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CONTENTS

Abstracts of Presentations made the the SDC/SLAIHEE Joint Conference, May 2009

1. **Using Small Group Activity to Promote Independent Student Learning Skills in First Year Law Students**
Naazima Kamardeen *page 2*
2. **Developing Assessment Criteria to Reflect the Mark Deserved by the Students at the Final Crit Assessment of Architectural Design Projects**
Anishka Hettiarachchi *page 3*
3. **Using Theatre Workshop Methodology as an Additional Resource to promote Oral Communication in English Classrooms**
K. Shriganeshan *page 4*
4. **Challenges in Online Learning: Case of a Private Institute**
Gayani Karunasena *page 5*
5. **Facing Challenges of E Learning Towards Better Learning**
T.C. Sandanayake *page 6*
6. **Role of the ELT Lecturer in the Psycho-Social and Economic Challenges of the Arts Faculty students, University of Colombo**
Savitri Dias *page 8*

Using Small Group Activity to Promote Independent Student Learning Skills in First Year Law Students

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First year students are considered incapable of learning on their own. This paper discusses the use of small group activity to enhance independent learning skills. In the subject of Legal Method, where the emphasis is on learning the skills that help one to have a successful legal career, small group learning was facilitated in a particular area of the syllabus. Students were informed that they would have to face many assignments in future that would depend on group work, and that learning how to do it in a non-threatening atmosphere would be useful to them. Since they had never done group work before, the first step was helping them to form groups and devise group rules dealing with punctuality, responsibility for work undertaken, punishment for failure to deliver on agreed obligations, and peer review opportunities.

Each group was given a different topic on which to research, and a date was set for presentation of the work. Presenters were asked to fill out self evaluation forms, while peer evaluation and evaluation by the teacher was also done. On analysis, 43% scored consistently high marks from all their peers, and from the tutor (6 “A” grades or more out of 8). Another 43% obtained a range of 3-6 “A” grades. 14% fared poorly, (more than one “D” grading). At a review session, it was found that the top 43% had adhered firmly to their rules. The next 43% had not been too organised in their group work. The last 14% admitted to poor group organisation.

Prior agreed rules can facilitate independent learning in small groups by providing a framework within which students can work. Although the finding has to be validated through further work of this nature, it indicates that small group activity can be used to promote independent learning skills in students.

Developing Assessment Criteria to Reflect the Mark Deserved by the Students at the Final Crit Assessment of Architectural Design Projects.

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It has always been a challenge in higher education to obtain the reliable final mark deserved by the students. In this regard, the design of the assessment criteria plays a vital role. Assessment criteria should necessarily be clear, simple, practical and provide a clear-cut cross section of the total skill profile to be displayed by the student. Further it should be friendly to the assessors enabling a clear, easy and impartial assessment.

Within this context the prevailing crit assessment sheet (**X**) of Bachelor of Architecture Level Four was found to have several challenges such as lesser number of components in the structure with long descriptions, uneven marking weightings and lack of certain essential skills to be tested, which affect the final mark of the students.

To develop a new criterion for future assessments, two samples (**M&R**) were designed and tested at the final crit assessment of Design Project Two. Both proposals had same simple, clear-cut criteria in common with 10 nos of components to be marked representing the total skill profile. Sample-**M** was based on marking of components which carried equal marking weightages. A rating system was introduced in sample-**R** of which each component had to be rated from 1-5 coming up to a total mark out of 50.

The proposals M & R were tested against existing crit sheet-**X** via assessing 8 students by 8 individual examiners and written feedback was obtained by filling a questionnaire.

Significantly, all eight examiners agreed upon the proposed criteria. Marking was preferred by six examiners (out of 8) over rating to reflect the assessment the student deserved. Marking was found to be more realistically reflecting the actual state of the students where rating was prone to give out a higher unrealistic mark thus was identified to be tricky in assessment.

Using Theatre Workshop Methodology as an Additional Resource to promote Oral Communication in English Classrooms

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Teaching English as a second language to undergraduates has become a difficult task in a context where students' national sentiments are high and the learning environment is very poor. Making them proficient in oral communication is a nightmare but it is essential for an undergraduate who aspires to become an employee in an English environment. The paper will confine to a study made in an undergraduate class in the Vavuniya Campus and present the results observed during the three-week workshop programme. It adopted the qualitative methodology, ethnographical in nature with participant observation and the researcher's intervention in teaching with informal interviews. Theatre has been an exciting medium and can be used to motivate students to engage them in communication. Students were involved in a theatre workshop in order to get rid of fear, shyness and inhibition. The subjects were put in contexts and were expected to speak unconsciously as characters with the teacher's initial language patterns used as functions of communication. They performed short plays in groups and wrote them as collective output. This is the main data the researcher used for analysis to see language development. The sentence structures, the vocabulary used and the contexts created were the basis for the analysis. Thus, their written versions of the skits (plays) produced in the workshop try to prove their ability of communicating in English. Students' diaries and the researcher's diary are the other sources of data. The language produced through the plays is evident that the students are capable enough to develop their own communicative skills when there is a need. The paper will present a detailed report of the workshop methodology as an additional resource to promote oral communication in English classrooms.

Challenges in Online Learning: Case of a Private Institute

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In recent years, the government has become increasingly eager to venture into the possibilities of online learning to deliver cost effective, easily accessible and ever-current education to all ages and social backgrounds, regardless of time, cost and geographical constraints. Further, It is observed that many public as well as private sector entities engaged in higher education are moving towards e-learning based educational systems motivated by the reasons such as better recognition gained in using state-of-the-art technology, higher student enrollment, convenience of course management, flexible process etc. Within this context, the Ministry of Education with the collaboration of the Asian Development Bank launched the Distance Education Partnership Program. As one of the key objectives of this project, public as well as private sector institutes engaged in the higher education sector gained opportunities to introduce their courses online. The Institute of Quantity Surveyors, Sri Lanka was also provided with an opportunity to offer an online course titled “Certificate Course in Quantity Surveying” which was considered as the single case study for identifying challenges in online learning. This paper will focus mainly on challenges that were encountered during the design, development and delivery stages of that online course, as a private partnership institute. Case study approach is used as the research methodology and semi structured interviews numbering ten experts and observations are used as the data collections techniques. Content analysis is used as the case analysis technique and results revealed the key challenges in online learning in perceptive in subject matter experts are the inadequate training received on online course deigning and delivering, time limitations where most individuals opt to be part-time or visiting-basis external lecturers and inadequate resources. Key challenge in online learning in perceptive in private institute is the identification of suitable qualified subject matter experts who could understand and grasp the concepts of e-learning., for both designing and delivering stages.

Facing Challenges of E Learning Towards Better Learning

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In the modern era of education, the rapid growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) leads to extremely dynamic changes in a variety of tools and technologies applied to the learning process. E learning has become an ubiquitous concept in the era of ICT education and has also been identified as a major mode of learning where learners are able to select the occasion, location and the phase of learning [1]. Recent research in higher education shows there is a greater incensement of e-learning courses compared to conventional educational programmes [2, 3]. Feedback is one of the key aspects of effective learning and learners' greatly value feedback due to getting the individual attention [4]. The conventional large scale face to face learning doesn't facilitate the learners much on providing feedback. One missing factor of such learning environment and e-learning is recognizing the learner behavior during the learning session. The facilitator must acknowledge the learners' positive and negative views on the method and the techniques of learning in any learning mode. The objective of this research study is to analyse the learner behavior in the e-learning mode and try to recognize the learner's preferences on different activities offered in e-learning. This research study has been tested with undergraduate students who follow a Bachelors Degree in Information Technology. The Moodle LMS was used to deliver the experimental material and a questionnaire survey has been carried out to analyze the learner behavior during the online session and the learner preferences on different learning styles. The results of the survey shows the learners prefer e-learning mode rather than other modes of learning. At the same time results shows that the learners would like to have a strong feedback system in e learning mode. Moreover, the results suggest that the facilitators must acknowledge the learner views and the different behavior in order to provide a better learning environment.

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Role of the ELT Lecturer in the Psycho-Social and Economic Challenges of the Arts Faculty students, University of Colombo

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A pass in two FNDE course units in English offered in the first year is compulsory for a general arts degree and a pass in Level 2 for a special degree, in the University of Colombo. This paper is a reflection of why about 5% of students failed to obtain this basic requirement within the course of their academic career. The objective was to identify the psycho-social and economic factors that contributed to this cause and demonstrate how these students were enabled to overcome them. The methodology adopted will be studying the case histories and questioning five of the students on the following categories:

Failed or not completed one or both FNDE units

1. In the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th year
2. After leaving university (earlier batches)
3. Not completed level two within the 4 years (which is necessary for special degree students)

According to the data obtained and analyzed, a lack of motivation due to many psycho-social and economic factors was identified. Some major factors being low attendance due to economic reasons (75%), psychological (20%), peer pressure and social issues (5%). These will be discussed in detail. When considering the lack of motivation of the students, it is obvious that they were lacking in the lower order needs mentioned in Maslow's Needs Theory. This theory together with how ELT lecturers should observe, monitor and encourage these students and provide these basic lower order needs where possible will be discussed. In order to help these students some changes in administration would be required. Any resistance to change at this stage will have to be overcome when implementing these changes.