

HIGHER EDUCATION INNOVATION AND RESEARCH APPLICATIONS (HEIRA)

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY, BANGALORE

Social Justice in Higher Education Initiative

Ford Pathways Programme – 3rd Annual Workshop for Faculty

Dates: December 8 and 9, 2011

The Pathways to Higher Education programme funded by Ford Foundation is currently a key project in the Social Justice initiative of the Higher Education Innovation and Research Applications (HEIRA) programme at CSCS. This pilot programme seeks to develop a Campus Diversity model in nine undergraduate colleges across three states (Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka) to enhance quality of access to higher education. The focus of this four year-programme is on skill-building for socially disadvantaged students, along with teacher training in curricular and pedagogic reform so as to ease the integration of these students into the mainstream. The programme is currently in its third year, and activities completed this year include a series of nine student workshops on effective communication, critical thinking and social change, and a workshop for faculty on curriculum reform and new pedagogic strategies.

The third annual workshop for faculty from the nine undergraduate colleges in this programme was held on December 8 and 9, 2011, at the CSCS premises in Bangalore. This was the third in a series of four annual workshops to be conducted as part of the research and training for faculty in the Pathways Programme. In continuation with the theme from last year, the workshop this time again looked at development of new pedagogic strategies and curricular innovation in the context of social justice and diversity. A total of 18 teachers, mostly from the Humanities/Social Sciences attended the workshop this year along with the regional resource persons who had helped facilitate the student workshops in the three states. The long-term objective of the programme is to create a larger network of undergraduate teachers, across disciplines, so many of the participants this year were new to programme. Apart from issues related to existing efforts to rethink methods of classroom teaching and reform curricula, a key point of discussion this year was the need for better assessment of teaching and learning in higher education. The new design of the Pathways programme and the campus activities to be undertaken this year also figured prominently in the discussions.

Day 1

The workshop commenced with a brief introduction to the work of HEIRA and the Pathways programme by Dr. Tejaswini Niranjana. She emphasized the need for institutions to focus more on 'quality of access' rather than access itself in order to effectively address the issue of social justice and diversity. The new design of the Pathways programme was then discussed at some length. Dr. Niranjana also spoke about the issues with the old design and the changes in the larger objectives of the programme which had necessitated this change – namely the need for more synergy among the different components of the project and the need to move beyond access and skill acquisition and foster critical thinking skills in students. Nishant Shah then spoke about the rationale behind the recently concluded student workshops, and the expectations from the campus projects to be conducted this year. He stressed on the idea that institutions need to be more sensitive to the students' understanding and experience of exclusion, and must provide an environment that will help them integrate better into the mainstream.

The next session titled 'Need for Curricular Reform and Innovation' began with a brief presentation by Dr. S.V Srinivas on the changing social composition of the undergraduate classroom. He looked at some of the changes that this part of the higher education sector has seen with reforms in policy, and the growing demand on colleges to increase strength, which also leads to increased diversity in student composition. While stressing that this is not specifically a problem of the humanities, he spoke about the need to transform these disciplines to meet the demands of a socially diverse classroom. Creating spaces within the college but outside the classroom, and equipping students with certain skills to meet the challenges of mainstream education could be some of the possible solutions.

Dr. Milind Wakankar then spoke about the importance of critical thinking in knowledge production. He stressed on the critical reflex, as something that comes before thinking or certain modes of behaviour, and whether such reflexes form part of a tradition inherited by students from their parents. The student's experiences, many of which are part of histories of silence need to be taken into account when we imagine new forms of curricula or indeed attempt to reform the existing one. The need to render the curriculum relevant to the needs of the student was also taken up by Maithreyi Mulupuru, who spoke at length about new curricular objectives. Maithreyi suggested the idea of bringing the notion of conflict into the classroom, to challenge traditional ways in which students would deal with a given problem. She also spoke about the need for the teacher to be aware of her own position and attempt to push her boundaries, and the importance of inculcating social justice issues in the curriculum.

The presentations were followed by a group discussion which brought to the fore several interesting questions from the teachers, specifically on curriculum change and methods of teaching. The group agreed that the role of the teacher needs to be re-defined today, given that students have increased access to learning resources outside the classroom. The teacher today therefore not only imparts knowledge but also as facilitates its creation. The notion of teaching conflict also generated several questions among the participants, especially with regard to the position occupied by the teacher when discussing sensitive issues like caste or terrorism. The group however agreed that it is important to create a learning environment that encourages curiosity and questioning among students, and fosters the ability to analyse different points of view. Another important point that came up was the issue of the perceived relevance of certain disciplines, namely the basic sciences, and whether the humanities and social sciences are under pressure to explicitly demonstrate their relevance in higher education today.

The third session titled 'Exploring the Potential of Curricular Innovation in the UG Space' began with initial inputs by Dr. Tejaswini Niranjana and Nishant Shah on some the curricular experiments conducted by HEIRA at the undergraduate level. Nishant spoke about the course conducted at Christ University in 2009 – 10 on digital classrooms and the learnings it generated on using different types of learning materials and the ways in which technology could be brought into the classroom. He further elaborated on the relevance of curricular reform in the context of an expanding and changing classroom, which is now also digital in some sense. Dr. Niranjana then described the work done by the Integrated Science initiative in attempting to create a dialogue between the natural and social sciences. She also gave a brief overview of the projects on integrated science education undertaken in collaboration with the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune and the Central University of Jharkhand. She further emphasized the need for new kinds of research, which ideally spans a gamut of subjects or disciplines, which would contribute to re-imagining curricula.

The teachers then shared their individual experiences of experimenting with curricular change and well as attempting to teach differently. A crucial point was about the need for the system to take into account the teacher's potential while designing curriculum, and whether teachers are also sufficiently aware of the

demands that certain kinds of courses make of them, and if they are prepared to meet them. Another important point that came up was the need to make curriculum as culturally relevant as possible, which also calls for a constant re-thinking of both structure and content of courses. The group also agreed that there is a need to create an environment where all kinds of knowledge is legitimized, and the curriculum needs to be flexible to ensure this.

The role of technology in bringing about a change in both teaching and learning was discussed once again. Nishant then spoke about the Digital Natives project at the Centre for Internet and Society, and the manner in which young people see themselves in a process of change. He also spoke about responsibility of the teacher in bringing about a change in the learning process, and whether this is to be assumed for each individual student. The discussion then concluded with the general opinion that while the problem of curricular change is a perpetual one, it may be more advisable to look at the classroom as the site for immediate intervention, through new modes of teaching.

Post-lunch, the participants were divided into small groups for a curriculum-building exercise. The task was to devise a module for a short-term certificate course, ideally of about 5 days duration, incorporating the ideas of social justice and diversity. The content, structure, framework and target group for the course was left to the choice of the participants. The exercise proved to be quite challenging given that the teachers were all from different disciplines, and it was difficult for them to narrow down on a common topic of interest and expertise. An initial problem faced by almost all groups was that they immediately moved on to the methodology of the course without addressing some of the larger abstract concerns about the curricular objectives. As a result it was difficult for them to address questions about why they had narrowed on a particular subject area, picked a particular target group, why the course would appeal to certain group of people and what would be its learning outcomes.

The discussion was followed by presentations and group reports, where each group presented the course that they had put together to the rest of the participants. As expected the groups only had a skeletal framework of the courses they had in mind, so it was decided that they would work on the courses again the next day during the group activity session. This was then followed by a short round of general discussion on the group activity.

The day ended with a meeting at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and a short interaction with the Director, Dr. Pankaj Chandra. He gave an overview of the work done by the institution in the last several decades in management education, their experiments in curriculum-building and teaching methods, inculcating a cross-disciplinary approach in teaching and research and individual experiences of teaching a diverse composition of students. He also spoke in general about the higher education sector including the growing presence of private players, the need for better governance and financing to sustain institutions, and emphasized need to encourage interdisciplinary research. This was followed a general discussion with the participants.

Day 2

The first session for the day was on 'Issues for a New Pedagogy', and it commenced with a presentation by Ashwin Kumar A.P on the social and linguistic barriers in the classroom. He spoke about the learning gap that is seen between certain students and the majority of the class, which is characterized primarily as a lack – both intellectual and cultural – and the ways in which this manifests itself in the classroom. This is mainly seen as a difficulty in expressing oneself in English, leading to a sense of alienation and therefore a lack of participation in the classroom. He therefore stressed the need for strong and relevant learning goals, which also take into account and circumvent social and linguistic barriers faced by certain students. He also added that while there is a paucity of learning materials, students also have difficulties in the using existing resources, and it is precisely these barriers that must be identified and removed.

Tejaswini Niranjana then spoke about the need to foster critical and analytical skills in students in order to meet such learning goals. She also demonstrated some of the methods by which this could be done by describing taxonomy of curricular objectives that teachers could use in their own classrooms. This included a sequence as follows: Factual knowledge – Comprehension – Application/Translation – Analysis – Synthesis – Judgement. This was followed by a brief presentation by Nishant Shah on the importance of student-driven learning. He spoke about the digital turn in teaching and the different forms it could take, and the role of peer - to - peer learning. Most importantly he stressed on the need to look at the classroom as a learning environment driven by the needs of the student, rather than the aim of the teacher.

The next session on 'New Teaching Resources for the UG Space' began with a presentation by Ashwin on a couple of the material production initiatives undertaken by HEIRA as part of its Gender and Regional Language Resource initiatives. He gave an overview of the Gender Studies reader in Malayalam developed by the Centre for Development Studies in Kerala, and the materials generated by the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University through their workshops on research methodology. He emphasized that material production initiatives should not only look at generating new resources but also try to examine at how they can be taught effectively. While developing resources in different languages is important, there is also a need to devise learning goals that are relevant and appropriate to the student's level.

Milind Wakankar then initiated a discussion on the problems of enhancing quality of access faced by institutions, mainly in the undergraduate sector. These issues are further aggravated by a lack of freedom to discuss them outside the classroom. How would re-thinking curricula and teaching methods address these issues became an important point of discussion. Milind also emphasized on the need to build the research capacity of institutions as an important step in thinking about these methods of reform. The three regional facilitators, Shrikant Botre (Maharashtra), Abhilash J (Kerala) and Tanveer Hasan (Karnataka) then shared their individual experiences of the students workshops they had been part of, and the problems they perceived as an impediment to student learning. The teachers also then pitched in with their own experiences of learning issues in the classroom, and their attempts to help students overcome these difficulties.

The third session for the day was on 'Innovative Teaching Methods, and it commenced with a presentation by S.V Srinivas on new methods of classroom teaching. He pointed out the increasing trend in the social sciences of using 'extra-curricular' material like pictures and videos as teaching aids, but was also skeptical of their relevance in the context of a socially and culturally diverse classroom. While using such materials is no doubt helpful, it is also crucial to teach students how to interpret and analyse them correctly. He therefore felt that it would be more ideal if students could be taught to use existing resources, however few they are, in the most effective manner as possible. Teachers also need to elicit

from the students their feedback on how a text has been taught, and more importantly what they would want to learn or be comfortable learning. Change of classroom space and use of creative assignments and presentations to enliven the learning ambience were other suggestions for innovative teaching in the classroom. Nishant then spoke about the use of digital media in teaching, and the difference between the 'digital' and the 'virtual'. The digital can be described as a paradigm of thinking and not merely as the use of tools and specific skills, which would be technology. The digital and the virtual would therefore need to go together in building an environment that is conducive to learning. Nishant also proposed that the idea of innovation and its relation to digitalization be examined more closely. Access to technology may have made digitalization a possibility, but the urgent need is for innovation that would help students to think of new ways to reach their own goals effectively.

Post-lunch, the teachers re-grouped once again for the activity session. This time the task was to devise new teaching methods for the course developed on Day 1. The resource people at the workshops also provided their inputs to the groups and helped them in devising the methodology for the courses that they had developed. The discussion was followed by presentations by the groups on the courses, but before that participants were asked to put down criteria for assessment of these courses as well. This included conditions such as appropriate identification of the target group, originality and creativity in course content, structure and resources used, sequencing of learning tasks and outcomes, clarity in curricular objectives, provision for feedback, assessment and course correction, and feasibility in actually teaching the course in a university or undergraduate college. The courses developed were all inter-disciplinary, and were an interesting mix in terms of their approach and structure. Group 1 worked on a four-day course on 'Creative Thinking Skills', with a focus on developing awareness about gender issues among undergraduate students. The course included components such presentations, games and a demographic study as part of the teaching methods, and continuous assessment as opposed to a single exam at the end of the course. The course was appreciated at large for its attempt to bring together several ideas and an interesting approach, but there was a lack of clarity on the objectives and focus, as well as an appropriate title. It was suggested that it may be better if the course could be broken up into multiple courses, each addressing a separate theme. Group 2 worked on a five-day workshop titled 'Transition from Innocence to Experience' for undergraduate teachers, aimed at sensitizing teachers about diversity and conflict in the classroom, to help synthesise different disciplines and to adopt a more contemporaneous approach to teaching. This course also used a combination of different themes and techniques such as group activities, exercises, games and varied texts to help teachers address issues they face in the classroom, as well as to develop innovative and interdisciplinary teaching methods. This course included a component on eliciting feedback from students on teaching. The course received positive feedback for attempting to make an intervention at the level of the teachers, and to pass on experience gained from teaching, but there was a little concern about the coherence of the objectives of the course, and it was felt that the course needed some precision in terms of methodology. The course developed by Group 3 was titled 'Perspectives in Agricultural Studies' and was aimed at a cross-section of undergraduate students. The objective was to provide the opportunity for a systematic study of agriculture, especially for students outside of the basic sciences, so that it would give them an idea of the subject and scope of the field. The group used a three-pronged approach of a) factual knowledge b) comprehension skills c) analysis and discussion, as well as different resources such as interviews, case-studies and comparative analysis. The course was appreciated for focusing on a subject like agriculture with an interdisciplinary approach, as well as the attention given to the sequencing of the structure. However, it was felt that the research potential of the field needed to be brought out more clearly, along with a focus on some of the current developments in the field, including agricultural management and research. Group 4 worked on a three and a half day workshop on study skills for academically weak students in the undergraduate space, specifically first generation learners. The objective was to enhance their learning capacities and help them integrate in the mainstream of college education, by developing

their skills through a number of hands-on sessions which included group activities and exercises like mind-mapping. The course received a fairly positive response, but it was felt that the target group needed to be better-defined and the method of selection of students should be appropriate. There was also some clarity required on the objectives of the course, skills provided and whether they would help build the competence of disadvantaged students to negotiate the challenges of formal education.

The presentations were followed by a round of general discussion, and the courses were roughly evaluated against the criteria for assessment collated in the beginning. While all the courses were appreciated for originality of approach and methodology, some of the problems highlighted were also helpful in placing in context the issues faced by students and teachers in higher education today.

The workshop ended with a concluding discussion on the key points discussed over the two days and the prospect of more interaction and discussions on these ideas over the next few months. Overall, the workshop was a useful exercise in bringing new faculty members into the programme and helping them interact with each other, and setting the pace for the programme in the next few months.

Participants from the Pathways Colleges

- SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mumbai: Ms. Rupal Vora & Ms. Archana Sanil
- St. Xavier's College, Mumbai: Ms. Rashmi Lee George & Ms. Girja Balan
- Ahmednagar College, Ahmednagar : Mr. B. Eshwar Gouda & Mr. A.Y Raikwad
- St. Aloysius College, Mangalore: Mr. George Rodrigues & Ms. Praveena Cardoza
- Vidhyavardhaka First Grade College, Mysore: Mr. Manoj Kumar & Mr. R. Arvind
- Dr. A V Baliga College of Arts and Science, Kumta: Mr. MG Hegde & Ms. Pratibha Bhat
- Farook College, Kozhikode: Mr. Habeeb C & Mr. Haris P
- Union Christian College, Aluva: Mr. Libu Alexander & Mr. Cijin Paul
- Newman College, Thodupuzha: Mr. Louis. J. Parathazham & Mr. Saju Abraham

Speakers/ Moderators and Discussants

- Abhilash J (Regional Facilitator -Kerala)
- Ashwin Kumar (Initiative Head – Regional Language Resources, HEIRA)
- Maithreyi Mulupuru (Research Associate, HEIRA)
- MG Hegde (Dept. of English, Dr. A.V Baliga College, Kumta)
- Milind Wakankar (Initiative Head -Social Justice in HE, HEIRA & Fellow, CSCS)
- Nishant Shah (Director – Research, Centre for Internet and Society)
- Shrikant Botre (Regional Facilitator – Maharashtra)
- S.V. Srinivas (Senior Fellow, CSCS & Lead Researcher, CIDASIA)
- Tanveer Hasan (Regional Facilitator – Karnataka)
- Tejaswini Niranjana (Senior Fellow, CSCS & Lead Researcher, HEIRA)

