

Newsletter

September 2017 issue



Sri Lanka Association for Improving HE Effectiveness

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SLAIHEE Workshops available on request

- How to make your teaching more attractive
- How to teach large numbers
- How to make your marking easier / reduce time in marking
- How to make your student learning outcome-based
- Developing the attitudes of the students we teach

Editorial..... + asking for your views in identifying desirable change by Suki Ekaratne

The end of this year will mark 20 years since 'staff development' was formally started in Sri Lanka. It began when the first Staff Development Centre (SDC) was established at the University of Colombo in late 1997. To jog us to review what has been achieved since then, the next page carries an extract from the first Staff Development Newsletter of the Colombo SDC, which is the Editorial by Mr Stephen Cox, who helped start SD in our country. As Mr Cox said 20 years back; "Change is never easy, and the coming transitions pose great challenges for us all..."

It will help Higher Education (HE) to ask some questions on this central question of change: has the desired change occurred? What further 'push' is necessary to bring in desired change?

For example, for 20 years now, one QA 'structure' that has been in place in all our state universities is the requirement that all new teaching staff undergo a training course to improve teaching in Higher Education. While such training courses are specially relevant as many university lecturers criticise students entering HE as having become 'rote learners' through their pre-university school education, has this 20 years of lecturer training enabled universities to 'think afresh' to make an impact in getting students out of that 'rote learning'? Creating new knowledge by 'refreshed practices' is obviously one important university role: so, what 'fresh practices' have these training courses produced in university teaching? Are such courses (now run by SDC's of almost all universities), and recently established QA bodies, insufficient? What needs to be done to steer change in the desired directions? Are there good practices from the last 20 years that we can choose and then help spread?

We need to answer these questions; if not, what will the next 20 years lead to?

What YOU think matter to be 'improving HE in Sri Lanka'. So, help us identify / select good practices that can be spread to: help change our students: from what they are at entry to what they should be as HE products.

To the two questions below, e-mail answers/comments: improvingSLuni@gmail.com

Q 1. have you seen good HE teaching practices / course to help the above student change? (if so, give a couple of examples);

Q 2. what motivated these HE teaching practice changes? (where these were learnt/became motivated)

Thank you for your help: if we have good practices, then we need to identify, spread and sustain these, before other practices grow their roots still deeper, too deep to dig them out!

Past noteworthy events;

AS IT HAPPENED: IN 1998

As staff development started EXCERPTED FROM the 1st Staff Development Newsletter in Sri Lanka;

Staff Development Newsletter

Issue 1

January 1998

Teaching is the highest form of understanding-Aristotle

Editorial

From Stephen Cox, Consultant in the Staff Development Centre

University teaching is changing, and is likely to change with great rapidity over the next few years. This is because there are inescapable changes taking place globally and in Sri Lanka that demand firstly that our graduates who are adaptable and self aware learners, and secondly, that the universities become more publicly accountable. Indeed, the whole university system is changing in response to these demands. For instance, at least one Faculty has a mission statement for its teaching that carries a clear description of the graduates that it will produce.

In addition, Departmental Reviews will soon be commonplace in the University, with close scrutiny of the systems and strategies that support the teaching and research activities of staff and the learning of students. The technique of asking students for questionnaire comments on teaching and courses is already in use in parts of the University.

These and similar processes are already accepted practice in universities in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the

USA. The challenge for the universities in Sri Lanka is not merely to adopt these practices, but to leapfrog to a position where they lead the countries of South-East Asia in operating and managing an effective, adaptable and flexible higher education system suited to local needs and circumstances.

Change is never easy, and the coming transitions pose great challenges for us all, not least in deciding the precise role and development needs of the University, our Faculties and Departments, and ourselves.

That is why the Vice Chancellor established the Staff Development Centre. Both Professor Ekaratne, the Director, and myself, as Consultant, have long experience of providing support and guidance to colleagues in the process of changing their approaches and working practices. The programme of Staff Development Centre conferences, seminars and workshops will be a key feature in the development of the teaching and evaluation processes of the University in the coming months and years.

The planned staff development events will give you the chance to express your own ideas and to explore those of others as you contemplate the future and the challenges and opportunities that it has in store.

The Role of Mistakes in the Classroom

As the school doors swing open to welcome the start of another year, both teachers and students will have goals: to inspire a class, to learn new things, to get good grades.

What probably won't be on that list is to make a mistake - in fact many. But it should be.

Why? Because we're raising a generation of children -- primarily in affluent, high-achieving districts -- who are terrified of blundering. Of failing. Of even sitting with the discomfort of not knowing something for a few minutes.

If students are afraid of mistakes, then they're afraid of trying something new, of being creative, of thinking in a different way. They're scared to raise their hands when they don't know the answer and their response to a difficult problem is to ask the teacher rather than try different solutions that might, gasp, be wrong.

They're as one teacher told me, "victims of excellence."

Why is this? Because success in school is too often defined as high marks on tests. And if results are all that matter in education, then mistakes play no positive role. They are only helpful if we believe that the process of learning - which inevitably must include the process of erring - is just as, or more, important than getting to the correct answer.

I realize that parents play a crucial role in how their children view mistakes - and I've written about that -- but here, I'm focusing on educators.

While writing my book *Better by Mistake: The Unexpected Benefits of Being Wrong*, I came across some fascinating research about how children learn and what message they take away about mistakes.

Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, has conducted groundbreaking research in this area. One of her experiments asked 400 5th graders in New York City schools to take an easy short test, on which almost all performed well. Half the children were praised for "being really smart." The other half was complimented "having worked really hard."

Then they were asked to take a second test and given the options of either choosing one that was pretty simple and they would do well on, or one that was more challenging, but they might make mistakes.

Of those students praised for effort, 90 percent chose the harder test. Of those praised for being smart, the majority chose the easy test. Dweck has conducted such experiments and studies in a variety of school districts - low-income, high-income, homogenous and mixed-culture and races.

A cornerstone of Dweck's research is the concepts of fixed mindsets and growth mindsets. Those with fixed mindsets, as Professor Dweck says, believe people are good at something - either good at math or music or baseball - or they're not. For those with a fixed mindset, mistakes serve no purpose but to highlight failure.

Those with what Professor Dweck calls growth mindsets - who believe that some people are better or worse in certain areas but we can all improve and develop our skills and abilities - are much more likely to be able to accept mistakes because they know they're part of learning.

And studies in a secondary school have shown that when students are taught about growth mindsets and that the brain is malleable, their motivation to learn dramatically increases. Take a look at the web site www.brainology.us if you want to learn more.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we can all be world-class chess players or pro athletes, but rather that we all have a much greater ability to develop our potential than we think we do. It takes hard work, however, and we can't do it without taking chances and making mistakes.

Embracing such an ideology also means, to circle back, that the emphasis in schools must be on the process of learning, not solely the results. I know this is difficult in our country now, particularly when so much stress is put on standardized tests - which are all about results and not exploring different ideas - as a way to measure the success of both teachers and children.

But it can be done. We can learn from other cultures - for example, in Japan, children are allowed, and expected, to work out a problem in front of the class for 10 minutes or more. Even if the student is wrong, there is no shame. Mistakes are an indication, not of failure, in these classrooms, but of what still needs to be learned.

I also know a group of fourth-grade and fifth-grade teachers in New York who, inspired by the idea that children need to learn to make and live with mistakes, are developing their own lesson plan to build resilient learners. The idea is to help students examine the ideas of effort and persistence, learn to take risks and accept imperfection and be willing to sit with the uncertainty of not knowing.

It's a big task. But over time, I think we can teach students how to shift the prism at least slightly, so they look at mistakes not as something to be dreaded and avoided, but as an inevitable -- and often very helpful -- part of learning.

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Originally published: September 6, 2011 © Edutopia.org; George Lucas Educational Foundation

Personal Section;

HOW I BECAME MOTIVATED.....

This article will reveal how I became motivated to do a PhD on educational aspects of my subject area and a bit on the focus area of my studies at the Creative Industries Faculty (CIF), Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

First of all, I would like to explain how I came with this research idea. Being a lecturer in the Department of Integrated Design - University of Moratuwa Sri Lanka, I have taught Design Thinking (DT) and facilitated Design Thinking workshops both in design and non-design contexts. The responses from the students and other participants were impressive. So, it triggered my thoughts to go deep into creativity education using design thinking. This whole notion of getting feedback and thinking through students' perspective intensified while I was following the Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (CTHE) course in SDC – University of Colombo (UoC). Further, this qualification along with SEDA accreditation accelerated my way to get a position as a Sessional Academic at QUT and access to CPD programs from UK Higher Education Academy (HEA).

If I talk about a few of my motivations that made me go on to research education, these will attach to my experiences with the Staff Development Centre at UoC. I used to participate in most of the staff development workshops conducted at the centre since 2014. Participating and engaging in teaching-learning-assessment discussions always acted as a Mental Priming Model (MPM) for me to think about my practice as an educator from the perspective of students. So, at least a day in each month, I was thinking as a student and that helped me to refresh, and to keep afresh, my approaches to facilitate students.

This research idea to apply one of the most successful mindsets in my discipline, in education grew over the years. I had the privilege to discuss it in open forums in university education. Creativity, innovation and related topics were the subject matter in most forums. In parallel, internationally, the prominence of creativity and innovation have been attracting increasing attention over the last several decades, with both practitioners and educators promoting the importance of creative thinking for students. Even so, there remains little consensus regarding effective pedagogical practices for

facilitating creativity. As a design educator, I started enquiring "How and in what ways 'Design Thinking' can be applied in teaching-learning environments in Higher Education (HE) contexts to develop students' Creative Intelligence (CI)?"

Over the last few decades 'Design Thinking' has been used, tested, interpreted and evaluated in many ways. However, today, Design Thinking can be defined as a mindset and a process for almost any problem or a challenge which does not only belong to designers *per se*. Consequently, a considerable amount of success stories can be found. The application of design thinking in HE has already been made in many contexts to overcome several challenges. A good example is The Hasso Plattner Design Thinking Research Program; a collaborative program between Stanford University and the Hasso Plattner Institute from Potsdam, Germany.

In the first phase of the research, the focus will be to broaden the understanding of the phenomena of design thinking in tertiary education. I am not focusing only on existing design education, but on looking at how design thinking is being used more broadly in higher education. It is evident that the use/application of design thinking in HE is fourfold;

1. To solve institutional and system based challenges (organisational),
2. To set educational outcomes, policy alterations, syllabus, curriculum and to plan lessons,
3. Engendering design thinking skills in students and for students' projects (way of thinking for students), and
4. Change the physical environment of the teaching-learning-assessing context.

Consequently, if we consider Design Thinking in the Sri Lankan context, where are we?

We have lots of opportunities to frame these kinds of concepts in our higher education system to overcome lots of challenges, and that will not end up only developing creativity and innovation.

by Gnanaharsha Beligatamulla - April 2017

Currently researching at the Creative Industries Faculty (CIF), Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (CTHE) Course at the Open University of Sri Lanka

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) introduced its first CTHE course for probationary lecturers in 2010 and to date it has completed four batches. CTHE participants are mostly new recruits who are yet to obtain a post-graduate qualification. OUSL is an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution, where its members of academic staff are required to develop and produce course material for self-learning, coordinate delivery and assessment of academic activities. In addition to these requirements, academics are also required to contribute to university's development and contribute to national development; to demonstrate research and scholarship in their chosen fields and in Open Distance Learning.

The vision of the Open University is to achieve "excellence, efficiency and equity in lifelong learning" while its mission is to "enhance access to high quality, affordable and relevant education through ODL while ensuring lifelong learning opportunities to face challenges in a knowledge society". Even though the ODL pedagogy expects a more flexible and liberal learning and is designed to serve self-directed adult learners who could relate learning to their life-long experiences. However, limited higher educational opportunities in the country have made young adults who are more accustomed to face-to-face learning, to seek entry to OUSL's study programmes.

Having to serve cohorts of learners with diverse backgrounds and learning traits; large student numbers; not to mention professional rivalries resulting from varying schools of thought have caused many academics resort to conventional forms of delivery over approaches that encourage and support University's Mission. In this regard, the Staff Development Centre of the OUSL has realised the importance of making CTHE participants take a reflective learning approach; research and develop scholarship that supports Open Distance Learning.

The CTHE course encourages participants to follow the Constructivists learning philosophy when interpreting their teaching. The formative assessments help participants to apply concepts learnt to improve their course development and delivery. Participants are required to maintain a reflective learning log on self-learning assignments.

These log-entries require them to state a) experiences, opinions, events or new information received; b) personal thoughts and feelings; c) ways of thinking that may lead to possible improvements; d) the self-knowledge that has changed one's outlook towards teaching and learning.

Recently, the SDC has introduced the Outcome Based Education (OBE) in its curriculum and course development module (i.e. Module V). OBE is being introduced by Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) in order to structure and standardise programmes of study across levels, while the Washington Accord requires such compliance in engineering education.

The course has nine modules (i.e. Modules I-IX) and is shown in Figure 1. Module I explains course requirements and introduces participants to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Edu 2.0. Module II focusses on the role of a professional teacher and emphasises the need to work towards achieving one's personal goals.

Module III discusses norms, policies and procedures of the University and the Universities Grants Commission relevant to an entry-level lecturer.

Module VI requires participants to produce an audio-visual learning resource using a digital story telling tool. This module is conducted by OUSL's Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe).

Module VII, the computer skills development module is offered to improve word-processing skills and spreadsheet usage. The module is offered at basic, intermediate and advanced levels, to serve participants with varying levels of computer literacy. They are exposed to the use of spread-sheets, particularly to maintain and process data on student performance.

The Research Module (i.e. Module VIII) is designed to develop research skill. Participants are required to write a research proposal and it has to be presented to a panel of senior academics. The module introduces research techniques and methods, performing a literature survey, concept mapping, and proposal writing.

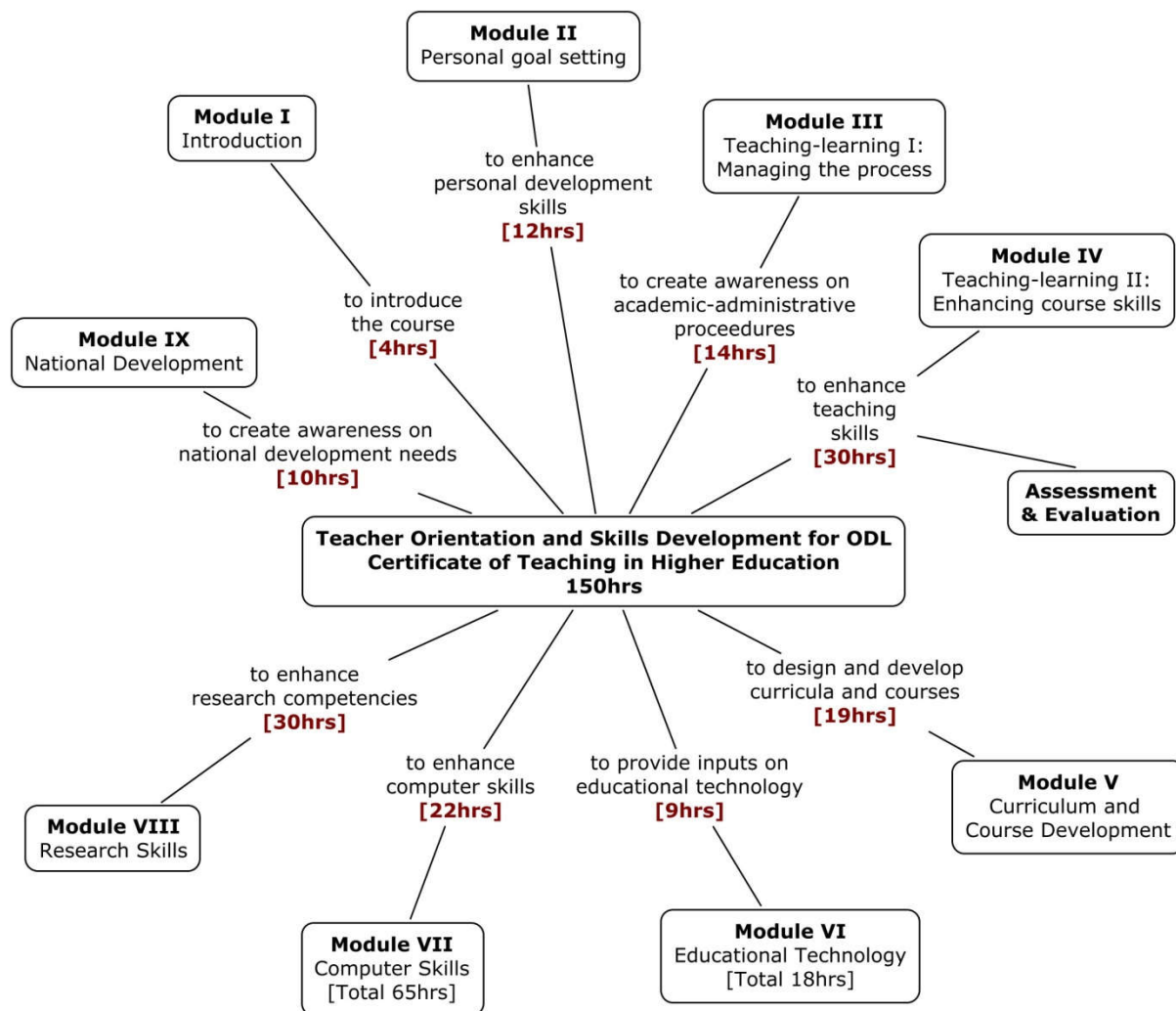


Figure 1: The structure of the CTHE course.

The National Development Module (Module IX) focuses on current socio-economic and environmental issues and higher education related issues. The resource persons present their views on the topic during the first half and the participants discuss, analyse and present their views in small groups.

The SDC at OUSL has felt the need to reduce the number of interactive sessions and to utilise the VLE effectively. It also hopes to invite a panel of experts this year to review the course, thereby to improve its quality and efficiency.

by Dr Prasanna Ratnaweera - 21 March 2017

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