
	No awareness of artistic/critical context		Unacceptable understanding of the relationship between content, form and technique	No evidence of awareness of others
	No evidence of awareness of subject-based convention, procedures and approaches		Professional incompetence	No evidence of self-awareness

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta
Esitys pro gradu-tutkielmien arvosteluperusteiksi kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnassa

Arvosana	Aihe	Teoriatausta, lähde- ja tutkimusaineisto lähteiden käyttö	Tutkimustehtävät ja ongelmat	Tutkimusmenetelmät	Tulosten esittäminen ja tutkimusongelmiin vastaaminen	Tulosten tulkinta	Pohdinta ja tutkimuseettinen arviointi	Tutkimuksen luotettavuus	Kieliasu ja rakenteen johdonmukaisuus
Approbatur, Lubenter approbatur 1	Aihe pinnallisesti ymmärretty; liittyy vain löyhästi tieteenalaan	Tutkimuskirjallisuus suppeahko tai huonosti valittu; liittyy löyhästi tutk.ongelmiin	Määrittelyssä puutteita tai epäjohdonmukaisuuksia. Yhteys teoriataustaan hämärä	Menetelmien käyttö puutteellista tai epäjohdonmukaista	Pintapuolista ja referoivaa Luettelomainen, puutteellinen, vaatimaton	Puutteellista, luettelomaista	Niukkaa, ei yllä yleisenmälle tulkintatasolle	Arviointi niukkaa tai pinnallista, kirjallisuutta referoivaa	Heikohko, viimeistelemätön
Non sine laude approbatur 2	Tavanomainen selkeästi alaan liittyvä	Esitetty, liittyy löyhästi tutk.ongelmiin mutta empiriaan liittyvää käyttö mekaanista ja puutteellista	Yhteydessä teoriataustaan, mutta määrittelyssä on puutteita tai epäjohdonmukaisuutta	Menetelmien käyttö horjuvaa	Kaavamaista, mutta loogista; yhteys tutkimusongelmiin jää vaatimattomaksi	Tulosten tulkinnassa nähtävissä yhteys työn lähtökohtiin ja aikaisempiin tutkimuksiin	Suppeahko, ei juurikaan ota kantaa alan tutkimukseen	Arviointi niukkaa tai pinnallista	Ei suuria ongelmia tai virheitä, rakenne selkeä
Cum laude approbatur 3	Suhteellisen tavanomainen, merkitys kuitenkin osoitettu	Osoittaa aikaisempien tutkimusten tuntemusta. Tutkimuskirjallisuus hyvin valittu ja riittävä.	Yhteydessä teoriataustaan, selkeästi määritelty	Hyvin valittu, tutkimustehtävän mukainen. Toteutus pääosin moitteetonta	Tulokset vastaavat selvästi ja moitteettomasti tutkimusongelmiin	Hyvätasoista, teorian ja empirian vuoropuhelua	Hyvätasoista. Yhteyksiä kysymyksenasetteluun ja teoriataustaan, jatkotutkimusehdotuksia esitetty.	Arviointi asianmukaista	Hyvätasoinen, rakenne johdonmukainen
Magna cum laude approbatur 4	Tutkimusaihe merkittävä ja tutkimuskysymys itsenäisesti hahmotettu	Hyvä teoreettinen perehtyneisyys ja kirjallisuuden monipuolinen ja kriittinen käyttö	Kuvattu täsmällisesti, perusteltu monipuolisesti, suhteutettu taidolkkaasti teoriataustaan	Menetelmien käyttö asiantuntevaa; työ tehty metodisesti hyvin	Selkeä, havainnollinen, vastaavat loogisesti tutkimusongelmiin; suhde aikaisempiin tutkimuksiin selkeä	Johdonmukaista ja korkeatasoista	Osoittaa kykyä tarkastella tutkimuskohdetta laaja-alaisesti ja analyyttisesti	Kriittistä ja perusteltua	Korkeatasoinen ja johdonmukainen kokonaisuus
Eximia cum laude approbatur, Laudatur 5	Selvästi tavanomaista vaativampi tai merkittävämpi	Osoittaa tieteenalan erittäin syvällistä tuntemusta	Ongelmanasettelu korkeatasoista ja innovatiivista	Poikkeuksellisen valmis tieteellinen tutkielma. Metodologiset analyysit korkeatasoisia, itsenäisiä, tieteellisesti merkittäviä tuloksia. Voitaisiin julkaista lähes sellaisenaan tieteellisessä julkaisusarjassa tai tieteellisessä aikakauslehdessä. Tyylillisesti erinomainen, rakenteeltaan selkeä ja johdonmukainen					

APPENDIX 5: ORIGINAL DIRECT QUOTATIONS IN FINNISH

ⁱ Hyvä opiskelija ei tarvitse palautetta. Hän on itseohjautuva ja tietää omat vahvuutensa ja heikkoutensa. Hän osaa suunnitella opintonsa itselleen edullisella tavalla ja osaa arvioida omaa oppimistaan ja ajattelun kehitystään.

ⁱⁱ Et hirveen tavallaan tiukka systeemi, että esimerkiksi kandin tutkinto, niin sulla on just se kolme vuotta ja sun pitää tehä 120 ov niitä paikallisia opintoviikkoja vuodessa ja vaikka haluaisit tehä enemmän niin se ei onnistu. Ja et saa tehä yhtään vähemmän, et sillä tavalla hirveen selvät sävelet lyyvään, et jos vertaa Suomeen, kun Suomessahan ei oo kukaan sanomassa ja sanomassa sulle, mitä sun pitää tehä tänä vuonna. (Interview D)

ⁱⁱⁱ ...siellä suurin osa asuu kampuksella... Ja sekin myös, että suurin osa muuttaa, tai lähes kaikki, pois kotoa ekaa kertaa, kun ne menee yliopistoon. Niin, sitten siihen liittyy aika paljon sellasta huumaa. Ja siivoojat käy ja ruoka käydään syömässä kanttiinissa, että siinä niinku, siinäkään, muussakaan elämässä, kun ihan opiskeluun liittyen, ei tuu mitää vastuuta, mikä ehkä myöskin sitten tukee sitä keveetä otetta opiskeluun. Se ei oo jotenki todellista se elämä. (Interview G)

^{iv} Sitten siellä oli näitä kaikkia klubeja ja societies. Niitä oli tosi paljon. Mun mielestä meijän toiminta ei oo samalla tavalla organisoitua, niin semmosta, aihepiireittäin järjestäytynyttä. Siellä se on paljon sosiaalisempaa, että siellä kuka tahansa, joka on sattunu kiinnostumaan esimerkiks jalkapallosta, voi mennä pelaamaan jalkapalloa ja ne opiskelijat voi tulla mistä tahansa tiedekunnista. (Interview C)

^v Huonoja puolia Suomessa on just se, että jotkut opiskelijat ehkä voi puotakin siitä oletetusta opiskeluvauhdista, koska ne ei saa ohjausta. Ja niistä voi tuntua siltä, että kukaan ei tavallaan välitä, miten niillä menee se koulu. Mut kyllä kai se on täälläkin, meijän laitoksella hirveesti muuttunu siitä, kun minä aloitin. Et täällä on joku omaopettaja tai joku semmonen. (Interview J)

^{vi} Suomessahan se on hyvin itsenäistä, mutta se on tavallaan, ainakin itse koen ongelmana, että periaatteessa sä voit suorittaa koko tutkinnon, olla viis vuotta yliopistossa ja saada joka kurssista vaikka kakkosen, mikä ei sano mitään ja sä et saa ikinä mitään palautetta ja sä käyt vaan tenteissä tai luennoilla ja sitten odotetaan, että sä teet itsenäisesti gradun, mikä on todella erikoista. (Interview F)

^{vii} Kriittisempi itse yliopistoakin kohtaan. Että tavallaan kukaan ei oikeasti tiedä. Mitään ei voi tietää varmasti. Hyvä vaan, ettei kukaan todellakaan tiedä asioita varmasti. Tai siis sillai, että en mä usko, että mikään tässä maailmassa onkaan sellasta, että ainakaan ihmistieteissä, että tää on ihan varmasti näin ja kaikissa tapauksissa. (Interview G)

^{viii} Ongelmanratkaisutaidot muuttunu ehkä sillä tavalla, että jos aikasemmin aatteli, jos joku ongelma oli eessä, niin meni sitten tavallaan heti no niin, nyt pitää tehä näin, mutta ehkä nyt on enemmän vaihtoehtoja ja sitten ehkä enemmän miettii, mikä olis paras. Mut sehän liittyy noihin, mitä tossa aikasemmin sanoin kriittisestä ajattelusta. (Interview D)

^{ix} Tavallaan se tarkottaa semmosta omaa ajattelua siinä mielessä, että pystyy kritisoimaan ja muodostamaan omaa maailmankuvaa. (Interview D)

x No, näistä ylevistä lausunnoista ja tästä luovasta ajattelusta, kriittisyydestä ja analyyttisyydestä ja ajattelun kehittymisestä huolimatta tuntuu, että oppiminen jäi vähän puolitiehen. Johtuen ehkä siitäkin, että mä oon aika nopeesti valmistunu tai sitten omasta alasta... Yliopisto oli tietyllä tavalla pettymys. (Interview I)

xi ...ite henkilökohtasesti ajattelen, että tavallaan sitten saa valmiuksia sitten, mitä voi hyödyntää työelämässä myöhemmin. Semmosia mitä nyt ei välttämättä saa ihan semmosella ammatillisella koulutuksella. Just semmosta niinku ongelmaratkasukykyä ja luovaa ajattelua ja semmosta, että kykenee itsenäiseen ajatteluun ja toimintaan. (Interview D)

xii Itseohajutuvuus on hieno periaate ja Suomessa se toimii silleen hyvin, että tuntuu, että täällä yliopisto-opiskelijat on vähän ajattelevampia. Semmosia että ajattelevat enemmän omilla aivoillaan, eikä tyydy niihin annettuihin vastauksiin. Mitä mun mielestä siellä Englannissa oli enemmänki, että ei ollu niin semmosta kriittistä tai analyyttistä ajattelua. (Interview I)

xiii Mun mielestä pitäis olla enemmän seminaareja ja tavallaan semmosta kontaktiopetusta. Liian paljon ainakin meidän laitoksella on nimenomaan sitä, että on luentokurssit ja sitten on kirjatentit. Missään vaiheessa ei tavallaan ole semmosta mahollisuutta, että sä oikeesti joutusit argumentoimaan ja sillä tavalla lukemaan, että siitä keskusteltais oikeesti, ettei se olis vaan sitä, että sä luet ja muodostat siitä oman mielipiteen ja käyt kirjottaa sen jollekin läsylle. Musta olis hirveen tärkeetä just, että joutuu puolustaan omia näkökantojansa elävää ihmistä vastaan tai sillä tavalla keskustelemaan yleensäkin asioista. (Interview D)

xiv Eniten Suomessa kaipaisin just niitä semmosia tutorryhmiä ja seminaareja ja pienryhmäkeskusteluja. Musta ihan loistava, jos Suomeen sais sen systeemin, että joka luentoo vastais aina perään tunnin parin seminaari, niinku siellä, että joka luennon perään sai keskustella aiheesta ja sai uusia näkökulmia ja silleen huomas ajattelevansa niitä asioita enemmän ja monesta näkökulmasta. (Interview F)

xv Ei se riitä, että sanoo, että tämä oli hyvä, vaan mikä siinä oli hyvää. Siinä tuli just se, että eihän sitä ite välttämättä tiedä, että mikä tässä nyt just oli sitä hyvää tähän kohtaan. Kyllähän se jo on se tärkeetä, että tulee tietoseks, miten mun aivot on tässä toiminu. (Interview G)

xvi Mun mielestä tarvitaan niinku ulkopuolisia ihmisiä, jotka niinku antaa siihen oppimiseen erilaista perspektiiviä. Tässäkin iässä vielä, persoona ja identiteetti on sillai muuttuva, että niinku kyllä mä suurin piirtein tiedän, missä mä oon hyvä ja missä huono, mutta toisaalta koko ajan opin kyllä asioista niin paljon lisää. (Interview H)

xvii Kriittinen palaute on oikeastaan positiivista. Se on kuitenki se ainoo tapa, millä voi oppia uusia asioita ja kehittää itteesä. (Interview D)

xviii Siinähän oppii suuntamaan sitä, että mitä asioita siinä esseessä esimerkiks pitää olla, mistä se koostuu, miten sitä rakennetta vois muuttaa... ja ihan sitten mä sain palautetta myöski kielestä niiltä opettajilta. (Interview C)

xix Kyllä mä pidän sitä helvetin tärkeänä. Ihan jo pelkästään sen takia, että jos sä kirjotat esseen tai mitä tahansa, niin jos sä saat pelkän numeron, niin sun pitää ite miettiä, että

mitähän se tentaattori oikeesti aatteli. Mutta, jos sä saat suullisen tai kirjallisen palautteen, niin ei jää ainakaan yhtään epäselväksi, mikä siinä oli hyvää ja huonoa. Ja kyllähän se tommonen palaute yleensä on siitä älyttömän hyvä, että sä tiiät oikeesti, missä oot tehny hyvin, missä huonommin, mitä voi sitten parantaa seuraavalla kerralla. Ei tarvii ite sitä miettiä, että mitenhän sitä nyt sais paremmaks sitä arvosanaa. (Interview D)

xx Se, mitä itse pidin ihan älyttömän hyvänä oli se, että kun sä palautat esseen, niin siitä annettiin erillinen lomake, missä oli kaikki, mikä oli hyvää, mikä huonoa. (Interview D)

xxi Briteissä oli paljon selvempi sillä tavalla, että heti, kun opiskelut alko siellä, lätkästiin läsyt kouraan, niin mitä arvioidaan esseessä, minkälainen esseen pitää olla, mitä ne haluaa kirjatenteistä ja sillä tavalla selvä, että ties, mitä ne haluaa, ettei ollu mitään ongelmaa. Selkeempi, kun Suomessa. Suomessa on enempi silleen, että sun pitää miettiä, että mitähän tää proffa nyt haluaa ja minkälaisesta tyylistä se tykkää. (Interview D)

xxii Melkein niin, että mitä epävarmempi on, sitä enemmän tarviis palautetta. Ja sellanen tietenki, että jos ei ihan varma, että tietää, mitä on tekemässä, niin olis hyvä kuulla, että onko tekemässä oikein vai ei. Myöskin mä oon kokenu sen, että mä oon kolme vuotta tehny ja tehny ja tehny ja aatellu, että miten mä en ikinä oo jotenki tarpeeks hyvä, ja sitten lopussa, kun mä sanon siitä asiasta, niin mulle sanotaan, että hän ajatteli, että kun sä oot niin hyvä, niin ei tullu mieleenkään sanoa sitä erikseen. Yliopistossakin kun näkee yleensä vaan sen oman työn, niin sikäli! (Interview G)

xxiii Mulle se on itse asiassa tärkee, koska mä oon ollu niin epävarma tästä omasta alanvalinnasta. Mä päädyin valitsemaan tän alan ihan täysin sattumalta ja tää nyt on sellanen ala, johon mä aioin jatkossa syventyä ja siinä se palaute on ollut erittäin tärkeetä. Et kun mä tiedän, että se kiinnostaa mua, niin mä myös tiedän, että oks musta nyt siihen hommaan. (Interview I)

xxiv Itsearviointi on monesti vähän päälle liimattu juttu... Ei se oikein oikeasti kehitä. (Interview I)

xxv Arviointi mittaa opiskelijan tietoja siitä aihealueesta. Mutta en mä tiedä kuinka hyvä mittari se on... Mutta lyhytkestosta muistikapasiteettia, niin aika hyvin tentti mittaa. Essee nyt pystyy mittaamaan vähän paremmin, että miten on ymmärtänyt sen asian, koska siinä pitää kuitenki pitemmälle sitä kirjottaa. En tiiä, kai se on, että opettaja saa tietää, että nää ihmiset nyt on viittiny lukee tän kirjan läpi, mikä on annettu kurssille oppikirjaks. Että ei se nyt hirveesti mun mielestä välttämättä mittaa varsinaisesti mitään, mutta välillä se on ainut tapa saada ihmiset edes lukemaan jotain. (Interview J)

xxvi No, en saa tarpeeksi, tosi vähän sitä tulee. Mutta toisaalta, en minä sitä niin hirveesti kaipaakaan. No tavallaan saan tarpeeks, mut jos miettii silleen ihmiset yleensä kaipaa sitä enemmän. Tai siis mulle riittää se, että minä saan kurssiarvosanan. Koska sekin voi olla, että siihen on tottunu. Se vois olla hirvee shokki jollekin, joka on tottunu tosi isoon palautemäärään ja itsearviointiin ja muihin, niin tulla tänne opiskelemaan, koska täällä opiskelijat jää tavallaan ihan yksin. Mulle tavallaan riittää täällä, että mä pääsen tentistä läpi ja mielellään saan siitä hyvän arvosanan. (Interview J)

xxvii ... vähän ajanhukan olosta puuhaa. (Interview J)

[xxviii] Arviointimuoto vaikuttaa paljon. Esseellä oppii muutenkin enemmän, kun tentillä, no meillä yhteiskuntatieteilijöillä ei paljon vaihtoehtoja olekaan, mitä nyt joitakin ryhmätöitä oli vaihdossa lisäks, mutta esseet ja tentit. Tenteistä nyt jää semmonen maku, että unohtaa seuraavana päivänä, mitä siinä oli. Esseestä oppii enemmän ja siihen voi aina palata ja jos saa vielä sen kirjallisen arvostelun, niin sitten varsinki. (Interview F)

[xxix] Esseen kirjottaminen, niin siinähän eri tavalla, pidemmän aikaa ehkä työstää niitä asioita syvemmin, kun että jos vaan lukee tenttiä varten....Se tenttitilanne ja yleensä kysymykset ohjaa enemmän muistamaan valmiita, opittuja asioita, eikä niinkään soveltamaan niitä. Kun sit taas esseessä useimmiten tarvitaan jotenki soveltamista, omaa ajattelua ja arviointia enempi. Et sikäli, mä uskon, että essee ainakin periaatteessa tukee oppimista paremmin. (Interview G)

[xxx] Se on varmaan kehittymisen kannalta aika tärkeetä, et saa palautetta. Mulle ainakin on. Mulla on luottamus näihin opettajiin, et ne on ammatti-ihmisiä, ne tietää sen asian ja on kiinnostavaa kuulla asiantuntijan mielipidettä. (Interview I)

[xxxi] Ja kyl se mun mielestä on myös oppijalle tärkeetä... on se myös sille oppijalle osoitus siitä, onko mitään muutosta tapahtunu. Se on työväline sekä opettajalle, että opiskelijalle. (Interview G)

[xxxii] Sitten se oliki, että hän oli vissiin nukkunut, kun hän oli lukenut tämän, että tämähän on aivan selvä kolmonen. Että mites tässä näin on käyny! Ja sitten siinä sähköpostissa tää opettaja oli analysoinu tän mun vastauksen, mikä oli ihan tosi hyvä, mut kyllä mä ymmärrän, että se oli lukenu sata tenttiä sillon, ettei kaikesta pysty sellasta antamaan, mutta et se oli semmonen myös mistä saatto todella oppia. (Interview G)

[xxxiii] Kysytkö sä erikseen vielä niistä Englannin esseearvioinneista ja niistä? Vai.. No siis, just siitä, että tietääkö, mistä joku arvosana on tullu, niin se oli mun mielestä tuolla Englannissa tosi hyvä, että siellä sai kirjallisen palautteen niitten esseiden mukana. Missä oli ihan analysoitu se, että miksi mikäkin on näin, mitä mä en oo täällä saanu ikinä. Siinä toteutuu se, että arviointi, essee tai tenti, on myös oppimistilanne, kun täällä se harvoin on oppimistilanne. (Interview G)

[xxxiv] Suomessa vois tavallaan sillä tavalla mennä lähemmäks brittisysteemiä, että palautetta annettais enemmän ja opiskelijaltakin kysyttäis enemmän, että mitä opiskelijat haluaa. Koska opiskelijoita vartenhan kuitenkin kaikki opetus annetaan, eihän se nyt oo mitenkään itsetarkotus, että proffat käy esittelemässä hienoja omia saavutuksiaan sun muuta. (Interview D)

[xxxv] Mun mielestä itsearviointi on muutenki semmonen, mihin pitäis oppia, että sitä vois oikeesti käyttää jotenki viisaasti välineenä. Ajatuksena se on ihan hyvä, mutta just sellanen, että ei sillä muuten oo mitään tarkotusta, että siihen pitää saada loksahtamaan se joku päässä. (Interview G)