Professional Development Workshops

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1 Curriculum Planning and Development for School Leaders

Across the world, many educational systems struggle to sufficiently prepare students with knowledge and ingrain in them the disposition to succeed in this era of constant change. While an education system can be duplicated easily, the needs of learners vary according to context. This points to the importance of school leaders in planning and developing a curriculum that develops students holistically – it is not merely about achieving the specific learning outcomes of an education programme; it is about planning ahead to respond strategically in the educational landscape. The educational outcome should encompass the school curriculum, subject curriculum, co-curricular curriculum, and the experienced curriculum.

At its core, our course aims to present the schools' strategic plan and outcome as a consequence of a complex web of interdependent parts. These include the school leadership, environment and culture, the school's curriculum and subject curricula, the assessment practices and expectations, and the school's internal structures and operations. This course is also premised on social constructivism whereby spearheading curriculum planning and development is not an isolated effort; it involves a collective effort. A culture of teaching and learning involves not only educators and learners, but also between educators. The outcome is to nurture a pipeline of leaders to ensure the scalability and sustainability of large-scale education reforms.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) 2

Compared to conventional teaching, constructivist teaching typically involves more student-centred learning experiences and activities with concrete materials, and in solving realistic problems. In a PBL context, this translates to the role of a teacher as a guide in the process of searching for information and learning new knowledge rather than a disseminator of knowledge. Therefore, in learning to teach, it is necessary to learn how to construct a learning environment that enhances students' learning, and how to customise situations to suit a variety of learners needs.

In the 21st century, professionals not only require extensive knowledge, but are also expected to know how to apply the knowledge to solve problems, as well as the ability to function as a team. Our course thus offers an instructional approach beginning with the strategies and techniques in problem formulation to sustain students' interest. We will build on to the motivational process to engage the learner with the literature and proceed to seek relevant, new information in a bid to fill the gaps in their prior knowledge. More importantly, this course covers the synergistic combination of instructional approach with features of technology to present PBL scenarios.

We recognise the fear of the unknown and unfamiliarity in handling group dynamics. At the end of the course, educators should be able to eliminate their fear, and be able to facilitate learning and handle group dynamics effectively.

3 Action Research

Action Research is guided by movement through a cycle of actions: plan, act, observe, and reflect actions. This step-by-step process can potentially produce continuous improvement in the educational landscape, such that schools work towards providing a work force that meets the future needs of the economy.

Our course aims to meet these needs through the following steps:

- Establish the research problem
- Search for relevant materials pertaining to the problem
- Identify the purpose of the action research
- Plan the action research
- Frame the design of the study
- Organise and analyse the findings
- Summarise the conclusion of the study
- Explore the implications of the study
- Share the study findings

This approach shifts innovation from top-down to bottom-up. Educators are empowered to improve their competency through problem identification and employing strategies, thereby fulfilling curricular development and innovation. The outcome of this course is that educators are able to craft appropriate curricular and instruction to meet 21st century teaching and learning needs.

Flipped Classroom 4

The flipped classroom involves providing students with a variety of learning objects as part of pre-class-meeting homework; teachers then put class time to effective use through hands-on activities, application, and demonstration of content mastery based on pre-class requirements. In this way, the flipped classroom transforms the role of educators from being a "sage on the stage" into a "guide on the side" – it changes from that of a passive presenter of content to a practitioner of teaching and learning.

Our course aims to:

- Highlight the differences between the traditional classroom and the flipped classroom,
- Uncover the challenges associated with the implementation of flipped classroom techniques,
- Map out the best practices for placing the educational encumbrance upon students,
- Demonstrate the execution of teaching delivery in order to eliminate co-dependency and to develop the cognitive skills of learners.

In this course, we also look into educational tools to facilitate learning. Video is one instructional tool that is widely used. However, the overuse of any educational tool can render the flipped classroom approach monotonous. We will thus examine other multimedia resources such as online simulations and games, readings including articles and books, and collaborative tools such as discussion forums, peer reviews, blogs, and social media.

5 Experiential Learning

The theory-practice (T-P) gap is prevalent universally, not just in education, but in almost all professions. This presents a need to achieve a balance between theoretical knowledge and practice-based learning. One approach to strengthen the T-P nexus is through experiential learning. Experiential classroom works to create an interdisciplinary learning experience that mimics real world learning.

Our course aims to use pedagogical tools to create a simulated school environment and experiential learning. These tools are designed in a way that surrounds four themes: reflective thinking, demonstrative method, inductive method, and problem-solving method. To bring this further, we incorporate authentic learning which relates to learning in context, learning by doing, learning through projects, and learning by using knowledge through solving problems and explaining the knowledge. We strive to help teachers engage students to learn by experience through authentic pedagogy, so that students not only see the fruits of higher intellectual achievements, but more importantly, in their roles as adults as contributing citizens of society.

Creative and Critical Thinking 6

Creative and critical thinking are often viewed as contradictory terms. Creative thinking is often associated with coming up with new, varied ideas, as well as details that enrich possibilities. On the other hand, critical thinking involves examining the possibilities constructively and developing the most promising possibilities. Which is more important, creativity or critical thinking? Neither. In fact, the two ways of thinking complement each other – we need creativity to generate options, but we also need critical thinking to focus on addressing challenges and concerns. Affordances for learning creative and critical thinking in the context of schools should be everywhere from the course curriculum to the physical and virtual spaces provided.

In light of this, our course attempts to provide some fundamentals to help educators appreciate the conceptions of creative and critical thinking. This course further brings to fore the essential conditions for promoting creative and critical thinking, approaches favourable to nurturing creative and critical thinking including the classroom environment, teacher competencies and dispositions, and school-wide initiatives for promoting creative and critical thinking in schools. This is followed by providing an overview of assessments used to assess creative and critical thinking.

By the end of the course, educators will realise the significance of developing creative and critical thinking skills among students in coping with the changes in a transient economy.

7 Differentiated Instruction

Every student differs in his / her approach towards learning. There is no one size fits all approach to teaching and learning, and educators should respond according to the needs of the learner. There are two different types of differentiations – internal and external. External differentiation involves putting different learners in different classrooms, where learners are grouped according to their capability. Internal differentiation takes place inside the classroom, by modifying the content, the method of delivery and other relevant modifications.

Differentiated instruction aims to attend to different readiness, interests, motivations, and learning profiles of students. With an increasingly diverse student population, our course aims to equip teachers with skills on meeting the diverse learning needs. As part of the course, teachers will explore the principles and practices of differentiated instruction, and how to cater to the needs of learners using differentiated instruction principles and strategies. For instance, teachers can differentiate through four dimensions: the content taught, the process by which students learn, the products of their learning, and the learning environment they are placed in. In addition, they will also analyse and discuss issues in implementation, as well as solutions to problems inherent in a differentiated classroom.

Collaborative Learning 8

Collaborative Learning encompasses joint intellectual effort by learners, or learners and educators together. Collaborative Learning goes beyond the mastery of content and covers a broad range of approaches with wide variability in the amount of in-class or out-of-class time built around group work. It can range from classroom discussions interspersed with short lectures, or peer discussions through entire class periods. The aims and the procedures of collaborative activities also differ widely. On one hand, some group work are highly structured and are devised around sequential steps. On the other hand, some are initiated spontaneously out of students' questions or interests.

The global shift towards high-technology and information-based economies has placed a premium on workers who are equipped with interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills. Thus, it becomes increasingly vital that educators are able to facilitate collaborative learning including face-to-face interaction, group processing, positive interdependence and individual accountability. In this course, educators will be expected to work in groups to design tasks that incorporate collaborative learning in their teaching. We also facilitate discussions on issues relating to lesson design and the use of ICT to support collaborative learning.

9 ICT in Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

One of the major issues countries face is implementing a 21st century skills agenda that focuses on teaching, learning, and assessment that is aligned with changing educational goals. To develop these skills, the alignment of the components of the system i.e. curriculum, pedagogy and assessment need to be aligned, and be closely coupled to support students' learning. Curriculum determines the tasks that indicate whether students have attained the learning objectives which in turn reflect pedagogy of classroom activities and strategies. The pedagogy then reinforces the learning objectives and prepares students for assessments.

By the end of the course, educators will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Educators will also draw upon theory and principle to develop a practical framework for implementation. This course takes a step further by extensively integrating ICT into the planning, design and implementation stages of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. We recognise that the integration of ICT within a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is complex. ICT applications may be poorly attuned to the curriculum, or that teachers do not change their teaching routines to use ICT in an innovative way. Hence, we designed the course in a way that can develop educators' understanding of contemporary theory, concepts and skills as applied in the classroom context with a particular focus on cross-curriculum priorities.

Increasing Student Achievement through Effective Assessment for Learning (AfL)

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AfL is concerned with practices that maximise the value of the feedback process to ensure that learning is optimised. Feedback ranges from informal e.g. immediate feedback given to learners as they process problems, to formal e.g. written feedback, the use of instruments such as rubrics that help clarify learning and assessment objectives. AfL also involves collaborative learning activities, such as peer assessment. By following well-designed approaches to AfL, educators have a better knowledge of how their students are learning, and use this knowledge to strategise how they will go about conducting future classes. AfL also helps learners understand their goals and what is required to achieve those goals.

Our course offers a guide to formative assessment. Formative assessment, in contrast to summative assessment, conveys that assessment is carried out during the process, not just the end. Learners should anticipate future learning. Although formative assessment is not a silver bullet that can solve all educational challenges, it offers a powerful means for meeting goals of high-performance, high equity of student outcomes, and providing students with knowledge and skills for lifelong learning.

Our course incorporates elements that include:

- Initiation of a classroom culture that encourages interactions and use of assessment tools,
- Indication of learning goals,
- Monitoring individual learner's progress toward these goals,
- Utilisation of varied instruction methods and approaches,
- Providing feedback on students' performances and adaptation of instructions to meet identified needs.

11 Seamless Learning Environment

Seamless Learning is defined as the continuity of learning by bridging the multi-faceted learning efforts across various components such as space, time, technologies and community. In the past, learning was viewed as separate, distinct components; e.g. academic and non-academic, on-campus and off-campus experiences. However, with the proliferation of mobile devices coupled with widespread internet access, Seamless Learning has found a new impetus. In a Seamless Learning Environment, learners are encouraged to draw on resources that exist both inside and outside the classroom. More specifically, learners are able to seamlessly switch between a range of settings – formal and informal learning, individual and social learning, and learning in physical and digital realms.

In this course, we will investigate the theories in understanding Seamless Learning across various components. The ultimate objective is to foster habits associated with thoughts and skills of seamless learning among the 21st century learners. Moving on, we will introduce the principles for designing the Seamless Learning Environment. This is essential in ensuring that educators know how to effectively integrate the learning resources into the environment, so as to eliminate the problem of information asymmetry between the learner and the educator. Through this course, we aspire to help a seamless learner engage in self-directed learning, without being inhibited by limited resources.

Lesson Study (LS)

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Lesson Study (LS) aims to shift teaching practices from "teaching as telling" to "teaching for understanding". It serves as a catalyst to improve teaching practices by collegially reviewing strategies for better implementation of future lessons. The newly discovered knowledge of instructional practices can not only be shared at the school level, but also at a national level.

This course will introduce Lesson Study as a teacher-led, professional development process. Educators' capacities and dispositions will be developed, as they discuss curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and other related issues. We explore the various stages of LS, based on the procedure as follows:

- Plan: Educators select a topic and set learning outcomes based on what the learners are struggling with. Educators will then collaborate to design a detailed teaching plan (Research Lesson).
- Do and See: The Research Lesson is enacted, while other educators collect data about the different aspects of the lesson using a variety of observation tools.
- Improve: Post Research Lesson colloquium, educators will analyse their observations and determine whether the learning outcome is in line with the Research Lesson. Refinements will be made to the Research Lesson through various inputs by the educators and facilitators.

To provide educators with comprehensive knowledge about LS, we will also explore the benefits and challenges of implementing LS. We hope that this will foster good teaching practices in educators. To add on, we will also ensure continuity in the LS journey by providing support for educators so that they become more attuned to the structural balance of their lessons, and the impact of their teaching on learners.

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