

Creating effective learning environments for the “Born Digital”: Exploring the process of establishing a Digital Humanities laboratory

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This paper follows the process adopted by the Department of English, University of Colombo in establishing Sri Lanka’s first Digital Humanities (DH) laboratory. The DH laboratory seeks to create pedagogical practices which support learner wellbeing by reflecting on how our students, who operate within multiple technological divides, engage with the digital. As Drucker (cited in Svensson, 2016) posits, no tool is neutral; thus, even the tool of technology must be approached with methodological and epistemic awareness. Although technology is being used in the teaching-learning process (e.g. blended learning), it is mostly as an instrument and fails to speak the language of our students from the Born Digital generation (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). In the Sri Lankan context, it is important to design pedagogical practices that contribute to creating effective learning environments. With the Born Digital generation of students, technology must be approached as a tool, a medium, as well as a subject (Svensson, 2016). The DH laboratory enables researchers to understand ways in which effective use of technology in the classroom can be reimaged. The paper identifies focus areas to be addressed in the DH laboratory, and analyses the policy level decisions taken in its creation, through an exploratory research design¹ and a critical pedagogical approach. This will enable the re-imagining of technology in the classroom, which will in turn inform pedagogical practices. The various activities conducted through the lab, such as digital performances, lab sessions, and reading sessions, require a policy for an ethical practice. The paper is part of an ongoing discussion that attempts to document the process of dynamic research in DH, specifically in setting up a DH lab in an institutional setting, where both the human subject and the technology are in a state of constant flux.

Keywords: *critical pedagogy, Digital Humanities, humanities laboratory, learning environments*

Acknowledgement: *This research was supported by the Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) Operation of the Ministry of Higher Education funded by the World Bank.*

¹ Exploratory studies are usually used when a researcher is breaking new ground, especially when working in a previously unexplored area. It is a source of grounded theory that provides new insights. Thus, this type of research design cannot be framed as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed, but borrows from multiple methodologies to create a methodology of its own (Babbie 2010).