CHAPTER 3

A CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION FOR THE STUDY OF FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE MANAGEMENT AND PROVISION OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

3.1   Introduction

The previous chapter outlines various factors impacting on the provision and management of student development and support in higher education in South Africa as a developing country. This chapter identifies some of the philosophical paradigms impacting and influencing higher education and more specifically student development and support within the context of a developing country. By investigating the philosophical paradigms that influence higher education and student development and support I was also able to define the specific paradigm for this study

3.2   Philosophical departure

The study is done in a context of political change and reconfiguration within higher education in South Africa. It is therefore imperative to reflect on the identifiable paradigms impacting and influencing decision making in higher education in general and specifically impacting and influencing student development and support functions.

The sections of the chapter elucidate on specific paradigms to be taken into account when investigating the management and provision of student development and support.

3.2.1 Paradigms in higher education management

The important factor of government steering of and purposeful interventions into the higher education sector in South Africa is highlighted in chapter two by focussing attention on the governmental policies and strategies since 1994.

In summary a number of critical and high impact interventions were planned and implemented through:

- White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education South Africa, 1994)
- National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education South Africa, 2001)
- Funding Framework for Higher Education (Department of Education South Africa, 2004)
- National Qualifications Framework (Department of Education South Africa, 2005)

Although these policies and interventions were published and are managed by the Department of Education it should be kept in mind that many other stakeholders have vested interests and influence that may not always only be from a pure educational motivation.

Two examples of such stakeholders are:

- The African National Congress: a political entity that needs to deliver to the constituency on many pre-1994 commitments and expectations.
- The Department of Labour that was instrumental in initiating and developing a national qualification framework to accommodate labour skills needs in the country.

Brameld (1971) maintains that education has become, especially in the modern world, an "arm of politics". In the early seventies already, Brameld (1971)

placed emphasis on the changing role of the university and claimed that whether we speak about American, European or Communist countries and increasingly so in Asia and Africa, the construction and operation of schools and universities have become "a colossal enterprise".

Literature shows an acute awareness and debate in developed countries on the issue of the essence of a university. Little evidence could be found of a similar level of debate and awareness in developing countries from the mid seventies to late nineties. However, with the announcements by the South African Department of Education in 2004 of its intention to reconfigure and establish a new higher education landscape, the purpose and approach to higher education in South Africa (and the broader region) has by political intention become a topic of increased debate at official and academic forums.

The core question that constantly arises is "what is a university and what is it supposed to achieve?" The debate often manifests in discussions on the value of university programmes in general but also specific programmes or areas of university education. Graham (2002) takes a clear position against what he calls "the international trend to position higher education as the mere provider of skilled workers". While authors like Graham (2002), Brameld (1971), Innes (2004) concede that undoubtedly the university should specifically contribute vastly to the skills-base in any economy, however they argue strongly that vocational training can certainly not be the only ideal and purpose of a university.

I would suggest that the advancement and continued construction of knowledge would be the primary purpose of a university with the development of competent employees as a subsequent outcome.   This issue is unfortunately still largely unresolved in the South African higher education sector and the tensions between government policy, education and labour agendas continue.

The debate remains of paramount importance to the student development and support function within higher education as the outcomes and conclusions of a debate on the purpose of a university (or higher education in general) will

determine the purpose, expectations and specific functions of the student development and support provision within higher education contexts. Key questions to ask are for example: Is it merely the task of student development and support practitioners to support students through various counselling services towards entering the labour market as skilled workers or is it the task to assist academics, via an inclusive curriculum, to systematically enhance whole brain thinking and lifelong learning by developing the underlying skills and the abilities of students to manage themselves and the world of knowledge? The student development and support managers and practitioners should therefore pursue and make a decisive input and contribute towards the outcome of such debates by providing the learning and facilitating perspectives paramount within the domain of the student development and support practices.

This section now further explores dominant philosophical paradigms that manifest in various schools of thought and may have an influence on the outcome of this study.

3.2.1.1 Post-modernist paradigms impacting on higher education management and provision: Economic versus academic determinism in higher education and the vocational training ideal

It is important within the context of this study to have an awareness of the impact of certain post-modernist paradigms on higher education in general and specifically on student development and support.

Lord Sutherland, the then Principal of the University of Edinburgh argued during an Oration on Higher Education in 1996 (Graham, 2002:76) that the most essential task of the universities of our time is to "redefine identity in a new diverse world of higher education". Sutherland contends that the new higher education system is a mass education system as opposed to the traditional selective system.

Within the South African context the debate on the nature and purpose of a university is complex. With the recent establishment of institutional types such as universities of technology and comprehensive universities, both as separate yet parallel entities to the traditional university, the struggle to define the purpose and nature of a university within the South African context has become even more prominent. The strategy to set up these "alternative" university types is openly declared by educational authorities as being primarily for economic reasons and intended to provide the national economy with the skills required for economic growth. Secondary to this is a socio-political "upliftment"-motivation for establishing such institutions (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). From a government, economic and political perspective these new types of institutions were established with the prime intention to provide vocational training and not necessarily with a traditional academic mandate. This immediately places great emphasis on the nature of programmes offered and the curriculum content and learning outcomes of such programmes.

Graham (2002) indicates that in Britain these types of institutions can all readily profess to make provision at the highest level (curriculum allows for vocational training) and still show reasonable research output as with traditional universities. In cases where the emphasis is on vocational training the research output are generally strongly focussed on the vocational and economic areas.

In South Africa a survey on the differences in research output between the traditional universities versus the new categories of universities as well as the qualification profiles of staff at these universities testify to a similar dynamic.

Table 3.1:   Research output units of the Tshwane University of Technology (2006)

Output type	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Publications	75.58	130.75	83.24	94.85	0.00
Masters	43.31	46.02	46.02	60.23	37.22
Doctorate	27.00	15.00	27.00	36.00	21.00
TOTALS	145.89	191.77	156.26	191.08	58.22

Table 3.2: Qualification profile of the full time equivalent staff of A University of Technology (Tshwane University of Technology, 2006).

Qualification level	2002	2003	2004	2005
Masters	76	76	84	101
Doctorate	230	250	289	302
Other	547	558	522	477
TOTALS	853	884	895	880

Although the above tables (TUT, 2006) demonstrate a rapid improvement in both research output and qualification profiles of staff it is clearly an enormous challenge for such an institution (newly established university of technology) to improve staff qualification profiles, build capacity for research and improve the research output of the individual institution. These are extremely cost- and time intensive goals to achieve. It is expected of these universities (refer funding framework) to compete with traditional universities for funding while the capacity to deliver equal research output obviously needs to be addressed first. It has to be said though that the above profiles are also not necessarily a negative reflection as it is also a consequence of the history of the type of institutions that became universities of technology. The former technikons had a different focus and approach with less emphasis on applied research (Van Eldik, 2002).

Alternative university types have just been implemented for a short time and many are still only in an establishment phase. There is however growing awareness amongst academic leaders on how critically important it is for the higher education sector to attend to the issue of defining and reaching national consensus on the various university types in South Africa. The Department of Education gave notice in July 2006 that a formal workshop is to be facilitated to address a possible categorisation of institutions.

There are high risks in developing a categorised higher education system as institutional value in the eyes of the public in general, prospective students and industry can be determined by the "category-label" the institution carries. In categorising the value or status of institutions should not merely be measured against a single indicator such as research output as the true academic value and contribution is not always accurately reflected in such figures.

Other risks related to the growing economic-determinism in higher education are that decision-making is increasingly based purely on financial considerations. In the early 2000's it was observed that education policy in Great Britain has become increasingly focussed on economic function, with broader social and political objectives being marginalised. It was even argued that the marketisation of education had and continues to have profoundly damaging consequences for higher education. According to Ball (1998) the increased marketisation leads to systems being applied in education to ensure performance and efficiency. Ball calls this "performativity" (Ball, 1998:190). Tested against how Ball defines performativity, namely as "a disciplinary system of judgements, classifications and targets towards which institutions must strive and against which they are evaluated" the South African system of higher education quality management (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2006) sounds alarmingly performative. Also relevant in this regard is the institutional planning processes, as officially required by the Department of Education, that provides

guidelines and quantified benchmarks. These then form the criteria for evaluation of institutional performance (TUT, 2004). "Performativity" as defined by Ball, refers to the same phenomenon of economic determinism and is critised as the "new positivism" (Brameld, 1971) in education policy. According to the author, school curricula are being narrowed with an emphasis on measurable results and the quality of university departments are now being assessed by managerial exercises based on commercial audit practice. The authors warn that as a result the notion of liberal arts education (linked to the value of higher education) is being usurped.

All of these authors sternly warn against the potentially negative impact of managerialism and strict economic orientations on the academic pursuit.

A further important philosophical approach with strong impact on higher education and educational policy (especially within the South African context) is the strong influence of the Department of Labour and its labour, skills training and person development paradigms. It is interesting that economic determinism, as discussed earlier, is strongly supported from this sector with its "skills demand and provision" paradigm. In chapter two the role of the Labour-sector, to implement the national qualifications framework in the country (South African Qualifications Authority, 2002) is discussed in detail.

It is however important to note the underlying paradigm within the labour sector and the impact of this on higher education in particular. By the nature of the sector the labour agenda is driven by a need to acquire and provide skilled workers. As the sector is a primary participant in the debate on defining and establishing a clear purpose for the categories of universities in South Africa it can certainly be expected that the labour agenda will impact deeply on the outcome.

A fourth important paradigmatic influence to take note of is the social development paradigm and its impact on higher education. Within the domain of social development and its relation to higher education the purported ideal is that vocational training is of primary importance as it is the means to address poverty and unemployment. The expressed expectation, as formulated but the government representatives of this sector, is to address poverty and unemployment through a vocational approach in education and training and the view is further motivated by the economic imperative to improve employment rates in the country (Department of Labour South Africa, 1998).

Graham (2002) states that "an institution cannot have a satisfactory sense of its worth if it does not have a clear sense of what its purpose is". If, for example, it is determined to be the primary purpose of Universities of Technology to offer vocational education as suggested by the Minister of Education (Pandor, 2005), then funding and research priorities should be adjusted accordingly and a differentiated system developed to accommodate such ideals.

A study by Graham (2002) on the history of universities in the United Kingdom revealed that the debate on the purpose of a university is age-old. Graham quotes Pope Alexander IV speaking on the topic of training versus education in the 1700"s:

> … suitable men cannot be found to administer the sacraments
> … that there should flourish a university….. (so that) many
> men of the kingdom would apply themselves to such study of
> letters and acquire the most precious pearl of knowledge, that
> the ignorant be informed and the rude become learned.
> (Graham 2002:19)

This historical statement expressed faith in the sheer power of education by expressing two distinct aims, i.e.. the training of professionals and the advancement of learning. In modern terms it

could be interpreted as two fundamental aims for the university namely vocational training on the one hand while also maintaining a focus on the formative effect of education on the society through knowledge construction and applied research.

From the above it is clear that the expectation of universities to address both the economic and the academic ideals is nothing new or even unique to our current context.

It is concluded that the same debates and paradigmatic issues highlighted in the work of the above authors remain relevant to the South African scenario where there are two similar and equally strong schools of thought impacting on the understanding of purpose and the approach to higher education. In summary: The first is the very strong school of thought informed by the labour, economic and social development paradigm, that it is the purpose of universities to primarily address the skills needs of the country and focus on vocational training. The second school of thought is informed by the traditionalist formative- education perspective namely that the purpose of universities is, in the words of Graham (2002) "education for the sake of education alone", in other words a strong developmental-education perspective.

The challenge for the newly established university-types in South Africa is to define and ultimately position the institutions on what could be best described as a "continuum of expectations". The fact that universities are not fully independent in making such a decision, due to the strict control in terms of programme offerings and finances and that government through both the education and labour sectors, is an influential partner in determining the outcome of such a positioning decision is an important contextual factor. The outcome will be further influenced by ideological factors as represented by the post-apartheid regime.

The intricate relationship between government and higher education is complex with dimensions of both autonomy and dependence. Government is the regulator, policy maker, monitor, evaluator and financier of higher education and the sector is adamantly focussed on academic autonomy, credibility and self-regulation. Gibbs and Bunker (2002:1-10) argue, based on an extensive study at the Centre for Higher Education, University of Virginia, that the task and role of the government in relation to higher education in the United States has changed significantly. With reference to a national poll by Callan in 1996, they indicate that there is a decline in public confidence in higher education. The Callan-poll indicates that in the United States the general public question the value of most academic research and they are concerned as to whether a degree can open the door to satisfactory employment and a better life. Gibbs and Bunker (2000:1-10) explain that the eroding of public confidence is not related to the importance of higher education, but is rather a direct consequence of the operation and functioning of higher education. They further argue that higher education may choose to respond by focussing on new ways of meeting the learning needs of the individual amid the complexities of the social, economic and political environments. The authors state that it is becoming an imperative for colleges and universities in general, and student development and support, in particular, to articulate and communicate what they can contribute to student learning and therefore to the society. These arguments suggest an imperative holistic and comprehensive offering of student development and support.

In South Africa, as a developing country, the some socio-economic realities are different from those of the United States but for a developing country there is value in the findings of the above study. Apart from economic differences, the local multicultural scenario can possibly be considered to be even more complex than is the case in most developed or even most developing countries. The reality for higher education in South Africa is that the sector functions within a

complex and developing economy. In addition, the higher education system accommodates a huge diversity of cultures and there is a political expectation that it should play a leading role in establishing a new social order. Cultural diversity has a pronounced effect on values, purpose, language and priorities within the sector. Interestingly, the sentiments expressed in recent media reports, though relatively early in the transformation process, already indicate judgments on and expectations of higher education and its role in person development within the country.

3.2.2 Specific paradigms in student development and support

Student development and support services are structured and provided against a specific theoretical framework within a specific institution. This framework is determined on a macro-level by the political agenda, educational policy and humanitarian culture in the country, and on a micro-level by the education paradigms of institutional managers and also the operational approaches of the practitioners. On the institutional level there are many specific influences. Aspects such as managerial preferences and interpretations of policies, setting of institutional priorities and strategic goals, financing and budgeting priorities and issues such as affordability may impact on the provision and management of student development and support services. The difficulty in measuring the value added by student development and support activities and interventions makes it difficult for the practitioners to defend the contribution made by such services. In the yearbooks of higher education institutions prior to 1995, the motivations given for offering student development and support services are mostly remedial and reactive in nature. In the later yearbooks of such institutions, these motivations have a distinctly more proactive character and indicate a shift towards a developmental approach (Technikon Pretoria, 1993, 1998, 2003; University of Pretoria 1978, 2000, 2002). With the phasing in of outcomes-based education the approach now seems to be increasingly person-centred and focused on the support to and effective facilitation of learning. The clear shift in positioning statements indicates a shift in paradigm from the reactive and even deficit models to a developmental and asset-based

approach. The following sections investigate a number of prominent paradigms prevailing in the student development and support as a sub-sector of higher education.

3.2.2.1 Constructivism and person development

The constructivist approach can be traced back as far as the work of John Dewey and the progressive education movement (Innes, 2004). In modern literature there are multiple understandings of constructivism and it became clear to me that it is important not to confuse constructivism with post-modernism or critical theory. According to Innes (2004:112) a general definition of constructivism that would cover all versions of the paradigm is that "knowledge is actively constructed by people, either as individuals or in groups, rather than being received from people".

For the purpose of this study it is important to distinguish between three major categories of thought and understanding within the constructivist paradigm. The categories can be explained as follows:

- Psychological constructivism: Knowledge construction occurs in the mind of the individual.
- Social constructivism: Knowledge is socially constructed and imbedded in the social culture and practices of people.
- Transactional constructivism: A combination/ midway between psychological and social constructivism recognising that knowledge is constructed by the individual but also by the social context of the individual.

(Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Innes, 2004; Cobb, 1996)

Herrington and Oliver (2000) developed a set of nine design elements for programmes that are based on a constructivist approach. The nine elements were developed to provide a framework for academic programmes in the modern university but can be used equally well in

constructing an understanding of the role of the student development and support within higher education.

The elements identified by Herrington and Oliver (2000) are:

- to provide authentic contexts to the way knowledge will be used in real life;
- to provide authentic activities;
- to provide access to expert performances and modelling of processes;
- to provide multiple roles and perspectives;
- to support collaborative construction of knowledge;
- to promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed;
- to promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge be made explicit;
- to provide coaching and scaffolding by the educator at critical times; and
- to provide authentic assessment of learning within tasks.

The following table (Table 3.3) represents a possible philosophical construction of the purpose and role of student development and support within the higher education context in a developing country.

Table 3.3: An interpretation of the elements of construction as identified by Herrington and Oliver (2000)

Design elements	Student development and support design framework
a) to provide authentic contexts to the way knowledge will be used in real life	a) to co-facilitate the provision of authentic contexts relating to the specific skills development outcomes for students by complementing and enriching core curricula.
b) to provide authentic activities	b) to devise skills development and support applications (services,

	programmes, modules) that allow valuable learning experiences and relate to current realities perceived by the individual; to facilitate the transferability of skill and knowledge from one activity to another and therefore also from one context to another.
c) to provide access to expert performances and the modelling of processes d) to provide multiple roles and perspectives	c) – d) to facilitate with a coaching and mentoring style and provide room for the modelling of positive behaviours through skills programmes and counselling; to specifically develop modelling processes through the enhancement of mentorship skills for both staff and students.
e) to support collaborative construction of knowledge f) to promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed	e– f) to create room for students to participate and self-construct knowledge about new skills and self; to promote meta-cognition; to assist and encourage whole brain thinking and the development of multiple intelligences (Herrmann, 1995; Herrmann-Nehdi, 2004).
g) to promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit	g) to create safe environments (confidential, respectful, permissive) for self exploration and knowledge experimentation for the individual and/ group; to facilitate and promote reflective behaviour.
h) to provide coaching and	h) to challenge individuals and

scaffolding by the educator at critical times	groups to extend personal or group boundaries and comfort zones.
i) to provide authentic assessment of learning within tasks	i) to promote self-assessment, reflection and external assessment as sources of knowledge and further construction.

The table provides a simplistic interpretation of the design elements to indicate how student development and support can construct its role within higher education towards being a critical partner in the academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular activity of a university. Most importantly for student development and support is the rising notion of holistic person development. It is in its ability to address this goal that student development and support could find its ultimate purpose and critical function within higher education institutions in a developing country.

The next section further explores holistic person development and the required multi-disciplinary approach towards achieving true holistic development.

3.2.2.2 Holistic person development and a multi-disciplinary approach in student development and support

Higher education in the United States has a recorded history of "general education progressing to specialisation progressing back to general education over the last two centuries" (Kockelmans, 1979:97). In South Africa a similar trend can be traced with the traditional universities. These universities had a strong focus in general education (as opposed to vocationally focussed) that existed until the early seventies. With the establishment of the technikon-sector the era of

absolute specialisation dawned. Highly focussed curricula with emphasis on vocational content were instituted. This trend also impacted curricula at traditional universities as the graduates of both types of universities had to compete in the same employment market. Political transformation and the expansion of local employment markets to a global market also impacted directly on the higher education sector. At the same time medical and related fields progressed in the implementation of an outcomes based education approach and the concept of holistic student development became prominent. The problem based learning (PBL) mode, as a delivery mode for OBE and preferred by medical schools, serves the integrated learning and assessment required in the medical fields exceptionally well. It could be speculated that it was precisely this need for more integrated learning and assessment that prompted the medical fields towards implementing OBE more rapidly than most other disciplines.

This shift in emphasis from a discipline based approach towards an integrated and holistic approach is of course strongly endorsed by the Department of Education. The degree of progress within medical fields does not however necessarily signify equal progress in other academic fields and the implementation of a multi-disciplinary versus vocationally focussed approach remains a point of debate. It is my opinion that the solution lies in a compromise position, as vocational training does not necessarily exclude a multi-disciplinary approach.

On the topic of increased vocational emphasis, Flexner (1979, as cited in Kockelmans, 1979:115) quotes the Columbia University Committee on General Education as saying that "there are growing concerns that American universities are turning out a new breed of 'barbarian' graduates whose degree of specialisation is nearly absolute…".

This concern also reflects the ongoing conflict in the evolution of the higher education curriculum in South Africa. There are traditional views about the formative value of higher education and concerns about the

impact of specialisation (purely vocational focus). In fact it is the challenge for higher education to move towards a curriculum that allows for skilled outcomes of vocational value, while also attending to the holistic person development of students. This type of curriculum is categorised as general education by McGrath (as cited in Kockelmans, 1979:47). McGrath says that "general education prepares the student for a full and satisfying life as a member of a family, as a worker and as a citizen, i.e.. an integrated and purposeful human being". It does not however ignore the individuality (talent, interest and purpose) neither does it put all in one mental and spiritual mould. General education, according to McGrath merely seeks the maximum development of each individual. It is an encouragement of the affective as well as cognitive growth of the student.

Within the context of general education, or what I prefer to call a multi-disciplinary approach in education, the pragmatic role, purpose and scope of student development and support offering in higher education suddenly becomes clearer. It is often beyond the skill and ability of faculty staff to facilitate person development to the degree required and therein lies the crucial input from the student development and support functions within the university.

3.2.2.3 The impact of psychological paradigms on student development and support

The impact of psychological paradigms on student development and support are investigated to determine the underlying theoretical influences and the impact of this on the conceptualisation of student development and support practices. This investigation is done by highlighting four prominent psychological paradigms that are resonant to the student development and support environment:

- Behavioural psychology

- Humanistic psychology
- Cognitive-developmental psychology
- Social constructivism

■ **Behavioural psychology:** Jarvis (2002) defines behavioural psychology as the study of "how we learn to behave in certain ways". Within the higher education context this implies that the student development and support practitioner focus on conditioned responses to certain stimuli and how this leads to behaviour modification and learning. Behaviourists identify three types of learning, i.e.. classical conditioning; operant conditioning and social learning.

Classical conditioning refers to the very early work by Pavlov (1927). Behavioural theory was further pursued by Watson (Jarvis, 2002). Watson believed that all individual differences in behaviour were due to different experiences of learning and thereby proposing that the process of classical conditioning was able to explain all aspects of human psychology.

Operant conditioning on the other hand involves more than the mere development of associations. This type of conditioning involves learning from the consequences of behaviour. The idea of learning from the consequences of behaviour finds a comfortable place within academic disciplines with a strong scientific-experimental approach. Not all behaviourists accepted the work of Pavlov (1927), Watson (1913) and Thorndike (1898). Bandura (1978) took principles of operant conditioning and developed the theory of social learning. Social learning theory postulates that although we do acquire most of our behaviour through conditioning it is mostly through imitating a model of behaviour that we learn. This implies that we also learn by seeing the behaviours of others reinforced. Social learning therefore means that we observe the behaviour of others, the consequences (including reinforcement) of such behaviour, then process the

information and determine our own response. Bandura's interpretation of behaviourism means that the student is no passive participant any longer but makes conscious decisions about responses.

The early behaviourist approach in psychology remains relevant to higher education and student development and support as there are many areas of teaching, facilitation and skills development that still depend on behaviourist principles. For example the acquisition of certain practical skills may depend on repeated exercises and application of such an action until it effectively becomes natural behaviour. Examples of behaviourist application and influence within the context of student development and support may be found in language development (including reading and writing development), behaviour modification therapy, life skills training and mentorship programmes.

■ **Humanistic psychology:** Humanistic psychology within the context of student development and support, can be understood through the following principles, as adapted by Jarvis (2002):

• People are motivated by the wish to grow and fulfil their potential.
• People can choose what they want to be, and know what is best for them.
• We are influenced by how we feel about ourselves, which in turn results from how we are treated by others.
• The aim of humanistic psychology is to help people choose what they want and help them fulfil their potential.

Jarvis goes on to contextualise and explains that humanistic psychology, whether it is applied in psychology, education or in the workplace, is always centred on creating conditions where people can make up their own minds and follow their own goals. This approach is evident in higher education from the selection of careers and academic programmes to the variety of skills development programmes offered.

Humanistic psychology places high emphasis on individuality and the accommodation of individual needs and aspirations.

The grounding work of Rogers (1961) and more specifically Maslow (1954) have application and relevance to modern day higher education. Maslow developed the theory of human motivation that essentially clusters and ranks human motivation. The ranking proposes a step by step actualisation of needs and a systematic progress towards achievement. The Maslow-theory of self-actualisation is widely applied in the formulation of educational policy and as motivation for the establishment of many student development and support services. The theory has been criticised to have little application beyond the so called North-American individualistic culture but has been found to have wide application despite this criticism. The theory sits easy with higher education   because of the systematic appreciation of learning and levels of learning as demonstrated by academic programme structures.

■ **Cognitive-developmental psychology:** Prominent features of the cognitive-development approach according to Jarvis (2002), are:

• The approach is primarily concerned with thinking and reasoning, as opposed to behaviour and feelings.
• Thinking and reasoning do not merely become more sophisticated with increasing experience, but also the type of logic the individual is capable of.
• As major influence on human behaviour, feelings and thinking also determines the type of reasoning an individual is capable of.

According to Jarvis (2002), Piaget saw intellectual development as a process in which we "construct an internal model of reality" Vygotsky was a contemporary of Piaget, working in Russia and not publishing in western literature before the 1960's. The independent work of Vygotsky supported the work of Piaget and agreed that cognitive

development takes place in stages characterised by varied styles of thinking on every level. He did however disagree with Piaget's position that the individual initially explores alone and then forms internal representations of reality. Vygotsky recognised the influence of adults on the learning of children in facilitating and directing development by transferring what he called "the higher mental tools" that was later defined as "whole brain thinking" by Herrmann (1995). Also refer to the concepts of transactional constructivism in section 3.2.2.4.

It is evident why this theory of Vygotsky found application in education in general and higher education in particular. The ideas and influence of Vygotsky can be identified through a number of current characteristics of the higher education approach in South Africa:

- The implementation of an outcomes-based approach with the implied systematic increase in the cognitive and general skills levels of learning outcomes (called *level descriptors* in SAQA terminology).
- The concept of scaffolding of learning where facilitators actively and purposefully facilitate learning as within a phase of development, and encourage them to move slightly beyond to achieve a next level of learning, while learners actively participate in learning.
- Recognition of the role of the influence of peers and the impact of cooperative group work and the subsequent emphasis on peer tutoring.

The principles highlighted by the work of cognitive-development theorists are widely applied in the context of higher education and of student development and support through:

- Planned and intentional scaffolding of learning through structured skills development programmes;
- increased application of computer aided learning tools and e-

learning materials to enhance the learning experiences of students;

- structuring of curricula to systematically elevate students to higher and achievable levels of intellectual development and learning.

Though cognitive development theory finds easy application in certain student development and support practices, the singular focus on the cognitive development of the student is not conducive to a paradigm of holistic development.

■ **Social constructivism:** A fourth paradigm with direct impact on higher education and student development and support, is social constructivism. Social constructivism essentially questions the scientific and non-political nature of psychology, traditional research methods and in fact the very nature of reality itself. According to this paradigm it is not possible to observe reality accurately as we are always influenced by our own language and culture and therefore no true objectivity is possible. In other words social constructivists see the world as the individual perceives it, i.e.. as "socially constructed". Social constructivists see psychological concepts like childhood, intelligence, effective learning as merely what a specific culture defines them to be. It is therefore understandable why language is of such importance for social constructivism as it determines the words we use and how we describe things, events and feelings. This will in turn determine the constructions we make of these things or how we define our own reality. Because of this the main research method that evolved for social constructivism is the application of discourse analysis. The principle is that by unpacking or analysing the assumptions and meanings individuals and groups assign and demonstrate through language, it becomes possible to understand behaviour and functioning.

The main importance of this paradigm for student development and support is the emphasis on social context and social identity and the

acute awareness of the impact of current discourses in education on the learning and development of students.

Social constructivism has complex implications for student development and support within a developing country context. For example, if language is such a crucial factor for the individual defining his or her own reality (i.e.. learning) then how does higher education accommodate a diverse culture with many languages as we find in South Africa where students are studying on higher education level in the medium of the English language. This must then have impact on the quality of construction that takes place as students have to define their own reality in what may be a second or third language. In addition recent findings at the Tshwane University of Technology (2004) indicated that the language proficiency of new students renders them unprepared for study at higher education level. The study focussed on the English language proficiency of first time entering students at the TUT.

These students were assessed to determine English language proficiency levels. Results were compared to a Grade scale similar to Secondary schooling grades. The outcome of the study clearly showed that a majority of students have language proficiency on the level of Grade 5, with a significant number of students with even poorer proficiency than Grade 5. For higher education it implies in practical terms that the development of higher levels of language proficiency is essential in order to facilitate the holistic person development and allow optimal construction of meaning for other learning outcomes.

In addition to the psychological paradigms, the impact of theories of learning science is relevant to the student development and support environment.

The following section investigates the relationship between learning sciences and student development and support.

3.2.2.4 Learning science and student development and support

The psychological paradigms elucidated on in the above sections all find application within higher education, but no single approach seems sufficient to fully underpin the complexity of human development as it is dealt with in the student development and support context. The cognitive approaches tend to emphasise cognitive development and neglect the emotional and social development while the social constructivist approach also does not give sufficient explanation of cognitive development.

In view of this dilemma of determining an appropriate approach that properly underpins modern experience, Innes (2004) promotes the idea of transactional constructivism as a possible framework.

Transactional constructivism is favoured by Innes because it allows a focus on cognitive processes as well as the way thinking is contextualised within culture and social processes. Innes puts it that "the transactional perspective changes our understanding of the nature of boundaries between individuals and between cultures from one of walls and fences to one of dynamic transactions" (Innes 2004:113).

The impact of constructivist paradigms on learning and how we view education and human development and more specifically the impact on the approach to higher education cannot be ignored. Constructivists have reframed the goal of education from a dispensing of information to a drastically reframed goal of creating social environments that help students construct their own knowledge (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

The idea of transferability of knowledge and skill, as promoted by transactional constructivism, is core to understanding the relevance of this paradigm. It implies that useful rather than inert knowledge is created because students are allowed to construct knowledge within a

specific social context. This construction of useful knowledge in turn implies that this "new" knowledge is accessible and transferable to other contexts.

In this regard it is important to take note of a number of stage theories within the transactional constructivist framework. Stage-theory is a specific type of theory that explains human development within a staged or phased framework. Transactional constructivism takes the essence of constructivism and structures it into a staged approach for the construction of meaning. The approach has high impact and value for the understanding of learning in the context of higher education and also accommodates the intricacy of factors relevant to a developing country.

A cryptic summary of work on stage learning theories that assists toward developing an understanding of the learning progress in higher education but also signifies the role of student development and support practitioners shows the following:

- Chickering developed the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Study" which is widely accepted as an authoritative guideline in higher education (Chickering & Gamson, 1978).
- Perry (1970) developed a model of intellectual development with nine stages that the undergraduate student progresses through.
- King and Kitchener (1994) proposed an invariant stage theory of cognitive development anchored in the work of Piaget and Perry but with strong emphasis on reflective thinking and more specifically the level of sophistication in thinking. King and Kitchener developed the "Reflective Judgement Scale" with seven stages of reflective judgement starting from a pre-reflective stage of dualistic thinking (right or wrong) and progressing to a final stage of truly reflective thinking (systematic thinking). The assumption of King and Kitchener could be challenged as reflective thinking is not always structured and may in some instances be most productive

when it is creative and unstructured.

- Baxter-Magolda (1999) devised the model of epistemological thinking as an extension of the work by Perry, King and Kitchener. The model of Baxter-Magolda has four stages from the initial phase where there is a belief that knowledge is certain to the final stage where there is understanding that knowledge is uncertain. The author maintains that constructivist pedagogies allow students to construct their own knowledge and is the optimal strategy for moving to the advanced levels of thinking.

- Mezirow (2000) proposed a constructivist approach that has been very influential in higher education and adult education. Mezirow reviewed the work of predecessors and combined the concepts of Dewey and current constructivists with critical theory - referring specifically to the work of Habermas (Innes, 2002). Mezirow proposed new ways of facilitating self-development by implementing reflective techniques as part of the learning process. Mezirow postulated that reflection would improve understanding of the world and therefore enhance learning.

Constructivist stage theories and staged approaches towards facilitating learning are reflected in current higher education practices. However, the approach that an institution of higher education ascribes to, either purposefully or incidentally, will determine the demands placed on students and therefore have direct impact on the nature of student development and support required. The latter may be extra-curricular, co-curricular or curricular (refer to the definition of student development and support in Chapter 1).

It is concerning how despite the progressive thinking of the theorists, the debate amongst academics (practitioners) still predominantly focuses on what should be taught (content) instead of issues of

learning and how students should learn. In essence that implies the difference between a content-based and outcomes-based approach.

It is within this context of a desired transition and change in higher education approaches that this topic is studied with the view of developing a framework for student development and support focussing on how to facilitate and accommodate the required change towards facilitating learning. Student development and support managers and practitioners need to reflect on current practices, review current structures and approaches and effectively position or reposition the function within higher education institutions in order to play a constructive and value adding role.

In the following section a theoretical framework for student development and support in the current higher education context in South Africa as a developing country is constructed.

3.3   A re-constructed theoretical framework for student development and support

Following the extensive literature review it is possible to construct a theoretical framework of factors for the provision and management of student development and support.
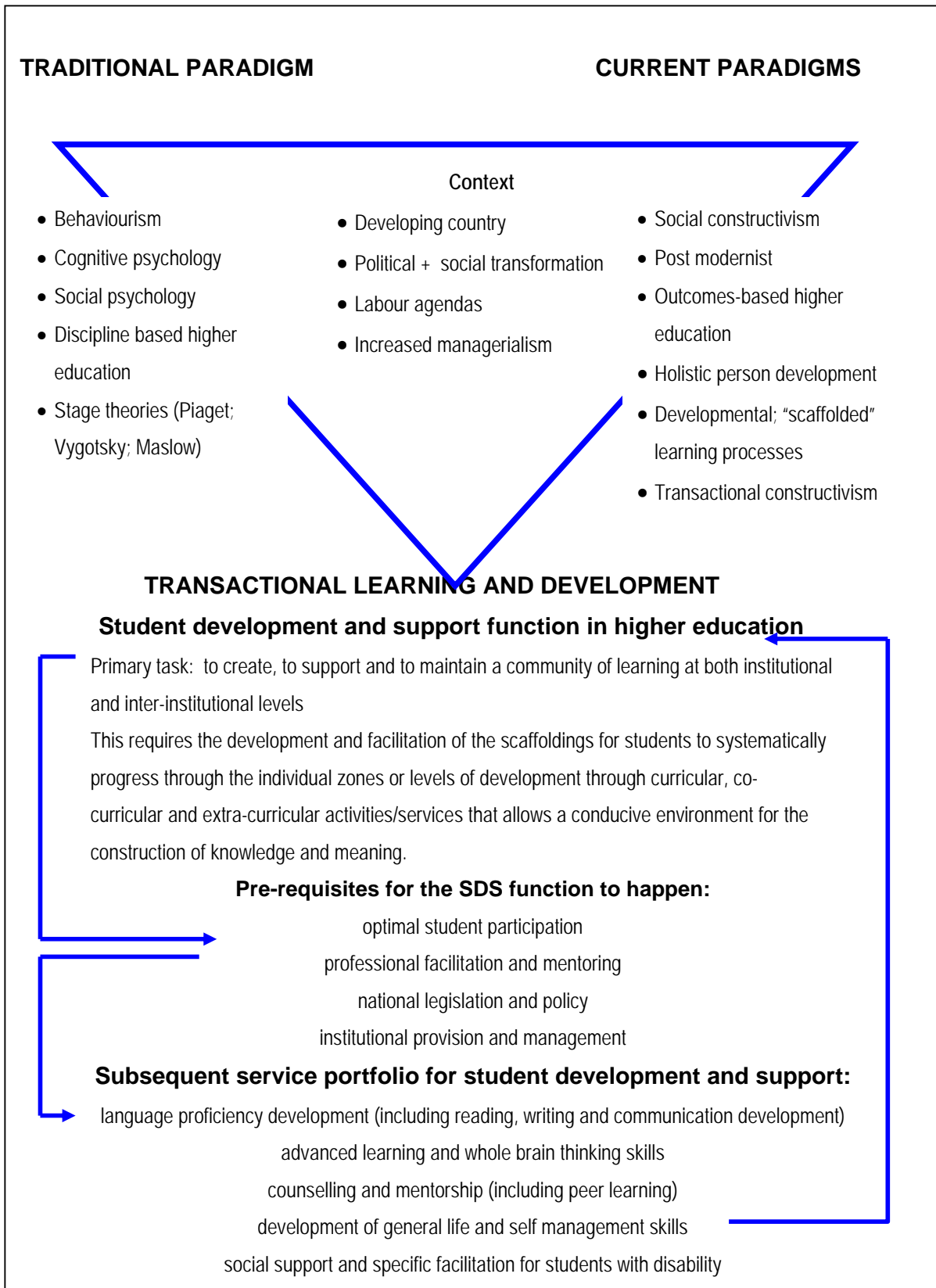
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TRADITIONAL PARADIGM   **CURRENT PARADIGMS**

Context

- Behaviourism
- Cognitive psychology
- Social psychology
- Discipline based higher education
- Stage theories (Piaget; Vygotsky; Maslow)

- Developing country
- Political + social transformation
- Labour agendas
- Increased managerialism

- Social constructivism
- Post modernist
- Outcomes-based higher education
- Holistic person development
- Developmental; "scaffolded" learning processes
- Transactional constructivism

TRANSACTIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Student development and support function in higher education

Primary task: to create, to support and to maintain a community of learning at both institutional and inter-institutional levels

This requires the development and facilitation of the scaffoldings for students to systematically progress through the individual zones or levels of development through curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities/services that allows a conducive environment for the construction of knowledge and meaning.

Pre-requisites for the SDS function to happen:

optimal student participation

professional facilitation and mentoring

national legislation and policy

institutional provision and management

Subsequent service portfolio for student development and support:

language proficiency development (including reading, writing and communication development)

advanced learning and whole brain thinking skills

counselling and mentorship (including peer learning)

development of general life and self management skills

social support and specific facilitation for students with disability

Figure 3.1: A re-constructed theoretical framework for student development and support

The above diagram depicts the progression from the traditional paradigms of behaviourism and cognitive theories in higher education, to a current paradigm with notions of constructivism and holistic person development. This transition takes place within a context of educational, political and economic reform and labour driven agendas, impacting on higher education. The synthesised construction of the new reality for higher education is the establishment of transactional learning and development environments within higher education institutions. It is in relation to this purpose that student development and support functions find their primary purpose within higher education institutions. The critical importance of the factors of management and provision for these functions now become apparent.

This new context provides student development and support and the university with a unique challenge to reconceptualise and reframe the role and provisioning of these functions within the university. Effective learning within this collaborative scenario has two pre-requisites, namely, optimal student participation and the professional facilitation of student learning (and therefore holistic development) needs. By nature of the specific expertise these services offer it should be argued that it may even be a strategic decision to properly position, fund and structure and manage these services to ensure university success.

The figure proposes the core service portfolio that will be the consequence of such a theoretical framework.

The proposed service portfolio should include:

- Language (including reading and writing skills) and communication development (attending to practical skills development and application of skills).
- Development and promotion of whole brain thinking skills (*inter alia* critical and analytical thinking, synthesis, creative and lateral thinking).
- Counselling and mentorship (personal and career counselling, therapeutic services and mentorship programmes and skills training).
- Optimal development of self management, social and life skills (outcomes

based life skills programmes assimilated into the academic programme curricula).

- Social support and special facilitation for students with special needs, disability or educational difficulties (steering the accommodation of special needs and the implementation of inclusive education on higher education level).

The content implication of the above service portfolio remind of what Kumar (as cited in Smith & Webster, 1998) states as "what is often spoken of as extra-curricular must come to be seen and attended to as the heart of the university and justification of the universities existence". The university should position these services to be more than mere extras for the student and for the outcomes to become part of institutional curriculum.

Smith and Webster (1998) postulate that the expectations that universities have of their graduates and even more importantly the expectations graduates have of higher education are undergoing radical changes. The authors explain that graduate expectations are framed by four trends that can be identified within the post-modern context.

The four trends are:

- Volatility, referring to the technological acceleration and de-institution-alisation of the university (virtual institutions) and the increasing amount of knowledge systems.
- Articulation between higher education and the labour market, referring to the rationalisation of graduates into a job-culture as opposed to an occupation-culture.
- Marketisation, referring to the fact that students are seen as clients and academic decisions are now made based on the immediate needs of clients.
- Credentialisation, referring to the massification of higher education and the fact that a consumerist culture is nursed. Vast numbers of society access higher education and the university now finds itself in the role of creating

instead of merely reflecting social hierarchies.

It is evident that as a consequence to the above trends highlighted by Smith and Webster (1998) higher education will have to pay much more attention to the purposeful inclusion of holistic development dimensions (inter alia social and life skills), if it is to address the societal expectations of what a competent graduate is. It is accepted that the concept of career has become more fluid and that the university graduate must be more flexible and adaptive so as to successfully progress through various employments during a work life as opposed to the earlier concept of longer term employment.

The modern university has no choice but to participate or at least respond to this expectation despite the alarm of academics (Melody, as in Smith & Webster, 1998). The university has to remain acutely aware however of this shift towards establishing itself as the implementer of public policies.

3.3.1 Philosophical assumptions of this study

As an interpretive researcher, I had to produce a reconstructed understanding of the participants' social, academic and management views on the provision and management of student development and support in higher education. I had to assume a paradigm of multiple realities within student development and support while attempting to construct an understanding of the student development and support phenomenon.

In my search for knowledge I explored the views, meanings, experiences, accounts, actions and events that occur in the extended process of provision and management decision-making in student development and support. These understandings are constructed by the participants and myself (the researcher) and presented as such as there is no single interpretive truth.

The following philosophical assumptions were made for the purpose of this study:

- a post-modernist trend in higher education,
- massification and increased managerialism within institutions of higher education,
- the steady and gradual progression towards collaborative learning and transfer of knowledge demonstrating a transactional constructivist paradigm.

The next chapter reports the field work and analysis of information towards identification of more specific factors impacting on the provision and management of student development and support in higher education within South Africa as an example of a developing country.