Challenges
in Sustaining Best Practices
in Higher Education

Conference on Higher Education
in Sri Lanka

Jointly organized by

Staff Development Centre (SDC)

University of Colombo

and

Sri Lanka Association for Improving
Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE)

Monday 5th April 2010

9 am to 4.30 pm

Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Colombo

6th Joint SDC – SLAIHEE Conference 2010

Challenges in sustaining best practices in higher education

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Message from the Executive Committee of SLAIHEE and the conference organizing committee

We are pleased to welcome all the participants to the 6th Joint SDC – SLAIHEE conference and wish you all a very productive and effective learning experience. The SDC and SLAIHEE are both committed to improving life skills and performance capabilities of university teachers and students. SLAIHEE embodies the vision of transforming higher education in Sri Lanka to empower individuals to become socially effective as productive, accountable and caring citizens.

We are honoured to have with us today the Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, Prof. Kshanika Hirimburegama, who continues to strengthen and support SLAIHEE in all its endeavours.
Our Chief Guest today is Prof. PL Ariyananda, Professor of Medicine, University of Ruhuna whose main interest apart from Medicine is medical education and staff development. He was the pioneer in the Faculty of Medicine to establish the Medical Education and Staff Development Centre and was the first Director of the Staff Development Centre in the University of Ruhuna.

We are indeed very fortunate and honoured to have with us someone who is known to all of us in staff development; Dr. Suki Ekaratane. He is the pioneer who almost single handedly initiated SLAIHEE way back in 2004-2005. and whose vision we hope has become a reality in SLAIHEE. He has been the continuing source of encouragement to the ExCo and its membership. Not only has he timed his visit to coincide with the conference but has also consented to do a workshop for the participants in the afternoon today.
The theme of the conference "Challenges in sustaining best practices in higher education" is applicable to many of us who continuously struggle uphill to sustain good practices that we have adopted over the years. It is the intrinsic motivation resulting in reflection and reflective practice that each of us need to cultivate and should be the driving force to sustain best practices. We should not be solely dependent on extrinsic forces such as quality assurance, accreditation, excellence awards etc.

Several university academics will present papers at today's conference. The abstracts have been peer-reviewed, and were invited on the stated conference theme based on experiences which are supported with evidence. We congratulate our presenters for believing that they are committed to evidence based improvement of higher education in Sri Lanka. Abstracts of previous conferences could be viewed at the SLAIHEE website. (www.slaihee.org)

The SDC and SLAIHEE would like to extend their thanks to our reviewers for the efficient work put in during review of abstracts. The former Acting Director of the SDC and her staff needs special mention and acknowledgement for all the work done behind the scenes. We also extend our thanks to the Dean, SAR and staff of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and SAR, General Administration for their ready support in lending their facilities, to make this event a success.

Enoka Corea   *Shrinika Weerakoon*   *Nilukshi Abeyasinghe*   *Nelun de Silva*
Prasanna Ratnaweera   *Krishantha Fedricks*   *Preethi Randeniya*   *Hasitha Pathirana*
Kandaiah Sriganesh   *Anton Arulraja*   *Vasantha Devasiri*

Programme

8. 30 am	– Registration

<u>Session 1</u>

9 am	- Welcome by Prof. Nelun de Silva, President SLAIHEE
9.10 am	- Address by Prof. Kshanika Hirimburegama, Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo.
9.20 am	- Address by Dr. Suki Ekaratne , Guest of Honour
9.30 am	- Keynote Address by Prof. PL Ariyananda, Professor of Medicine, University of Ruhuna
10.00 am	- Vote of Thanks by Shrinika Weerakoon, Acting Director, SDC, University of Colombo
10.10 am	Tea

<u>Session 2</u>

10.30 am	- Presentation of scientific papers: parallel sessions in halls A and B
12.30 pm	- Annual General Meeting of SLAIHEE (for registered members only)
1.30 pm	- Lunch – Old Board room
2.00 – 4.15 pm	- Workshop "**Managing Change to ensure sustainability of Best Practices in Higher Education**" by Dr. Suki Ekaratne in SDC seminar room (for conference participants - pre-registration required)
4.15-4.30	– Workshop Closure & Tea

List of Abstracts

Time	Hall A	Hall B
	Chairpersons	
	Nilukshi Abeysinghe *Krishantha Fedricks*	*Preethi Randeniya* *Hasitha Pathirana*
10.30 - 10.45 am	**P 1 A** **Using Pyramiding to Promote Active Participation of the First Year Medical Students in Small Group Discussions** *D Dissanayake*, P Atapattu* Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo	**P 1 B** **Using Teaching Learning Methods as Formative Assessments and Vice Versa** *P. P. Nanayakkarawasam**, Allied Health Sciences Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo
10.45 – 11 am	**P 2 A** **Enhance Self Directed Learning Skills in Higher Education through Constructive Guiding** *Nisanka Kusumsiri** Department of Textile and Clothing Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Moratuwa.	**P 2 B** **Use of Weblogs in My Teaching as a Knowledge Management Tool** *M.C. Mohamed Zakeel** Department of Plant Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura.
11 – 11.15 am	**P 3 A** **Demonstration Teaching as a Strategy to Promote Best Practices in Higher Education: CTHE** *Shrinika Weerakoon** Staff Development Centre, University of Colombo, Colombo 3	**P 3 B** **Confidence Building is Central to English Language Teaching.** *Asantha U. Attanayake**,ELTU, University of Colombo
11.15 – 11.30 am	**P 4 A** **Transforming Undergraduates in to Lifelong Learners through Information Literacy: with Special Reference to First Year Undergraduates of the Faculty of Law** *P. Wijetunge*, .K.S. Manatunge,* Main Library, University of Colombo, Colombo 03 *P. Wijetunge*, .K.S. Manatunge,* Main Library, University of Colombo, Colombo 03	**P 4 B** **Challenges in Sustaining Scholarly Teaching for Higher Education Development in Information-rich and Scarce Country Settings** *Suki Ekaratne** University of Bath, UK
11.30 – 11.45 am	**P 5 A** **A Study on Problems related to Learning and Recommended Solutions: First Year First Semester Students.** *A. Anton Arulrajah** Department of Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka	**P 5 B** **Sustaining Active Learning in an Online Learning Environment– Reflections in Offering Online Blended Course in Engineering.** *Bandunee C. Liyanage** Department of Civil Engineering, The Open University of Sri Lanka
11.45 – 12 noon	**P 6 A** **Students' Perspectives on the Educational Environment, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.** *E M Corea*, S A Wijeratne, D S Kirthinanda,* Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka	**P 6 B** **A Community-based Health Promotional Intervention: a Learning Experience of Medical Undergraduates in Sri Lanka** *Nalika Gunawardena*, Rohini de A Seneviratne, Dulitha Fernando, Upul Senarath, Kantha Lankathilake, Carukshi Arambepola, Shreenika Weliange, Arosha Wijewickrama,* Dept. of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo
12 – 12.15 pm	**P 7 A** **A Research on Absenteeism in Proficiency Courses in English Offered by English Language Teaching Units in Universities**. *Muditha Cooray**, English language Teaching Unit	**P 7 B** Game-based Learning in Engineering Education in Sri Lanka. *S.J. Sooriyaarachchi** Vishaka Nanayakkara Department of Computer Science and Engineering University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
12.15 – 12.30 pm	**P 8 A** **Effectiveness of a Midterm "Re-Orientation" Activity for Students** *G.L.R.S. Perera*, K.A.G. de Abrew, I.M. Karunathilake, D.R. Jayasinghe*, Allied Health Sciences Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo	

*presenter

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ABSTRACTS

P 1 A

Using Pyramiding to Promote Active Participation of the First Year Medical Students in Small Group Discussions

D Dissanayake*, P Atapattu
Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo

Introduction

Traditional small group discussions (SGDs) occur in randomly selected groups of students. Most first-year medical students do not actively participate or contribute satisfactorily during Physiology SGDs. Pyramiding is a technique that promotes gradual development of confidence during group learning.

Aim

To examine 'pyramiding' as a tool to improve active participation in SGDs, in first-year medical students.

Method

Pyramiding was introduced by the principle author to two SGDs with 51 students in the following manner:

1) Explained pyramiding and stressed ground rules and timelines.

2) Advised students to individually underline keywords in a given question.

3) Advised to form pairs to identify important topics/ areas to be discussed and formulate a sketch/flowchart.

4) Grouped students into three small groups to formulate a group answer based on sketches/flowcharts.

5) Got all students together to discuss the answers.

6) Observed group behaviour during the process and obtained feedback via a questionnaire at the end.

7) Student feedback was analysed using MS Excel.

Results

Improved enthusiasm and active participation with minimal free-riding were observed in all students. Students appeared more confident to express their ideas during the final discussion. Student feedback revealed that 71% perceived pyramiding as an 'excellent' method for SGDs, whereas 27% found it to be a 'very good' method. Majority (96%) felt that working in pairs was very useful to develop the answer. 92% perceived that they actively participated in the SGD. All the respondents felt enthusiastic to learn more about the topic.

Conclusion

Pyramiding in SGDs develops confidence, promotes active participation and facilitates deep learning among first year medical students. One limitation is the time taken for successive steps which requires good time management skills both in the tutor and the participants Effectiveness of pyramiding compared to traditional methods could be assessed by performing a larger scale comparative study.

P 2 A

Enhance Self Directed Learning Skills in Higher Education through Constructive Guiding

Nisanka Kusumsiri* Department of Textile and Clothing Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Moratuwa.

Students making the transition to higher education from secondary education encounter many changes and adjustments. Majority of the lecturers and the students agree that one of the main reasons for poor academic performance among many university students, especially among new students, is that they are not used to the different way that teaching and learning is carried out in the university, in which self directed learning plays a major role. However, limited surveys have been conducted among the university students in Sri Lankan universities to identify their views, problems and requirements in self directed learning.

Therefore, this survey was conducted in order to identify students' views, problems and requirements in self directed learning. Year 1 and year 2 students of Fashion Design and Product Development (FDPD) degree of University of Moratuwa were chosen for the survey. FDPD degree is totally based on project based learning where all the subjects taught/learnt are integrated to specific project/projects.

The survey was a combination of qualitative and quantitative aspects and a questionnaire was designed to identify students' views, problems and requirements in self directed learning.

All the students mentioned that self directed study is helpful in the learning process similar to lectures. 71% said self directed learning is a very helpful concept. However, around 50% were of the opinion that self directed study time is wasted because of the ineffective practices in self directed learning.

Most critical problems the students have in self directed learning are that they do not know how to prioritize the work in self directed study time (34%) and they find difficulties in identifying specific tasks that they have to accomplish in self directed studies. (34%)

97% of the students think that they need guidance in self directed learning. The most important requirements were guidance from the tutors to manage time and prioritize the work in self directed learning (39%) and guidance to identify specific tasks needed to be accomplished in an identified self directed study time slot (34%).

Conclusion and further suggestions:

All the students think that self directed study is important as a learning tool. The majority think that they need guidance from the lectures in the form of identifying and prioritizing the goals at a higher level, managing them and finding solutions for the problems they face in self directed learning.

P 3 A

Demonstration Teaching as a Strategy to Promote Best Practices in Higher Education: CTHE

Shrinika Weerakoon Staff Development Centre,
University of Colombo, Colombo 3.

Getting the lecturers to adopt best practices in teaching by changing their existing teaching practices is a challenge, as people usually resist change. In order to change teaching practices into desirable or best practices "Demonstration Teaching" has been identified as an effective teaching method (Joyce & Betty, 1987). This study looked at, through course participants' reflections, whether demonstration teaching practiced in CTHE had been influential in changing teaching practices of the course participants, during the CTHE course.

Data collected from a sample of lecturers (n=54) who have completed the CTHE course showed that they (100%) have changed their teaching practices while following the course. Different teaching practices had been adopted by those lecturers, as they selected the teaching

practices to adopt from the teaching practices demonstrated in the CTHE. A comparison of the teaching practices adopted during the CTHE course showed the participants' preference to select teaching methods that they can 'apply' (*sensu* Bloom *et al* 1956) into their teaching practices (*e.g.* 100% adopting Small Group Discussions (SGD) demonstrated in CTHE) over 'synthesize' (*sensu* Bloom *et al* 1956) of two or more teaching methods demonstrated (*e.g.* 2% getting students to design 'lesson plans' with 'intended learning outcomes' for their respective SGD and thereby letting the students to take the responsibility of their learning). However, during the course, their preference to adopt teaching practices changed from those at the multi structural level to the relational level and beyond (*sensu* Biggs, 1999). The course participants (100%) expressed confidence in adopting new teaching methods they have experienced through demonstration teaching, but only 93% of the respondents were confident to adopt a teaching method demonstrated in literature which they only have 'procedural knowledge' (*sensu* Biggs, 1999). Adopting of best practices through demonstration teaching in CTHE will be explained further in the presentation.

P 4 A

Transforming Undergraduates in to Lifelong Learners through Information Literacy: with Special Reference to First Year Undergraduates of the Faculty of Law

P. Wijetunge, .K.*S. Manatunge,* Main Library, University of Colombo, Colombo 03

Due to the variations in the prior learning environments, the new undergraduates lack skills in surviving in the university's information environment. A pre test consisting of main elements related to information usage carried out with 250 first year undergraduates in 2010 proved that the average marks they could gain was 10 out of 30. This confirmed the need for goal directed guidance from the library than the customary library tour to enhance their academic skills.

The researcher planned an information literacy programme consisting of nine topics. A common session for the entire group was held at the beginning and eight topics were delivered to five groups of students with 50 in a group, each group attended from 4.00 to 6.00 pm, four days of the week. The programme was conducted throughout five weeks and at the end a post test was held. The average mark increased from 77 to 90 per cent across the groups.

The original plan was to introduce the topics across several weeks so that the students complete an assignment with ample time to develop the competencies. This could not be implemented due to time limitations. Hence the programme was offered as demonstrations and hands on sessions.

Ten aspects out of eleven related to the administration and content of the programme received positive feedback from the students in varying percentages from 74-95. Negative feedback was given on the time slot allocated for the programme. Feedback also suggested that the programme should be compulsory for the second, third and fourth years and other faculties too.

The researcher identified the allocated time slot and the requirement to complete the programme in one week duration, variations in students' previous learning, non assessment of the outcome, other events which clashed with the programmes, as challenges to be addressed in future programmes.

P 5 A

A Study on Problems related to Learning and Recommended Solutions: First Year First Semester Students.

A. Anton Arulrajah Department of Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka

The objectives of this paper were to explore the learning related problems encountered by the first year first semester students and to suggest appropriate solutions to the identified problems in order to facilitate their learning. The study was conducted among the 130 first year students of the Faculty of Commerce and Management of Eastern University, Sri Lanka regarding learning related problems which were encountered by them during the first 3 months in their University life. The results of the study revealed that:

100 % of the students revealed that medium of instruction in English were the major problem they are encountering in their learning process.

84 % of the students revealed that teaching practices of lecturers' as another major issue in their learning process.

Other problems identified were personal problems in managing change (32%), financial problems (31%), course administration and management (29%), long distance from their home and travelling (22 %), pattern/way of learning (19%), time management (16%), disturbance from their peers and seniors (15%), and poor library facilities.

To address the above problems/issues, the researcher has suggested and implemented some best practices as solutions. They were: getting feedback from the students before or end of mid semester period; communicate

findings with peer lecturers and students' counselors, heads of the departments, and other relevant stakeholders; small group based teaching; sharing experiences of some successful students with first year students; giving lecture breaks; conducting special seminars on self management, attitude changes, team working, change management and time management; exploring the importance of English language in their life, support or motivate students by providing course or subject specific advices were some of the practices implemented in order to orient and direct the first year students in their studies in addition to the teaching.

The problems highlighted through this study are useful to all the academic staff and other relevant stakeholders in improving their roles in the future.

P 6 A
Students' Perspectives on the Educational Environment, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.

E M Corea, S A Wijeratne, D S Kirthinanda,* Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Background:
The educational environment is an important determinant of student behaviour. The Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM) has been validated and found to be reliable. Our objective was to assess how students of the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo experienced their educational environment.

Sampling and methods:
The DREEM questionnaire was administered to 544 medical students belonging to the three main phases of the course; IBSS (Introductory Basic Sciences) n=196(36%), ASS (Applied Sciences) n=162(29.8%) and Final Year n=186(34.2%). The total mean DREEM scores and mean scores for the five subscales [students' perceptions of the atmosphere (SPA), students' perceptions of learning (SPL), students' social self-perceptions (SSP), students' perceptions of teachers (SPT) and students' academic self-perceptions (SAP)] for each of the subgroups was calculated and data was analysed to determine significant trends.

Results:
The overall mean DREEM score was 123.5/200 which falls into the category "more positive than negative" according to the DREEM rating scale. The final year score was the lowest at 99.09 (SD=21.73), ASS scored the highest at 158.71 (SD=19.94) with the IBSS scoring 118.55 (SD=17.03) (p<0.05). For each domain the DREEM score of the final year students was the lowest while ASS students had the highest score with the IBS students falling in between (p<0.05). Except for few statements, there was no significant difference between males and females on overall DREEM score or its main domains.

This observation may reflect examination stress and work load associated with final year learning and the emphasis on factual learning in the first phase of the medical curriculum making the environment less interesting.

Discussion:

These results clearly indicate areas of concern for each of the five domains addressed by DREEM, particularly in the IBSS and Final year. Further analysis of each of these domains should initiate strategic planning in order to institute solutions to improve the educational environment of the institution.

P 7 A
A Research on Absenteeism in Proficiency Courses in English Offered by English Language Teaching Units in Universities.

Muditha Cooray*, English language Teaching Unit

Absenteeism has become a burning issue in relation to the students' attendance of ELTU courses. It has been observed that students' attendance in Proficiency Courses in English offered by English Language Teaching Units(ELTUs) is deteriorating specially in the Faculties of Arts, Management and Law.

This study was an attempt to investigate the linguistic and non linguistic reasons pertaining to poor attendance. It was conducted with a special focus to the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo. The first year and second year level 1 and level 2 students were selected as the sample of the study as it has been observed approximately 75% of them have not attended English classes. In conducting this research, students' attendance registers were analyzed. Questionnaires were administered. Interviews and group discussions were conducted. Chi-square test of independence was applied.

Inconvenient timetables, the load of work in the main subjects and the professional subjects, unsatisfactory classroom conditions, traditional teaching methods and outdated lesson materials were identified as notable factors that affect attendance. The p value of all the test scores was below 0.05(level of significance) in the Chi-square test of independence. This implied that attendance and performance are not independent variables.

In remedying the problem the ELTU restructured their programme offering credit earning courses. The students were rewarded for satisfactory attendance. Lesson materials were revised. Prime hours were given for English lectures. The pass mark was increased. These remedial measures have improved the first year attendance up to 70% in the first semester of the academic year 2009/2010. However the problem of absenteeism of the second year students has not been addressed yet.

Creating a welcoming environment to the absentees, giving them additional take home assignments, marking their homework regularly and arranging a relief teacher when a particular teacher gets absent can be suggested as further recommendations.

P 8 A

Effectiveness of a Midterm "Re-Orientation" Activity for Students

G.L.R.S. Perera*, K.A.G. de Abrew, I.M. Karunathilake, D.R. Jayasinghe, Allied Health Sciences Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

Introduction:

In a student centered course, students would benefit from a "re-orientation" on the academic programme at regular intervals. This would provide them with insights that would help in making adjustments to their learning activities and will improve awareness of the components of the curriculum. Hence a "re-orientation" activity was conducted for the 1st year students following a BSc. degree in Physiotherapy at the University of Colombo, to improve student perceptions regarding the course.

Method:

A "re-orientation" activity was designed to give feedback to the students regarding the effects of teaching/learning activities of the course with emphasis on 3 broad domains: personal development and awareness, perceptions of the curriculum and use of learning resources. It also included a question and answer session where students were able to clarify their concerns. To assess the activity, a fifteen item self-administered questionnaire was developed addressing the domains discussed, and was administered immediately before and after the timetabled "re-orientation" activity. Responses were analysed electronically and the Wilcoxen signed rank test was used for statistical significance testing.

Results:

30 students retuned completed pre- and post-activity questionnaires. There was a significant increase in the average scores from pre test to post test ($p < 0.001$). Analysis of different domains showed a significant improvement in scores in all 3 domains with a percentage increase in scores by 35.87% (personal development and awareness), 36.06% (perceptions of the curriculum) and 41.62% (use of learning resources).

Conclusion:

There was a significant improvement in positive perceptions among the students following the midterm re-orientation activity. Repeated inputs to students regarding their teaching/learning methods and resource utilization are recommended throughout the course.

P 1 B

Using Teaching Learning Methods as Formative Assessments and Vice Versa.

P. P. Nanayakkarawasam*, Allied Health Sciences Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

Introduction:

BSc Physiotherapy course consists of 32 modules in 5 parallel streams where 25 examinations are included. Most of these examination methods allow the students to be superficial learners. Therefore, formative assessments were included at the end of each module in the Applied Physiotherapy stream as a teaching learning session. Performance assessments which assess deep learner strategies were selected.

An evaluation was done at the end of the stream aiming to find the perception of students and teachers about these assessments or teaching-learning session.

Method:

A questionnaire was administered to 27 students of the first batch and the physiotherapy lecturers were requested for their observations.

Results:

All 27 students returned questionnaires. Majority of students agreed that these assessments improved their subject knowledge (92.6%), clinical practice skills (70.4%), and generic skills (96.3%). However, these assessments had caused additional stress to 85.2% students and financial burden to 88.9% students. In a descended order, students preferred case presentations, poster presentations, reflective writing and assignments. In addition, the majority of students preferred doing individual presentations than group presentations. Most of the students (78%) felt these assessments assist them to become good Physiotherapists and 89% recommended continuation of this method. Seventeen students proposed other methods and the most frequent request was for tutorials. Twenty students requested to take some marks from these assessments to the final cumulative marks.

It was found from the observations of teachers that shortage of physiotherapy lecturers was the only threat to continuing this method.

Conclusion:

The results suggest that knowledge and skills of students had been improved by this method but there is a challenge to continuing the method due to the shortage of physiotherapy lecturers.

P 2 B

Use of Weblogs in My Teaching as a Knowledge Management Tool.

M.C. Mohamed Zakeel* Department of Plant Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura.

At present, the major challenge in university teaching is helping students acquire both explicit and tacit knowledge (Kirk and Johnson, 2009). To become employable, graduates should possess an ability to integrate both explicit and tacit knowledge in the workplace (Asllani, et al., 2008).

Academic weblogs establish an electronic collaboration with teachers, peers, researchers and virtual experts and are useful for learning community formation, to find other competent people and to facilitate contact with researchers (Kirk and Johnson, 2009).

I experienced an issue in my undergraduate teaching that students' engagement in class discussion is very poor. I found that some students have problems in speaking in English although they can write very well in English. This also puts students away from communicating with me. Therefore, I wanted to find an efficient way to communicate with students and to engage students in conversation with me by getting the advantage of the students' strong point i.e. "can write very well in English" to overcome a weakness i.e. "lack of communication with the lecturer". Thus, I found weblogs to be effective tools for this purpose.

A community-focused weblog named Biotech, Microbiol and Genetics with an ULR of http://zakeel.blogspot.com was designed by having a blog at www.blogspot.com (e-blogger) as I teach mainly Biotechnology, Agricultural Microbiology as well as Genetics and Plant Breeding. This weblog was introduced to two different batches of students (one in co-programme and the other in majoring programme). This ULR address was also given to some selected outside researchers and academics in the same discipline to give comments for students' questions. Students' questions were routinely answered and a small questionnaire survey was also conducted to find the usefulness and accessibility of this utility. 94 students from both batches were subjected to this survey.

The results revealed that 92 students found this weblog to be useful for discussion. Further, it was fully accessible for 36 students where as moderately and less accessible for 31 and 17 respectively. It proved that students' communication became more effective by this step. Further, the results showed that about 57% of the students have problem for fully accessible for the blog and it may be due to lack of computer literacy of the students and however further study is needed to ensure the cause.

P 3 B

Confidence Building is Central to English Language Teaching.

Asantha U. Attanayake*,ELTU, University of Colombo

According to the findings of my research with 240 students of the three universities namely, Colombo, Sabaragamuwa and Jaffna, there was a clear desire to improve English speech among students. The reason for students to refrain from using English was lack of confidence. The course I planned had the aim of the coined result of the aforementioned issues: To build student confidence to learn English via speech. The course was planned with two theoretical underpinnings embedded in it: The Speech Act theory and the theory of BICS and CALPS. The teaching method used was the Cooperative Language Learning. The course was implemented to 475 new entrants to the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo in 2009. The course

ran for 3 weeks and at the end, teachers' views were taken to measure the new level of confidence in students to use English. Of the 21 teachers who taught in the programme, 95% agreed that the programme was successful. Sixty two per cent were of the view that student confidence level was highly improved while 24% believed it was somewhat improved. Ninety five per cent stated that student-teacher and student-student interaction levels were improved. As 90% stated, the special teaching methods used were suitable and effective. Only 10% stated that there was nothing special in the methods. According to 72%, course duration should be increased to one month or more.

The insights gained through these findings help evolve new approaches to English language teaching that are suitable to our country: building confidence via speech is crucial prior to teaching English to use it for other purposes. However, the resistance to the changes in the course such as not teaching reading and writing and giving detailed instructions to students in the materials were overcome by elaborated justifications made by the course planner.

P 4 B
Challenges in Sustaining Scholarly Teaching for Higher Education Development in Information-rich and Scarce Country Settings.

Suki Ekaratne* University of Bath, UK

Data from lecturers undergoing similar teacher training courses in a Developed and a Developing country revealed that university lecturers of information-rich Developed Country (IRDC) economies tended to underplay the importance of literature to sustain their teaching development practices compared with lecturers from information-scarce Developing Countries (ISDC).

Both IRDC and ISDC courses were mandatory, underpinned by similar outcomes and literature bases, facilitated by the same tutor/s and produced criterion--assessed work-based portfolios. Both groups possessed knowledge presages that were not largely divergent when scored using a Bloom's Taxonomy knowledge-assessment protocol (11% for IRDC; 17% for ISDC). A questionnaire-based survey evaluated lecturers' changing perceptions on importance of pedagogic literature to sustain their teaching practice using a 1 to 4 rating scale, with 4 being 'very important' and 1 as 'not important. At course commencement, the ISDC cohort (n=23) perceived literature importance at 2.5, increasing to 4 towards course completion, while in the IRDC cohort (n=26) rankings moved from 2.1 to 3.0 at course completion.

A junior staff group (n=98) within the Developed Country university, having a lower (6.1%) knowledge presage, followed a shorter intensive teacher training by the same tutor, where most of them were yet to undertake teaching. Based on responses to tutor's end-of-course offer of further pedagogic literature, two subgroups became recognizable. The first, actively seeking literature, expressed a need to invest more effort to improve teaching, contrasting with the larger subgroup expressing that pedagogy was superfluous to enhance their self-perceived already-improved teaching abilities. The former subgroup mostly originated from Developing Countries and the latter from information-rich Developed Countries. This finding supplemented to illustrate that perception differences on pedagogy importance were based beyond enhanced facilities within IRDCs (*e.g.* ease of information access) and requires exploring different domain challenges to formulate learner-accepted HE teaching development strategies in developed and developing countries.

P 5 B
Sustaining Active Learning in an Online Learning Environment– Reflections in Offering Online Blended Course in Engineering.

Bandunee C. Liyanage* Department of Civil Engineering, Open University of Sri Lanka

Student contact with academic coordinators/tutors appears to be a crucial factor in student motivation and persistence for active learning. When student numbers increase unexpectedly, providing equal attention is a task for sustaining student motivation, interaction, and collaborative learning. This was successfully encountered by offering an online blended course in online Learning Management System (LMS) in the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) for final year undergraduates in the Civil Engineering stream while maintaining quality and the pass rate. Environmental Engineering is a course designed with several practical components, offers for final year students in the Bachelor of Engineering Technology programme. Due to revision of prerequisites, number of students registered for the course in 2009 was 67, which were 35 in 2008. In engineering, it is needed to gain the knowledge by study, experience and practice, which is to be applied with judgment. Hence the online environment was created using the LMS at OUSL focusing attention to interaction: with contents, with teacher and with other students as well as to gain experiences through practice.

Students were informed about online LMS through course information sheet and hands on experience on "how to use online LMS" was provided at the introductory session. The course was designed with navigation guide lines and students were asked to subscribe to discussion forums. During the course delivery, online teaching strategies were followed and attentiveness was demonstrated to keep student motivation.

The online environment allowed collaboration across time and location and it was seen from student's posts to the discussion forums. Since the students are scattered all over Sri Lanka, discussion forums in Moodle online environment provided them an opportunity to post their views, discuss, upload their live experiences, pictures on real situations, which ultimately enhanced active learning while working as an individual. This practice helped to raise eligible number notably, from 60% in 2008 to 75% in 2009.

Table 1. Students Online Contribution

Study Center	No of students		Number of posts to discussion forums
	Registered	Active	
Colombo	36	28	67
Kandy	13	12	50
Jaffna	03	03	09
Batticaloa	04	04	15
Rathnapura	04	03	03
Puttlam	01	01	01
Galle	02	01	02
Matara	03	03	04

However, about 17% of students did not participate actively in discussion forums neither uploaded assignments given. Hence, to promote active participation and for sustaining motivation, distribution of the work load among the students and assigning roles and responsibilities within the discussion area will be introduced in the future.

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A Community-based Health Promotional Intervention: a Learning Experience of Medical Undergraduates in Sri Lanka.

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Background

Community attachment programme of Colombo university medical curriculum has specified learning outcomes (LOs) to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills related to health promotion at community level. Achievement of these LOs has not been evaluated.

Objective

To describe student perception of achievement of LOs in a community attachment programme through community-based environmental health interventions on household waste management and to compare student perceptions with tutor assessed achievement of LOs.

Methodology

Specific learning objectives were given to students at commencement of attachment during a 1½-year attachment programme. At end of programme a self-administered questionnaire assessed achievement of each LO on a three point scale depicting level of achievement. Perception of achievement was also assigned a score and individual student scores were averaged to obtain a score for each LO for all students. Student group reports (n=14), were scored independently by three tutors using agreed upon descriptors as depicting extent of achievement. Scores of the three tutors for each LO were averaged to obtain a score for all students. Comparison of student perceptions with tutor assessed achievement of LOs was assessed using Spearman correlation coefficient.

Results

Student response rate was 78% (n=161/206). LOs perceived as achieved were: participatory needs assessment (51%-large extent; 48%-some extent); evaluating effectiveness (30%-large extent; 60%-some extent); developing communication skills (64%-large extent;34%-some extent); working in teams (50% large extent;43%-some extent); developing favourable attitudes towards leaning from community (39%-large extent;45%-some extent).

Correlation between achievement of LOs perceived by students and tutors was substantial (Spearman r=0.535).

Conclusion

Student reporting revealed that most of LOs have been achieved at least to some extent which was corroborated by tutors. Community-based learning can be used for teaching health promotion to medical undergraduates.

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Game-based Learning in Engineering Education in Sri Lanka.

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Gaming is becoming a popular means of entertainment for young generation in Sri Lanka. This entertainment with defined rules, objectives and outcomes together with challenge, imagination and interaction can be used to harness active student learning. We implemented game-based learning to encourage the students to develop robust and highly usable software. 'Treasure hunt' was our gaming environment. A batch of 100 students was provided with a game-server that gave information about an island with obstacles, pitfalls and randomly appearing treasures. The task for the students was to develop the client-software with their own imagination and logic to play against the server.

The game-based learning experience was a success with over 80% of student participation even though it was an extra-curricular activity that spanned across the vacation period. All the participants met the evaluation criteria satisfactorily scoring above 65%. The student-feedback proved that over 90% perceived that the Programming Competition improved their technical knowledge. Around 75% of the students believed that their creativity improved satisfactorily as a result of the Programming Competition. A high acceptance of the gaming approach was indicated by the fact that over 70% of the students marked preference for programming a game than a conventional software system. More than 90% of the students perceived that learning in the form of a game was more entertaining, interesting and effective than other academic activities. Similar percentage of the students also recommended that their juniors must definitely participate in the Programming Competition.

This game-based learning approach impressed the administration so that it could be included in the curriculum as 'Programming Challenge'. The industry was impressed enough to sponsor the event and volunteered as resource persons for technical sessions and conduct workshops to share required knowledge with the students. Game-based learning can effectively be used in engineering education in Sri Lanka with proper design and planning.

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