

Cultural issues in the academic development of a new degree programme in Sri Lanka

ICED 2006 workshop

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1. Introduction

Pictures and brief outline.

What was happening in this engagement?

- Was it that I provided a new, useful framework (a tool) – outcomes-based curriculum design - that was introduced and accepted, and then used successfully without difficulties? or
- Was it a challenge to an existing culture (UP, Sri Lankan) by a new culture (SB, UK) that was (partly) successful in replacing it? Or
- Was a new discourse introduced that changed a mindset?

Would a better understanding of culture and discourse differences have allowed more effective change?

2. The case

(see handout)

3. Culture and Discourse

What is culture, in this case?

“Culture” easily refers to everything and nothing’

Alvesson (2002:22) in Land (2005:161)

“the notion of organizational cultures ... within an institution ... is a useful way of clarifying the complex mixture of factors which together give rise to a ‘normal’ way of doing things and offer some clue as to the reaction which might be expected to attempts by outsiders to introduce change. The importance of this to the advisor in working towards a strategy for change is clear. The kind of strategy he must choose, or not choose, will be determined, in part at least, by the kind of culture he is dealing with”

Hewton (1986: 259) in Land (2005: 161)

Possible cultural differences: layers to disentangle.

<i>University of Peradeniya</i>	<i>UK</i>
(SL/UP/Fac Agric)	(UK/ed. Dev. Literature/SB)
More collegiate (e.g. VC rotates)	More managerial
More hierarchical, authoritarian	More entrepreneurial
Fairly gender-neutral, race neutral?	Gender-neutral, race-neutral?
Graduate employability assumed for economic development	Graduate employability a government perspective not necessarily shared
?	?

Are the observed differences in discourse (the words used, the texts) an important feature of cultural difference?

The water deepens ...

Discourse and culture:

“Every discourse constitutes ... imaginary communities, identity investments, and discursive practices. Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said; they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent, and thus discursive boundaries are always being redrawn around what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable and around what it is that makes possible particular structures of intelligibility and unintelligibility.” Britzman (2000: 36) in (MacLure 2003: 175)

“Most important ... is the paradoxical nature of the relationship between language and reality, words and things, in which the prospect of knowing which ‘came first’, or even of wholly disentangling one from the other, is endlessly frustrated”

MacLure (2003: 3)

Nonetheless she argues for “the educational importance of getting to grips with the ways in which language is entangled with reality”

MacLure (2003: 5)

“You have to suspend your belief in the innocence of words and the transparency of language as a window on an objectively graspable reality” MacLure (2003: 12)

“the way of saying is the what of saying” (Geertz (1988: 68) in MacLure (2003: 6)

Some words seemed significant e.g.

Theory (versus *practical*) (used by UP)

Student centred (versus *teacher centred*) (used by UP)

Intended learning outcomes (versus content) (used by UP)

Graduate profile (versus programme outcomes) (used by UP)

Student learning hours (used by SB)

Course values (used by SB)

Assessment (by both)

Words and things

There seemed to be different situations

- 1) different words being used for the same thing i.e. a simple substitution problem
e.g. course = module, module = pathway, in-plant training = placement
- 2) missing words and things i.e. a new concept is being introduced
e.g. intended learning outcomes, student learning hours
- 3) the same words for different things e.g. theory, student-centred learning
the most confusing and, possibly, most important for success.

4. Examples

Theory and Practical, educational Hero and Villain

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Practical</i>
High status	Low status
The lecture by full time academic	The practical by postgraduate assistants
Assessed by examination	Assessed by coursework
The lecture room with raised dais and blackboard, a physical position of authority	The laboratory where assistants mix on the same level with students
Counts in staffing load	Counts half in staffing load
Knowledge	Skills
Academic content	Employers' want skills, attributes

‘Cultural’ shift from *teacher-centred* to *student-centred*

Teacher centred UP originally	<i>Student centred</i> as in the new BSC	<i>Student centred</i> as proposed by SB
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher centred 2. Information provision by verbal exposition, little interaction 3. Student hours not counted, so overloaded 4. Design based on contact in theory & practical classes 5. National policy on minimum contact hours 6. Assessment includes norm-referenced adjustment 7. 46 courses in the core 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Student centred</i> as student responsibility for their learning 2. Aims and objectives using active verbs 3. Independent student learning activity recognized, student learning hours 4. Learning hours per credit somewhat standard; somewhat fewer courses 5. Staff workload by equation emphasizing each course 6. Assessment includes norm-referenced adjustment 7. 47 courses in the core (7 to 10 per semester) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Student centred</i> as holistic student course experience 2. Intended learning outcomes using active verbs 3. Student experience in contact sessions and independent learning 4. Standard learning hours per credit and per semester; fewer courses 5. Staff workload by student outcomes 6. Assessment criterion-referenced 7. 25 courses in the core, 5 per semester

5. Small group discussions (ideally with groups of mixed nationalities)

(See the worksheet.)

6. Successes and failures

Some Successes

1. Participatory Faculty structures and processes for the curriculum revision and renewal project
2. A graduate profile developed according to a needs assessment by stakeholders, including faculty and employers.
3. A common, outcomes-based, model of curriculum development (above) was used by all
4. Written intended learning outcomes, specific and with active verbs.
5. ILO/LA/A units (intended learning outcomes, learning activities, assessments) were developed as the basis of courses
6. Reduced number of credits, so hopefully a reduced volume of content, (but the same number of courses).
7. Fewer closed examinations, more coursework assessment; threshold criteria for assessments will be specified.
8. Teachers were prompted to consider new teaching and assessment methods
9. Capital expenditure on teaching rooms, equipment and computers
10. The standard evaluation form for all courses, and for the whole programme, will change. Faculty peer evaluation should be introduced.

Some Failures/challenges

1. Numbers of courses per semester in the compulsory core is unchanged and too high
2. Course credits are not evenly related to learning hours across the common core and the advanced module parts of the programme. The concept of student learning hours has not been used consistently.
3. Committee decisions about curriculum were subject to the usual political influences.
4. The distinction between “theory” and “practical” is still strong, and used in workload calculations.
5. Still an element of norm-referenced criteria in assessment, mixed in with criterion-referencing: adjustment of grades in relation to the class distribution of marks.
6. Learning outcomes/activities/assessment units not aggregated rationally into courses, but adopted by departments for courses: departmental structure dominated.
7. Faculty workload measurement does not recognize student output. It uses contact hours, preparation and assessment and emphasizes numbers of courses.

7. Plenary: I will gather answers to the questions on a flipchart or screen

“the kind of opening (of texts) is not a form of unmasking or illumination, in which the true meaning of is revealed behind the surface deceptions of the text. Texts cannot be reduced to singular meanings. But they can be unsettled – shaken up, breached, disturbed, torn – so that new questions and meanings are generated.” MacLure (2003: 81).

8. References

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MacLure, M. 2003 *Discourse in Educational and Social Research*, Open University Press, Maidenhead

Moon, J. 2002 *The module and programme development handbook* Kogan Page

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The Case: University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Agriculture

A. The main people and groups involved

1. The University of Peradeniya: the Vice chancellor and Deputy VC are supportive
2. The Faculty of Agriculture: a Dean, 8 departments, and 100 teaching faculty
3. The English Language Unit – all teaching is in English but first languages are either Sinhalese or Tamil.
4. The Faculty Curriculum Development Committee (of 36): The Dean, a Chair and a Secretary, all the full professors, the Heads of Departments, plus other representatives.
5. Five CDC subcommittees, established for 5 broad subject areas
6. A 'Core Group' of 8 enthusiasts chosen for training in curriculum development during the project, to form an expert group for future curriculum development
7. Prof. Deepthi Bandara is the project coordinator of the whole Faculty/World Bank project ("IRQUE") of 14 activities and also the Person In Charge of this curriculum development and revision activity
8. Dr Stephen Bostock is the external advisor on curriculum development

B. A timeline

1. The University of Ceylon was started in 1942 and an agricultural education programme started at Peradeniya in 1947. This grew so that in 1973 a Faculty of Agriculture was established at Peradeniya, and by 1978 there were six other Faculties of Agriculture established at other university sites in Sri Lanka, nurtured by that at Peradeniya.
2. Initially a three-year BSc programme, then a four-year course (8 semesters) was developed to include a placement and a year of specialization in one of the 8 departments (now 3 semesters, the Advanced Programme). The annual intake of about 200 is rising. From 2004-5 the BSc is renamed Agricultural Technology and Management, and a new curriculum will begin to be delivered from 2006-7.
3. In November 2003 DB held workshops on the "graduate profile" and employability with employers, faculty, non-academic staff, parents, alumni and students. The resulting proposal to the World Bank for the curriculum development project ("IRQUE") was approved in August 2004.
4. In February 2004 the Faculty's Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) was given the task of developing a guideline document for the new curriculum. It had 10 meetings and sent a questionnaire to the 100 faculty. The questionnaire produced (i) the desirable profile of a graduate (ii) 5 areas of content: production and management of agricultural commodities; agroproduct processing technologies; natural resource management; socioeconomic development; professional development. (these become the 5 areas of the new curriculum).
5. SB visits the University by chance in April 2004. The Guideline for the new curriculum is approved in December 2004 and commented upon by SB by email later.
6. March 31st and May 31st 2005: meetings with employer groups in Kandy and in Colombo, resulting in Graduate Profile of a list of generic skills, the desirable topics in the course content, and the total volume of the content (much less than previously, see below).
7. March 2005: Staff development activity for the Faculty's teachers. 60% attend a two-day workshop on curriculum development: outcomes based curriculum design (e.g. Moon, D'Andrea), and its weaknesses (e.g. Knight).

8. March & August 2005: Meetings with 3 student groups; they complete the Course Experience Questionnaire² and, in 'pyramid' evaluation sessions, produce lists of good and bad aspects of the 'core course' (the compulsory courses of semesters 1-5).
9. March & August 2005: several meetings of SB & DB with the Dean, the Core Group, CDC Subcommittees, and non-teaching staff
10. March 2005: the CDC agreed the new BSc structure. The credits needed for the new degree are reduced from 169 to 126 in 4 years, 8 semesters.
11. May-August: the 5 CDC subcommittees develop 23 broad intended learning outcomes and then about 315 specific Intended Learning Outcomes, over 5 curriculum areas.
12. September 2005 – May 2006: 47 courses (modules) were developed in departments from the specific ILOs, and sequenced into semesters. 'Capsules' describe each course briefly for Senate approval. Lesson plans are being developed, including learning outcomes and teaching methods.
13. September 2005: SB makes 9 recommendations about further curriculum development; but few adopted.
14. Student portfolio guidelines developed, and other non-credit courses including student "in-plant training" (placements).
15. Late 2005: teaching staff complete Teaching Experience Questionnaires about the core course.
16. 12 Advanced Modules formulated for semesters 6,7,8, from which students chose.
17. October 2006: the first intake to new curriculum BSc
18. After which, monitoring and evaluation by DB.

C. The old BSc programme

1. Eight semesters of 15 weeks, the first 6 semesters are a common compulsory core providing 136 credits; the last 2 semesters provide 25 credits in courses plus an 8 credit project. There are 46 courses in the core. 169 credits needed for the BSc. Courses mostly 2 or 3 credits.
2. Curriculum: Content based, overloaded with content, too many modules of different sizes (anyone taught what they wanted).
3. Teaching: verbal exposition in 'theory' lectures plus, in some courses, practicals with "part-time staff" (recent graduates, teaching assistants).
4. Assessment: for every course, a closed examination. Examinations have a standard structure of multiple choice questions (MCQs) + short structured answers + half hour essay answers. E.g a two hour examination has 30 MCQs + 2 short-answer questions + 2 essay questions. In the advanced program examinations (4th year) there are no MCQs.

Most courses have practical work; it was assessed by coursework test or report. Project work (in final semester) was assessed by report plus oral presentation.

D. Evaluations of the old course

Employers' views on the desirable graduate profile:

- a) Team skills were highly valued so more team work and group assessment needed in the programme
- b) Numeracy and IT skills are required only at a basic, practical level
- c) Moral and ethical issues are relevant
- d) "Character", leadership and taking full responsibility for one's own actions are valued. Two suggested activities were internships and exposure to leaders from industry.

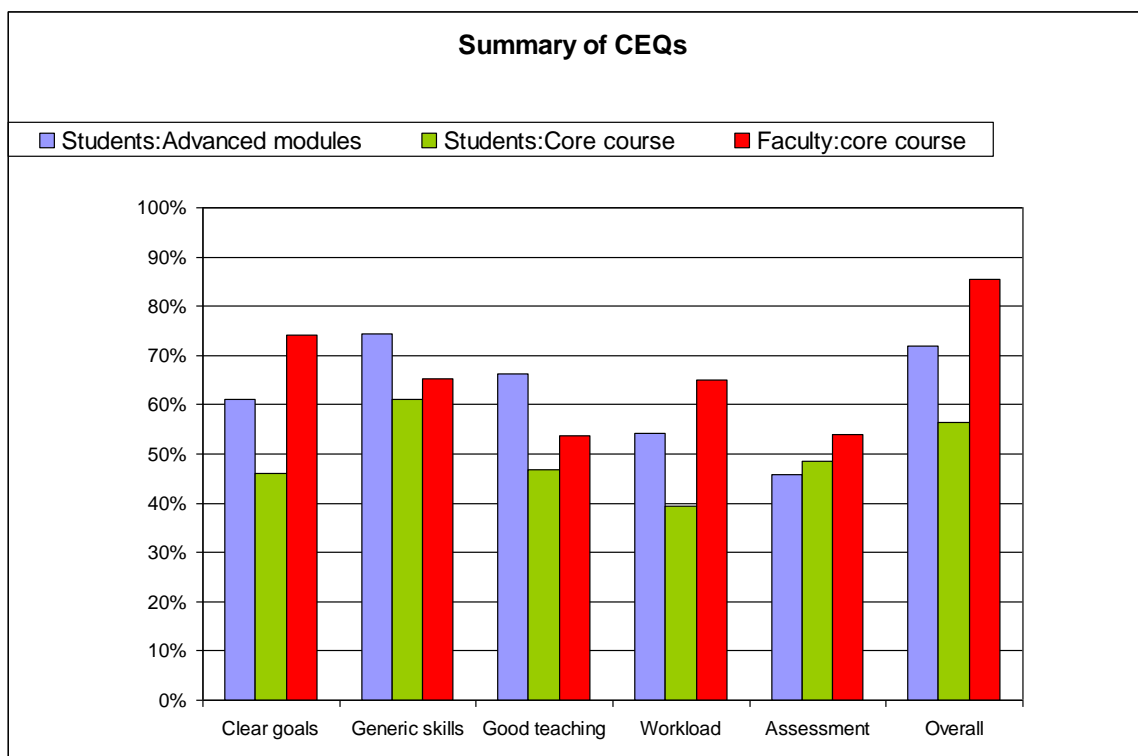
The Core Group analyzed the employers' responses on course structure:

- (1) There are currently too much content, too many courses and examinations.
- (2) 5 semesters is the right length for the core programme.
- (3) Some of the existing content looks as though it needs updating.
- (4) Some specific courses are unnecessary; other courses should be retained but combined to reduce the content, reducing the number of courses significantly. Farm Practice, Bio-mathematics, Computer Applications and Technical Writing should be removed as separate courses and their content integrated into other courses
- (5) The above removes 18 courses from the list of 46, leaving 28. Ideally there would be only 25 courses in the core (5 per semester for 5 semesters). So this exercise went a long way to suggesting some likely ways of reducing the number of courses. (Later, departments put more, smaller courses in and the number of courses did not reduce.)
- (6) Additional content is needed in: technology development, transfer and watch; agricultural marketing and exporting, international trade; government procedures; environmental management.
- (7) Career Development is a special case. It should not be a credit-bearing course, but a compulsory activity planned over the last three semesters, and removed from the core.

E. Course Experience Questionnaire results for students and teaching faculty

The CEQ (Wilson, Lissio & Ramsden 1997) was used with year 3 and year 4 students, and with recent alumni, with separate questionnaires for the compulsory "core" course of 5 semesters and the specialized Advanced Modules of 3 semesters. The CEQ has 24 questions that produce scores for 5 themes: clarity of goals, generic skills, good teaching, workload, and assessment. The 25th question asks about the overall quality of the course. The 3 student groups had similar responses and are aggregated here (total sample size 92).

The CEQ was converted to a Teaching Experience Questionnaire for faculty to complete, asking how they thought their students experienced their courses in the common core (sample size 31).

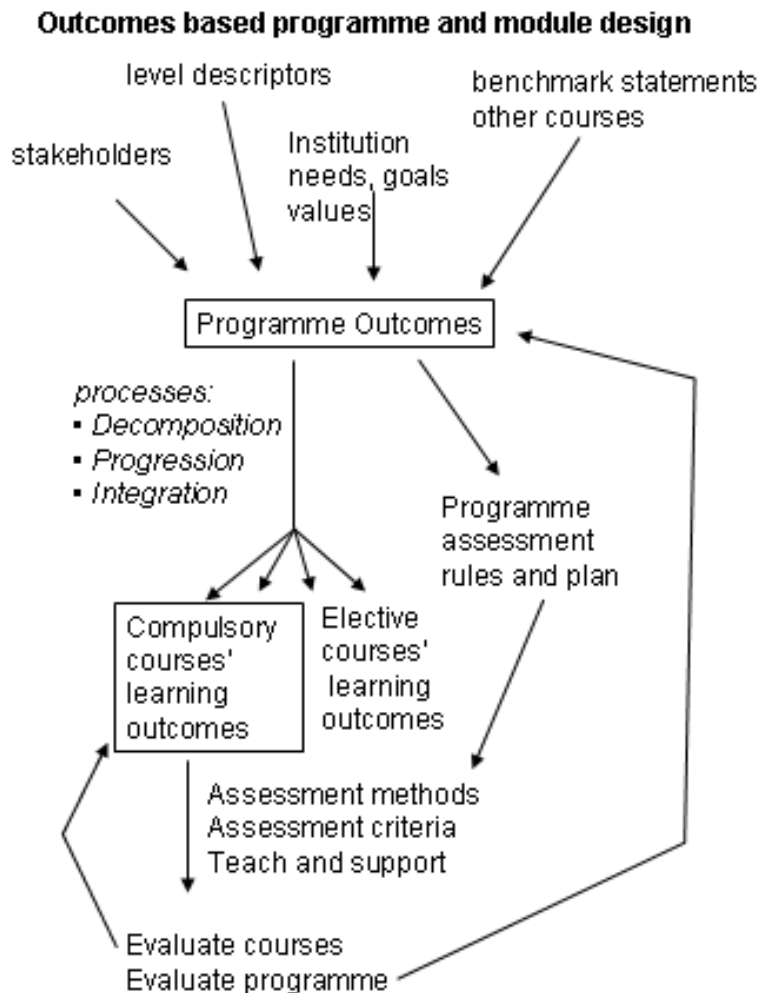


Students generally rated the advanced modules higher than the common core except for assessment. For the compulsory core, the worst scores were for *workload* being too high and *goals* not being clear. Staff scores are higher (they think the courses are better), and

more think that *goals* are clear and that student *workload* is not too high, compared to students. Teachers are frank in giving lower scores for *assessment* and for *good teaching*, as do the students.

F. Outcomes based curriculum development

A diagram used to structure faculty workshops and guide the initial curriculum development process



G. Graduate profile for the new BSc (Senate approval June 2006)

“A graduate in BSc Agricultural Technology and Management shall possess the necessary knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes that makes him/her capable of making a significant contribution to overall [economic] development, focusing mainly on the issues related to agriculture and allied activities in the manner described below.

- Identifying and analyzing problems in agriculture and related sectors at the farm community, provincial, national and global level
- Proposing innovative, technologically appropriate, environmentally sound, economically feasible and socially acceptable solutions to challenges faced in the development of agriculture
- Becoming a professional in the areas of research/ academia/ management/ entrepreneurship, and a team player who is socially responsible, human and ethical with effective communication skills.”

H. The new BSc programme

A new curriculum was devised top-down, as intended learning outcomes, and outcomes-teaching-assessment units, and then turned into courses by the 8 departments.

1. Still 8 semesters of 15 weeks, but now 126 credits needed for the BSc not 169. Courses are mostly 2 credits. There are between 7 to 10 courses per semester (at once), and a total of 47 compulsory 'core' courses over 5/6 semesters, plus advanced modules and a project in semesters 6,7,8.

The recommendation of having only 5 courses of three credits per semester was thwarted by departmental politics and, possibly, by the faculty workload allocation formula that mostly rewards each course taught rather than actual teaching hours or student credit output.

Somewhat simplified, students get 94 credits from the compulsory core in 5 semesters plus 26 credits from last 3 semesters' advanced program plus a 6 credit project. So, the student learning hours per credit are still not fixed: the credits earned per semester vary and the advanced modules have twice the hours to earn the same credits.

2. Curriculum: core of 5 broad areas with total of 23 Broad Intended Learning Outcomes, decomposed to 315 Specific ILOS that are bundled into courses (i.e. modules) delivered by the 8 departments.
3. Teaching: there is no explicit policy/strategy, should be related to specific intended learning outcomes. Lesson plans are being developed.
4. Assessment: The individual teacher now has more freedom to design assessment. There is more continuous assessment of theory, as well as examination. No longer a predefined structure to examinations. Practical work still assessed by coursework. There may be fewer examinations. There is still an element of norm-referencing in the adjustment of marks, despite a recommendation to the contrary.

Cultural issues in the academic development of a new degree programme in Sri Lanka

A worksheet for each discussion group

Aims: to comment on the project, and reasons for its successes and failures; compare the different cultural meanings of some words; and comment on the effects of any differences to approaches to changing practice.

1. Why the successes and the failures in this case?

Does anything surprise you?

Does anything look quite predictable?

2. What cultural/discourse differences are there in the way you each use the key words of educational development? E.g consider

Theory (versus practical)

Student centred (versus teacher centred)

Intended learning outcomes (versus content)

Graduate profile (versus programme outcomes)

Assessment

Student learning hours

Course values

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3. How would any differences affect how a change agent should best approach an organization with such a culture or discourse?