

Report:

Tejaswini Niranjana, the Coordinator of Higher Education Research at CSCS welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the nature of the work undertaken by the Higher Education Cell at CSCS, the many educational initiatives that it has taken so far, and its contribution to the educational discourse. She explained how the different conferences, consultations and the strategy paper on HE had actually recognized specific areas of intervention. The strategy paper was looking at the general undergraduate education as the space of intervention and sought recommendations for ways of strengthening the UG – University and Research Centre linkage. It had also suggested that curricular reform, programmes for enhancing teacher capacity, and conceptual and programmatic engagement with the question of translation would help bring about a qualitative transformation in the field of undergraduate education.

The strategy paper had also identified certain areas of transformation, as areas that need to be probed further. Currently, there is much talk about ‘vocalization’ of higher education and ‘autonomy’ of colleges and these words merely hint at the large scale of transformations in the sector of higher education. Tejaswini explained how, instead of going the way of policy analyses, CSCS was keen on commissioning micro-studies that would pay closer attention to in-depth analysis of changes brought about by vocalization or autonomy at the institutional level. The research wing of Higher Education Cell was keen on proposing the model of micro-study as a way of arriving at research models that can be replicated in other regions too.

The workshop coordinator, Mrinalini Sebastian explained why it was important to rethink the concept of general education. She spoke of the recommendations made by S Radhakrishnan Commission in terms of teaching general education at the University level. Though Radhakrishnan was proposing the ‘general education’ model as a defence against over specialization and as a way of incorporating a model of holistic education of the citizen and viewed all-round knowledge as knowledge of nature, society and spirit (to correspond with the study of sciences, social sciences and humanities), the discourse on ‘general education’ in our own context drew from similar debates in other contexts such as the US and UK. Currently, there is evidence to believe that many countries which have inherited the legacies of colonial education, and are faced with challenges of meeting the pressures of globalization, are rethinking the content of ‘general and non-professional undergraduate education’. This workshop is seen as providing the context for comparing the dominant patterns of transformations within different spaces such as Hong Kong and Sri Lanka, and within India, the variations in the transformations from one state to another.

The Director of CSCS, Sitharamam Kakarala spoke next and pointed out that even within the field of legal education there has been a debate about the objectives of legal education for a long time now. Whether legal education should ultimately aim at improving the mind or imparting professional skills is a question that has accompanied discussion of legal education from the colonial times.

The discussion that followed threw up the following points:

- i. From the time of liberal education, there have been debates as to whether education should aim at providing skills or should be a value in itself.
- ii. The discourse on education has always seen these two aspects of education as contradicting each other while in fact it may not be the case
- iii. Professional education (such as legal education) incorporates teaching of social sciences as the soft spaces within the general scheme of things and there are only a few examples where an attempt has been made to include interdisciplinary courses
- iv. The changes within the field of education are context-specific as the example of Hong Kong shows
- v. There is a disjuncture between education and industrial economics

Session 1

The three speakers at the first session were: Padmini Swaminathan, Professor and Director, MIDS, Stephen Chan, Professor of Cultural Studies and Programme Director of the Master of Cultural Studies Programme at Lingnan University, Hong Kong, and Nira Wickramasinghe, Professor, Department of History and International Relations, University of Colombo.

In her presentation, Padmini Swaminathan spoke of the importance of contextualizing education. She pointed out how education is often studied in isolation without making any reference to industrial economics. Similarly the study of industrial economics does not bear in mind the labour sector and the relationship between the quality of education and the nature of employment. She pointed out that there is a need to gather data about unemployment of the educated youth and also data linking the rate of development and employment. There are indications that the rate of unemployment among the educated is growing.

She referred to the discussions during the colonial times, especially to the perceptions of Alfred Chatterton, who was the Head of the Department of Industries in Madras Presidency. He tried to link education, the concept of economics and the social system of caste-based artisanal training. He recommended the setting up of industrial units which would also take up apprentices and take care of their training. There were attempts to retrain those who were from traditional artisanal background. There was a great deal of debate around the question of the quality of education, the training in skills, industrial economics and traditional skills of artisanal groups. Even before and after independence, there were discussions about the responsibility of the private sector in providing proper training through apprenticeship. It was pointed out by Padmini Swaminathan that none of these issues were really taken up by the two Task Force Committees which were set up in 2000 and 2001 to look into the matter of 'vocalization' of education.

She suggested how a comparative perspective, taking into account the examples of different developed and developing countries with a successful scheme for linking education, vocationalization and employment will help us get a better sense of our own

case. Her own examples were from Germany, Japan and South Korea. The lack of educational discourse connecting quality of employment, labour sector and the nature of education has created a disjuncture that needs to be looked into. It is also important to map the histories of the many statutory bodies that govern education.

The next speaker, Nira Wickramasinghe, in her presentation, mapped the history of the educational system in Sri Lanka. Only 3% of the relevant age group is in the University. Though education is free and schools and universities are public institutions, a large number of the population is unable to make use of this opportunity. There is a definite perception of crisis in education. Those who can afford it, go abroad for university education. Wickramasinghe also spoke of the recent interventions through a World Bank supported initiative called IRQUE which aims at providing a review of tertiary education. She pointed out how its broader goal of enhancing the level of quality and relevance in higher education does not go well with its perceptions about the unemployed and the underemployed.

Her presentation clearly revealed the relationship between educational policies and the political history of Sri Lanka. Started as an affiliate system of the colonial educational system, it has changed over the past decades in many ways depending on the political and ideological vision of those in power. She explained that during the 60s there was a move to shift the medium of instruction to *swabhasha* with the result that an entire generation of academics are monolingual and find it hard to the English-speaking academic world.

After the JVP came to power in the 70s there was an attempt to rationalize the system. Institutions of Advanced Technology were set up. During this time the social sciences came to be seen as the field of study with practical applications and the humanities as the training in the classics. This set up the distinction between practical and 'wasteful' subjects especially as the bulk of the educated unemployed were from the Arts Departments. Currently, however, in a bid to generate employability in the University the University of Colombo has started offering History along with International Relations, Political Science with Public Policy and also programmes in Conflict Resolution and Gender Studies. Nira Wickramasinghe felt that this kind of educational reform is not necessarily carried out keeping in mind the needs of the Sri Lankan society but it has been designed elsewhere and imposed on the system. She echoed the concerns brought to light by Padmini Swaminathan by arguing that some of the courses can be seen more in terms of apprenticeship and training in specific sectors of the industry and do not call for university academic programmes. However, since the system allows for academic freedom of individual teachers, interdisciplinary courses such as Culture and History and Gender in History have been offered through the History Department.

Stephan Chan, in his presentation, focused on the importance of taking into account the larger context of education. According to him, change in context also explains the differences in the manner the institutions and the system of education have developed in the different spaces. Speaking of the Hong Kong context, he said that education is of one of the most prioritized issues for social policy in Hong Kong. 23% of the annual budget is allotted for education, thus making it one of the largest sector to be supported by public

money. There are 8 universities in Hong Kong. With the exception of one, all of them are public universities. Currently 17% of the relevant age group is getting higher education. Attempts are being made to raise this to 60%. Even before the political transition, there has been a discourse on crisis in education. The new global economy, the political context and the increasing sense among the business community that it is important to have people who are trained in critical skills, have all contributed to this sense of crisis in the education system.

Stephen Chan explained the outlines of the new education reform which will bring about major changes in the system in the year 2009. The current system of 5+2+3 years of secondary and higher education will give way to a 3+3+4 system. The reform includes the teaching of a compulsory core course in Liberal Studies. The academics in some of the universities are now working with the schools and helping them prepare themselves for this change in 2009. Stephen Chan said that his own Department in Lingnan University has now started offering a Diploma in Liberal Studies, which is meant as an academic programme for school teachers who will be teaching this course in their schools. The agreed upon model for Liberal Studies only provides the broad areas that need to be covered the actual process of teaching and the syllabus as such is decided by the institutions. The idea is to give students a foundational course which will help them gain skills for critical thinking. Chan also mapped the history of his own University and explain that the college had started in 1880 as a Christian college and shut down in 1952. In 1967 it was reinstated and it continued as a business college for 20 years. In the early 90s following the political uncertainties and the increase in the brain drain, there was a move to convert polytechnics into Universities. It was at this time that Lingnan joined the UGC. However, now it is seen as the only Liberal Arts University in Hong Kong.

Stephen Chan explained that his Department which now offers Cultural Studies, was responsible for the teaching of General Education earlier. This is the reason why they are now asked to interface with other institutions in the teaching of the new Liberal Studies course at the high school level. Now, the Department offers an undergraduate course in Cultural Studies and a Master's programme where Cultural Studies is a specialized area of study. At the Master's level it is a self-financing programme and the students are normally professional workers such as teachers, social and community workers. Thus the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University is involved in teaching at three levels:

- UG – teaching Cultural Studies as one of the subjects
- Master's level – teaching the specialized subject Cultural Studies
- Diploma in Liberal Studies – offering a teacher-oriented academic programme for future teachers of Liberal Studies at the High School

During the discussions that followed each session, the questions were mostly about the relationship between education and employment, about the student –composition for disciplines from the social sciences and the humanities, about the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction, about vocationalization, and about the programmatic aspects of the intervention by the university at the secondary school level education.

The second session was a panel discussion on “Transformations in the Field of General Education: Integration, Autonomy, Vocationalization”. The panelists were P. Thirumal, Co-ordinator of the Communications Discipline at the University of Hyderabad, Shaji Varghese, Centre for Social Research, Christ College, and Mathew Abraham, Department of Economics, Christ College.

P Thirumal spoke of the attempt by his University to start Integrated Courses in the different departments. The mandate is to offer a five year course starting in the post-secondary phase. The Integrated programmes are set up on the recommendation of the former President APJ Abdul Kalam who wanted to introduce integration across the disciplines too. The programme is supported by the Ministry of Human Resources Development. Conventionally the university is an affiliating body for the colleges but they do not offer UG courses. Though the move to offer integrated programmes at the university level is a major programme, there is no concept paper, nor much thought given to the curriculum. According to Thirumal, currently, integration is envisioned more in terms of a project which incurs increasing infrastructural facilities. There is also a provision for giving fellowships to the students.

Shaji Varghese and Mathew Abraham spoke of another structural change in the system of education. This refers to the recent policy of offering autonomy to colleges. Speaking of the enthusiasm with which autonomy is being spoken about, Shaji explained how certain changes have been taking place even before universities such as Bangalore University granted academic autonomy to a few colleges. Therefore it is not correct to imagine autonomy as a watershed moment in the history of an institution like Christ College. He suggested that we see the issue of ‘autonomy’ in the larger context of economic transformations which took place in the 1990s. From 1994 there is a gradual withdrawal of funds for colleges. The colleges are expected to raise their revenue through fees and also offer ‘market-oriented’ courses.

Offering a critique of ‘autonomy’, Shaji argued that though autonomy is seen as providing academic freedom, it may not necessarily be the case. Before autonomy, all curricular changes were guided by the Board of Studies (BOS) for each discipline. Though the BOS is a body set up by the university, it has representation from teachers working in the colleges. Now, the autonomous colleges have the right to frame their own syllabus, but not much thought has gone into ways of framing the curriculum. The autonomous status has also given a managerial turn to administration in these colleges. He also observed that when there was a closer link with the university, and the university sent its own students to the MA in Sociology at Christ College, the student composition was different. The new curriculum for MA was put together keeping in mind the challenges that the diversity of the classroom posed. However, post-autonomy, there is homogeneity in terms of the economic background of the students. He suggested that instead of focusing on theory, it may be time that the sociology curriculum could be redesigned to offer courses around a set of problems.

Mathew Abraham pointed out how there were disciplinary implications to the managerial attitude towards academic autonomy. There is confusion now whether economics is a subject under the social sciences or management studies. He explained how attempts to introduce dissertation at the MA level had faced severe challenges. Insistence on regular attendance at college, and insistence on 16 hours of teaching for the lecturers had thwarted attempts at encouraging students to take up independent research and that of the teachers to allot more time for their students.

During the discussion, there were questions about the discussions within teaching communities within the different departments, about autonomy in Tamil Nadu and what a comparative study of the two locations might yield, and also about the role of teachers in negotiating these changes.

The next panel was on “Challenges of Teaching Non-Conventional Courses”. The panelists were Swati Dyahadroy of the Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, Pune University and S V Srinivas of Centre for the Study of Culture and Society.

Swati began her presentation by saying that though Women’s Studies could not be considered ‘non-conventional course’ there were challenges in teaching the subject at the UG level. The three institutions in Maharashtra, where Women’s Studies has been taught for a long time now are the SNTD University of Bombay, TISS, Bombay and the University of Pune. The Women’s Studies Centre at Pune University has always tried to keep the link between teaching and research alive. Its PG course in Women’s Studies is taken by people from mostly activist and social work background. Individual Faculty members have offered several ‘autonomous courses’ at the Centre, and at the UG level, there have been courses on ‘Women and Development’. These courses are taken by students from rural and urban areas and also by college drop-outs. The courses are interdisciplinary in nature mostly because the Faculty is drawn from different disciplines. It is also seen as the academic wing of the Women’s Movement itself. This raises several questions: Is Women’s Studies truly interdisciplinary? Should the students taking up these courses have minimal proficiency in the different disciplines which contribute to the making of the Women’s Studies? Swati also pointed out that after doing the UG Women’s Studies course, the students do not necessarily pursue an MA in Women’s Studies. They are often lost to the other disciplines. She also spoke of the difficulty in terms of translation – both in terms of conceptual translation to students who are just out of their schools and also of translation into Marathi a discourse which is mainly in English.

The next presentation was by S V Srinivas who spoke about the teaching of Cultural Studies at the UG level. He also began by stating that it was not very productive to debate whether Cultural Studies was a conventional or a non-conventional subject. He spoke of the beginning of Cultural Studies in India. He mentioned the conference on Cultural Studies organized by CSSS, Calcutta and the book edited by Tejaswini Niranjana and others which did not use the term but was, in retrospect, referred to as one of the first books on Cultural Studies in India. He then traced the history of CSCS intervention in teaching Cultural Studies at the UG level and spoke of the host institution – Christ College – which was undergoing a great deal of transformation at the time the

Undergraduate Certificate Course in Cultural Analysis was introduced at the college. He suggested that the particular context within which this course was tried out for the first time was very hospitable and this might have something to suggest about the new spaces for the teaching of a certain kind of course which draws its resources from the social sciences and the humanities. He explained how the content of the course changed depending on the instructor. This course which had to justify its own existence claimed that it would help the students develop his/her critical skills. It focused more on problems and concepts rather than on conventional modes of teaching. Instead of looking at Cultural Studies as a discipline of radicalism, we may have to see Cultural Studies as offering a window to teach humanities and social sciences in spaces which are otherwise not invested in studying or theorizing 'Culture'.

As discussant, Nira Wickramasinghe pointed out how it was important to think in terms of the relationship between mainstream subjects and the teaching of Cultural Studies. Stephen Chan reminded us about the process of institutionalization of a new area of study. He also explained how these examples of teaching subjects which are not part of the mainstream show the need for rethinking the relationship between research and pedagogy. He suggested that we will have to think of pedagogy itself as a research area. Within the classroom, do changes in the classroom composition demand changes in the way we teach? What does it mean for academics to teach the teachers? Viewing things from this pedagogic perspective will also throw light on the new configuration of knowledge. There were also questions about the way we translate systemic change into disciplinary changes.

On the second day of the workshop, there were two panels. The first panel was called: "Language and Curriculum". In the first panel, Vaishali Diwakar of St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, spoke of her experience of teaching Sociology. In her college, there were separate sections for students who had opted for Marathi and English as the medium of instruction. The curriculum, however, remained the same. She argued that the difference in medium of instruction also suggested a difference in the class and caste composition of the students. Her college was the first college to receive 'autonomy' and it already shows that autonomy is closely tied to the politics of numbers. Pointing out a steep fall in the intake for arts subjects in her college, Vaishali argued that this probably had to do with the question of employability offered by studying sociology. However, this challenge did not necessarily translate into appropriate curricular reform. Updating of the syllabus normally meant that a few new topics would be added to the existing list.

In his response to this presentation, Thirumal referred to an essay by Veena Das where she speaks of the relationship between English language and the discipline of sociology. She has argued that English is seen as the language of analysis whereas the regional languages are presumed to be more expressive in nature. Pointing out that this would almost suggest that the students opting for their regional language as the medium of instruction by default constitute a sociological category, Ashwin argued for a different way of defining the problem of language, translation and curriculum. He asked whether the problem of translation did not arise because of a problem with the discipline itself. If

the students are not able to deal with 'abstract' theories, how does one relate it to the disciplines which are being taught at the college level.

Making a departure from this line of argument, Padmini Swaminathan suggested that it is not correct to imagine that lack of English suggests lack of the ability to conceptualize. She spoke of the experiment in her own institution where giving extra training in language skills had helped the students gain confidence in their use of language. She also suggested that in regions like Tamil Nadu, there is a dearth of translations from Tamil to English since there is already a great deal of scholarly writing in Tamil.

Tejaswini Niranjana pointed out that it was futile to speak merely in terms of literal translation. It was important to create an analytical vocabulary that may not be the same as the one available in English. Nira Wickramasinghe responded to the translation issue by suggesting that even in the Sri Lankan context where currently most of the academics are bilingual, there were indications to suggest that there was a link between the medium of instruction and the student composition in a particular class. The issue of translation is defined differently in the Hong Kong context. Though most students are fluent in English and Chinese, in Hong Kong, a different set of translation skills are taught at the university level. Students are trained through workshop sessions to translate an academic language into a non-academic language for public criticism. There were persistent questions trying to link the social background of students to their choice of the medium of instruction. It was also pointed out that the issue of translation was raised only in the context of teaching of the social sciences and the humanities. In the sciences and the professional courses, the challenge of translation was never posed. This makes it once again, a problem specific to 'general education'.

The second panel on the second day was called "Teacher Initiatives: Research, Training and Curriculum Building" The panelists were three college teachers: Dilip Chavan, from the New Arts and Sciences College, Ahmednagar, Elizabeth and Shashikala S from Mount Carmel College, Bangalore. The objective in putting together this panel was to understand the nature of the teacher initiative into curriculum building. What were the non-formal initiatives taken by the teachers? Also, when there is academic autonomy, what kind of challenges are faced by teachers working towards a curricular revision.?

Dilip Chavan, spoke about the 'Critical Curriculum Theory' which influenced a group of teachers in Maharashtra. He described an extra-curricular academic intervention taken up by a group of teachers a few years ago, which ran classes and conducted examinations. The total number of students who took these exams was around 12,000. This programme which depended on the voluntary service of the teachers also aimed at publication. Some of the publications are in the form of tracts in Marathi. When asked whether any of this material is part of the 'regular' syllabus, Dilip said that though there were topics in the regular curriculum for which there was no other material available except the tracts that they had prepared there was no attempt made to bring this material into the 'mainstream' class room. This attempt at teaching an alternative curriculum by a group of teachers who otherwise follow the prescribed syllabus in the regular classrooms had to be discontinued but will be taken up by them soon.

In their presentation which was based on the micro-study that they had done on behalf of CSCS, Elizabeth and Shashikala explained the reasons for taking up the study, the methodology adopted by them and what they found out as a result of this study about the way academic autonomy is perceived by the college teachers, the different examples of new curriculum put together by three institutions and the need and feasibility of Faculty Development programmes. They argued that academic autonomy increased possibilities but nevertheless also decreased the resources available to teachers. The teachers who were expected to put together a new curriculum were all differently trained and this posed a set of problems. They were eager to bring in curricular changes and in fact seemed to think of the newly revised curriculum more in terms of the copyrighted material that added to the branding of the institution. Therefore in some cases, there was hesitation in sharing the material. But the micro-study confirmed that there was often not even an abstract notion of the curriculum available for teachers involved in putting together new courses. In an autonomous set up there was also no academic forum that would make an attempt to account for the changes in the system. Most autonomous colleges seemed to have a celebratory in terms of the freedom to frame their own curriculum without really being able to provide a rationale for the change that they envisaged in the curriculum. They found out that the students were the least resistant to curricular changes. Even within the disciplines there is no debate as to what constitutes the teaching of a specific discipline at the UG level. With the shrinking in size of the UGC teachers who receive their salaries through the grants-in-aid scheme, there is a floating Faculty. This and the fact that ultimately the content of the course is determined by the actual classroom teaching, it is possible that even the most ideal syllabus is likely to get distorted beyond recognition. The question really is how we look at classroom pedagogy as a process of research. The micro-study had come up with the suggestion that there is a need for creating spaces for the teachers. It is possible to think in terms of a Faculty Development programme which could provide space for research, for participating in contemporary debates, and for the actual framing of the curriculum.

In response to these presentation, Parinitha from the Department of English, Mangalore University pointed out the danger of simplification in talking about the relationship between the formal curricular and the informal but alternative curricular spaces. She also pointed out that in the case of autonomous institution, the Board of Studies of the colleges have now one member from the corporate sector who also suggests what kind of demands are being made from the students. If it is BOS for English Studies what type of English is necessary for those who get employed in the commercial sector. Swati, in her response suggested that it is important to find out why a group of teachers in Maharashtra felt the need to start this movement towards teaching an alternative curriculum. She was of the opinion that there was a difference between the way the teachers in Maharashtra viewed autonomy and the teachers in Bangalore viewed it. The response from the Bangalore college teachers was that in Bangalore, the college managements successfully sold the idea of autonomy to college teachers.

In the concluding session of the workshop Mrinalini Sebastian highlighted the main points of the discussions held in the prior sessions. She pointed out that the following

issues were raised repeatedly in the different sessions and therefore demanded greater investigation and collaborative work. We need to look at the following

Research

- a. the system of education, the different political histories that have impacted educational systems in different states in India and in other Asian countries
- b. the structures within the national systems of education – the issue of autonomy and integration within the institutional structures –the regional differences
- c. pedagogic and disciplinary implications of shifts in policies and structures – a comparative view
- d. the context of education as determining the streaming of disciplines and the hierarchy of disciplines in each national context
- e. the translation issue - especially as it relates to the issue of disciplines and the difficulty in translating concepts and developing a critical vocabulary in the regional languages
- f. the symbolic value of research - relating classroom composition, the pattern in programmes taken up by specific groups of people and the employment that they take up later on

It is also important to think in terms of **Models of Research and Intervention:**

- is micro-study a useful way of studying, analyzing and comparing the context and culture of education?
- are models of collaboration between university – research centre- college through formal forums or informal arrangements useful ways of intervening in the higher education sector?

These initial remarks by Mrinalini Sebastian was followed by a round of comments by Padmini Swaminathan, Stephen Chan and Nira Wickramasinghe.

Stephen Chan in his response suggested the importance of treating our own interest in discipline as work related to education, thereby reiterating that it is important for academics to get interested in pedagogic questions. If we think of education less as a profession (as most Education Departments in Universities tend to think) and more as a social and cultural process, we will also pay attention to the ‘subject-shaping’ process involved in education.

Stephen Chan recommended that we could think in terms of developing the following research projects:

1. Rethinking Disciplinary Work as Educational Work : This would involve paying attention to

Pedagogy - Researching the teacher-student interaction, the challenge of translating a discipline into a set of pedagogic strategies

Macro-scale Reform Process - which would include a study of the system, policy and implementation and also efforts at changing the curriculum

Context – it is important to look beyond the education system into the context of intellectual development

2. Reorienting General Education as a field for intellectual work in Humanities and Social Sciences
3. Recasting Cultural Studies as a critical tool for looking at the field of Education:
Since Cultural Studies is flexible and dynamic enough to respond, change, and reorient its own programmes to make itself relevant to different contexts it is easier to view educational transformations by using the methods of Cultural Studies – Women’s Studies would similarly provide a space for making such interventions

Nira Wickramasinghe in her concluding remarks observed that the following areas could be given priority in terms of setting up research agendas:

1. A Comparative Study of the Division of Knowledge Production which reflects the English/non-English disjuncture
2. A detailed study of Knowledge production in the non-English languages: it could look into the world view represented by this sort of writing and ask questions about ways of relating to this material