On the CONFERENCE THEME: *"Giving students a voice: evidence to have facilitated student voice generation through teaching"*

Good morning and welcome to all friends, well-wishers, colleagues from IIT and from other institutions.

It is a very pleasant task to talk to you today on the conference theme, *"Giving students a voice: evidence to have facilitated student voice generation through teaching"*. This is because finding ways to improve student learning and engagement are areas of challenge that interest all of us, as well as both parties that have come together to bring us here today (*viz*, the Informatics Institute of Technology, IIT and the Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness, SLAIHEE). The Conference Theme related to "Student Voice Generation" is one major method to improve student learning and which should therefore become part of teaching in ways that will closely accompany student learning. Your interest in this theme is therefore strongly supported. I thank the Organisers for putting together today's programme and for inviting me to deliver this Keynote address.

Let me point out, at first, that there are two closely related events that take place today. One event is, of course, this SLAIHEE Higher Education (HE) Conference, now in in its 20th year as the only HE Conference in Sri Lanka. The other is the inauguration of the IIT Academy, through which we attempt to facilitate the effectiveness of student learning through several activities. To reflect this array of planned activities, this academy was named as the "Academy for Learning and Teaching Effectiveness Facilitation" (ALTEF). One activity of the Academy is (as the Chief Guest, Mr Mohan Fernando, IIT's Group CEO ably indicated) collaborating with like-minded entities in Sri Lanka (e.g., SLAIHEE) as well as overseas (e.g., Advance Higher Education, UK), both of which we have already commenced.

I must at the outset mention and thank everyone at IIT, specially the CEO Mohan and COO Mr Welihinda, for the unstinted support I have been continuously receiving to initiate and more importantly, to sustain, the Vison and Goals of ALTEF, that I briefly indicated earlier.

If we are to go ahead and improve HE students, for them to step out confidently into the wide world around them and to change it, we need to invest our time and change management strategies in their development. We need not only to trust that they are capable of becoming productive citizens of this world, our world, but need to "give them the voice and the tools" to do so. Without such a mindset change in us, as their teachers, we fail at the very start itself and can lull ourselves to blame our students.

So, in my talk today, I will look at this "blame-the-student" aspect also, and mechanisms how we change this mindset. In this manner, my talk will highlight a few key points:

> (i) The importance of Voice in Empowerment ...Belongingness ... Identity; (ii)
> Use of Voice as a tool in Learning & Teaching (L&T) – to impress or suppress
> and to evaluate, assist, empower; (iii) use of Possible Methods... to do so and
> related Concepts / Theories that can bring the student to centre-stage; (iv)
> the Role of the Academy @ IIT to do so.

We all teach others, such as teaching a 'Course' as a lecturer or teaching a "performative act" as an administrator or teaching informally as a parent or as a critical friend and so on. Whatever this teaching is, it is meant to make "learning" to take place, where learning is broadly an 'act' (in the

three 'Learning Domains') that our learners can perform, which they could not perform prior to our teaching.

Let us examine a 'Course' that you are given and asked to teach your students. Traditionally, in designing and delivering such a course, the "content" of the course and other administrative aspects were considered as its most important components, and therefore came to be placed at its top or apex. As that thinking tradition did not result in the intended "learning" in our students, other concepts emerged to replace it. This replacement has been in keeping with quotes ascribed to Einstein, such as "*Learning is Experience. Everything else is Information*" and "*I don't lecture, I create an environment for them to learn*".

Thus, creating appropriate learner experiences assumed importance, to generate belongingness, motivation and engagement, and in turn leading to students achieving the Academic Development Outcomes. This rewired mindset made course design & delivery to turn 'downside up' its content-focussed pyramid, so that the students occupied its apex. This brought about a radical shift from the traditional "content learning" by students to the learning of "Skills" as performances (such as the 4C's of the 21st Century skills). This outcomes-based approach to student learning (acronym: OBASL, OBE), first propounded by Dr Spady in 1988, is a deep concept that can use relevant methods and procedures to bring Student Centred Learning (SCL) and its associated student experiences to the fore.

The 'concept' of SCL, to bring students to the fore, is laudable and transformative. But as we see in column 1 of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, 'concepts' can remain without being implemented – *i.e*., if stepwise 'Procedures' to enact concepts remain unplanned and unimplemented. This unfortunately is the case in most teaching.

So, let us examine how far has this conceptual change, in thinking, can progress and examples of such progress. To do so, a look at the UK HE scenario would be helpful.

In the UK, the 'regulator' of HE was HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England), a body similar to the UGC in Sri Lanka. Recognising that it is the student that should be given pride of place in HE, in 2018, the role and name of HEFCE was changed and became known as the "Office for Students", giving teeth to the conceptual or mindset change to bring the *student voice* to the fore. This renaming of a HE regulatory body at national level in the UK cannot come about easily. I leave it to you to consider and compare the situation in Sri Lanka for such a change and the possibilities that can emerge. Many universities of the developed countries have also put into place university level changes to generate *student voice*.

Having shown you how a country can implement Concepts to Procedures *(sensu* Bloom's Revised taxonomy) with broad nomenclature and functional changes, unless these are translated to actions at the classroom level, everyday practices will remain unchanged. Therefore, next, let me change my talk to examine procedures at a classroom level and how the student voice can be marshalled to give its rightful place.

Let us look at the pyramidal diagram of "Dale's Cone'. Here, you can easily see that if student learning is to progress to levels that will invest and empower them with being able to "do" tasks such as to use skills in practical settings, they need to recall and practice such once-learnt skills. Dale's Cone shows that students need to be given 'doing experiences' for knowledge to become realistic 'doable' skills. While learning in this way with students practicing these skill development activities in class, skill performance deficits are bound to occur as part of their learning 'mistakes'. While remedying these deficits through feedback is the most powerful method (shown by Hattie,

2009 - table), the essential first step in this remedying procedure is to find-out these deficits - and the easiest way to do so is to ask students 'to voice' what their learning deficits could be, such as unclear points.

Therefore, the use of *student voice* comprises a most powerful tool in order to make students skilled and empower them with a sense of belongingness and self-identity that is valued as motivating them to become engaged in class. Let us remember that students not being engaged is the most common complaint that teachers have in blaming their students. If you relate this to your own workplace setting, this employee motivation is also a common problem and can be rectified to an extent through appropriately designed voicing opportunities. In our personal lives also, the significant role that *voicing* can play for relationship building is also not different, whether it is relationship building with our spouses, our own children or our friends. Rarely, however, do we use *voicing* as a tool to do so. At a national level too, we have seen how the popular 'voicing' in Sri Lanka that started spontaneously to result in the 'Aragalaya' (*Struggle*). We all saw how this 'voicing' movement led to the recent peaceful ousting of the then country's President.

Such can be the power of 'voicing'.

Stepping back to the classroom setting, we know from the Constructive Alignment Model for curriculum design, and from the 3 P Model, that appropriately designed classroom Teaching-Learning Activities (TLA's) form the backbone whereby students are given voicing and development opportunities and learning experiences. Incorporating such student-voicing TLA's would also shift the teacher from the classical 'Blame the Student' behaviour stage to a stage where the teacher develops to become a skilled teacher (*sensu* Biggs' Levels of Teaching).

For a teacher to develop in this way, we can see from the graphical representation how student attention span decreases after 15 to 20 minutes of traditional teaching and how this dwindling attention can be restored by TLA's that give student voicing opportunities.

Student voicing opportunities are therefore potent tools. For example, students can become proficient in the 9 steps of the scientific method procedure when given voicing opportunities.

These skill-empowering voicing opportunities can be simple methods such as the Minute Paper, Think-Pair-Share and Gapped Handouts. With more (re)training of teachers, you can see that there exist a range of more complex student-voice generating methods that teachers can come to use, which would help develop students as self-regulated learners and life-long learners capable of becoming responsible productive citizens. In the USA, for example, academic staff have banded together (CASEL) so as to enrich students with social emotional skills that step through self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, social relationship building and responsible decision making. This is because US academics now consider that content knowledge, on its own, is insufficient.

As with modifying our learning environment with TLA's, you can see from the picture that physically modifying the classroom environment is also possible. Even so, the prime mover to make learning more effective and meaningful will remain with the generation of voicing opportunities to our students. One principal role of the Academy@IIT is, therefore, to show our staff the effectiveness of student-voicing opportunities and to motivate our staff to use this as a tool to become excellent teachers.

May I finally thank you for being here and I hope you have a good conference, a good follow-up workshop and wish you all good luck in improving yourself and your students.