



August 2013



Thinking Aloud

Higher Education in India
- **Vijayan**

Podium

Interview with **Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne**,
Secretary, Ministry of
Higher Education of Sri
Lanka

We Recommend

Book: The Element –
How Finding Your
Passion Changes
Everything, by Sir Ken
Robinson

Standing Ovation

Bani Mandir, West
Bengal

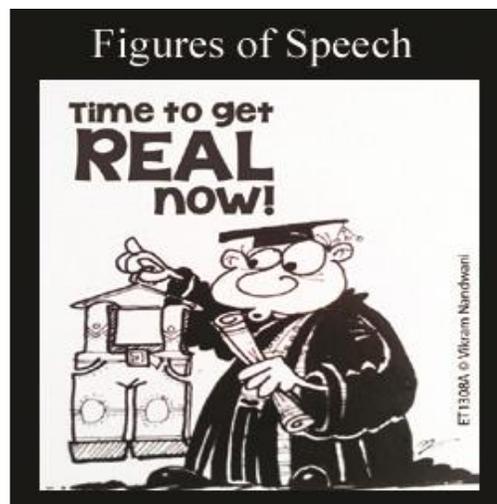
Dear Reader,

One of the many pillars that support overall economic growth is Education, this being an important aspect especially in Emerging Markets today. These markets are faced with challenges such as environmental degradation, economic deprivation, social inequality, ineffective public-sector management and weak corporate governance. None of these challenges can be overcome without a massive increase in the number of competent and motivated leaders and professionals, which in turn requires the reformation of the Education sector.

India for one is faced with the challenge of ensuring inclusive and quality Education to all – both basic and Higher Education. This is indicative from one of the challenges that the 12th Five Year Plan intends on addressing and hopes to answer questions such as ‘how can we improve the quality and the utility of our Education, while ensuring equity and affordability?’ The Ministry of Human Resource Development also reports that the essence of Human Resource Development is Education, which plays a significant and remedial role in weaving and balancing the socio-economic fabric of the nation.

ET this month takes a look at the Higher Education sector in Emerging Markets, the transformation of which is a fundamental condition to sustain economic progress.

In **Thinking Aloud**, Vijayan looks into the Higher Education sector in India and the challenges it faces. The student community is the key stakeholder who is aware of the plethora of courses available to pursue, which today is not confined to the four walls of a classroom. Given this scenario, the teaching community has to transform themselves to new ways to deliver content and pedagogies. Yet another challenge is the close linkage between the student, the



needs of the employment ecosystem, the herd mentality of parents and peer groups for their children to pursue courses in which they might not have the behavioural and other attributes for the same.

Podium features **Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne**. A profound Educationist, Dr. Sunil shares his views on the Education system in Sri Lanka, the many challenges it faces and the long term goals of the sector. Dr. Sunil highlights the various steps taken to make Sri Lanka “The Emerging Wonder of Asia”. He also talks about the key stakeholders of the Higher Education sector and the various skills required for students today to face the ever changing standards of employability. He opines that developing “Human Capital” or suitable “Knowledge Workers” demanded by the long-term vision and goals of the nation is a major responsibility of the Higher Education system of the country.

In **We Recommend**, Sir Ken Robinson through his book ‘The Element – How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything’ delves into finding our ‘Element’ which is the meeting point of one’s natural talent and personal passion. Through various real life stories of well-known personalities, the author presents examples of how these people realised their capabilities and unique talents which eventually helped them to be what they are today. Sir Ken is also of the opinion that the Education system in most parts of the world is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ system and also puts forth his stance stating that intelligence and creativity is interlinked and further describes the same.

Standing Ovation features an NGO which began as a village library dedicated to educating the rural poor and is today what is known as Bani Mandir, aiming at the eradication of illiteracy, and other socio-economic problems in West Bengal. Apart from educating the rural masses, it also offers various facilities such as crèches, training for both women and youth and various other awareness programmes.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram’s toon really graduates!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Linked In](#) & [Google+](#) - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us!



Thinking Aloud

Higher Education in India - Vijayan

Higher Education, in India, envelops most Education/Training courses that are offered post Schooling. It covers a wide gamut of streams, i.e. Engineering, Medical, Management, Catering, Pharmacy, Dental, Chartered Accountancy, Architecture, Education, Research, etc. In India, the Government has historically been a major player in Higher Education, and this explains the emergence of reputed brands like the IITs, IIMs, NIT, AIIMS, etc. Over the last decade or so, with liberalization and winds of change from across the world, the Government is seeking to reduce its direct role in Higher Education and enhance its attention on primary and early Education challenges. This has opened opportunities to the private sector - now to some foreign players too - to set up, upgrade and manage the Institutions in the Higher Education space.

The challenges facing Higher Education in India is to be seen in the above context.

I would like to engage with three important challenges.

First and foremost, it is to do with the student as a key stakeholder. The student community in Higher Education courses, now, are a generation far removed from the freedom struggle and the era of limited opportunities. The current student pool is very well aware of what is happening around them - in India and the world - and hence engaging their attention in a classroom situation is increasingly becoming challenging. This is accentuated when many Teachers/Professors are products of a previous generation. Students, in today's context, do not have to necessarily attend a class to gain information, as the latter is widely available on multiple platforms and sources - most of it for free. Hence, the classroom context has to deliver something more than sharing information. Students expect that the Teacher/Professor is able to engage with issues/challenges, dilemmas, updated practice, etc., around the content by facilitating conversations and learning through group interactions. In fact, the need of the day is for A BIG shift, i.e., from being 'taught' to one of being a 'learner.' The teaching community (and the administrators/regulators who set exams, etc.) have to rise up to this challenge and work from a student centric class learning lens rather than subject text book/Teacher centric 'teaching' filter. The Teacher needs to know how different students learn, as reflected by their preferred learning styles, and design delivery of content and pedagogy appropriately. This calls for a huge mind-set change on the part of Teachers and they should be prepared to 'let go', take 'some risks' and move out of their comfort zones in the class. Being vulnerable sometimes, by saying 'I do not know', will actually make students more respectful and connected.

The second challenge is the increasing need for 'close linkages' between the student studying a course (also from which Institution) and the needs of the employment ecosystem. The market - both private for profit, not for profit & Government - is actually determining what skills/knowledge/disciplines are needed and hence the Institutions of Higher Education are expected to align their teaching and training appropriately. It has become imperative - be it Geology, Anthropology or even Engineering/Management subjects - for a very strong academia - employment ecosystem collaboration. Curriculum planning & upgrade, pedagogical innovation, etc., have to be co-created by key stakeholders, rather than each one assuming that the other would act in the interests of the other. In fact the challenge for many Teachers/professors is that 'Pure Education' for knowledge enhancement/enlightenment (from students' and ecosystem perspective) is giving way to 'how/what are the skills and knowledge being taught' that will be of benefit to 'the users of the knowledge/skills.'

The absence of this imperative is now reflected in the contradiction of qualified students not being valued in the job market, as they seem to possess 'know what' but do not 'know how to do the work'! Competence and qualification is a gulf that needs to quickly recognized and bridged.

A third challenge is the historical perceptual bias of parents/guardians, as to which course/subject, their children should pursue. The herd mentality towards Engineering, Medicine, Management (also fuelled by the aspiration to emigrate to the West), continues unabated. Many a student do not have the behavioural and other attributes that are essential for success in these professions, and yet they have been 'pushed' by their parents and peer pressure. Hence, we have a piquant situation in India, where there is oversupply of moderately capable Engineers and Managers and a significant shortfall in Lawyers, Judges, Nurses, Teachers, Professors, Researchers, Policemen, Defence Officers, Real Estate professionals, Writers, Musicians, etc.

A country's well-being is ensured only when there is value and respect for 'hard' and 'soft' professions/subjects/courses. Historically, children of Indian parents have been pushed into more left brain,

analytical, rote-learning friendly professions. These skills are valuable but not sufficient. Some of these left brain dominated professionals are not able to engage with the 'art' of life, for e.g., how to resolve value dilemmas, align self and society, etc.

Hence, it is in India's interest that there is greater freedom for students to choose from as wide a range of subjects/courses, even on an audit basis. They should be allowed to study unique combination of subjects, i.e., Music and Engineering, Medicine and Ethics, or Management and Foreign Affairs, etc.

Higher Education is poised for change in India and there is no doubt on that count. The challenge before those who administer policy in this space and the behaviour of key stakeholders like Parents, Students, Academia, Society will have to decide what shape and how soon Indian Higher Education space has to unfold.

I would like to end with a quote from a legendary Professor at MIT, Dr Rob Freund, who commented on Teaching/Facilitation, saying, 'It's not what you cover in the syllabus, but it's what you uncover in the syllabus that is more important.'

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Podium

Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne, Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education of Sri Lanka



Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne is the Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education of Sri Lanka. He obtained his first degree in Business Administration from the University of Sri Jayawardenapura and later an MA in Economics from Kagawa University, Japan. He has also completed his PhD in Management at Keio University in Tokyo.

Dr. Nawaratne has Leadership experience in both the private and public sectors. He has held leading positions in Sri Lanka such as Director General and Chairman, National Youth Services Council (NYSC), Director General of Samurdhi Authority, Secretary of the Ministry of Samurdhi, Rural Development & Parliamentary Affairs, and Advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. He is working as a visiting faculty member at various Universities and is also teaching and supervising students in the fields of Strategic Management, Marketing and Change Management.

ET: Sri Lanka's Education system was developed based on the British system and has produced world-class professionals and academics over the years. What are the challenges that are faced by this sector in the light of evolving global trends?

SN: Sri Lankan Higher Education today is at a crossroad. As a middle income country, Sri Lanka has a new vision and that is "to be the Emerging Wonder of Asia" or "to be the Miracle of Asia". A vital input in achieving these long-

term goals is "Human Capital" development, which will be the key to realize the set vision and mission of the nation.

The prevailing Higher Education system has many advantages and strengths as well as some weaknesses, and faces a few threats too. If we can address these weaknesses and threats, our Higher Education system can be converted into a "modern" and "world class" system within a very short period. The greatest challenge for Higher Education is the recognition of relevance, which is the need to adapt to the immediate needs of the job market. Maintaining and upgrading the quality of University Education, keeping up to its past reputation and positioning Universities amongst the best in the world are challenges faced by Sri Lanka.

ET: How does the Higher Education system in Sri Lanka address key stakeholders of the Education sector?

SN: All Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) have two markets to satisfy namely – 'parents and students' and the 'employers' market. The student is the customer of the Universities and the potential "products" of the Universities or other HEIs. If the students fail to become a quality graduate or a product s(he) will be unable to find suitable employment opportunities or become "unemployed graduates". Then, students as well as parents will be dissatisfied. Prospective employers will also be dissatisfied since they are unable to find suitable candidates from among the graduates from the HEIs.

On the other hand, employers of various organizations look forward to hire skilled, high quality graduates with the right attitudes and mind-sets to make their organizations more sustainable. They expect something more than average from graduates since they are the "cream of the cream" of our Educational system. In other words the industry wants them to develop into "good leaders" or "effective managers" in the course of their career and expects their contribution towards elevating the organizations to a higher level. To be a good leader or manager or even to become an effective middle-level employee, a graduate needs: Knowledge (up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge), Skills (basic + specialised skills), Attitudes (positive and appropriate) and Mind-set (how one perceives the world) – "K-SAM".

From the Government's perspective, the accumulation of a large number of graduates in the country becomes a liability to the Government as it has the responsibility to provide some kind of employment for them in the public sector, although the system does not really require their services. Even more worrying are the negative effects and the invisible costs and burden to the system resulting from the recruitment of unemployed graduates by the Government without appropriate vacancies or need.

ET: Organisations today are looking for 'Human Capital' and not 'Human Liabilities'. Can you please elaborate on the same and describe the characteristics of 'Human Capital'?

SN: Developing "Human Capital" or suitable "Knowledge Workers" demanded by the long-term vision and goals of the nation is a major responsibility of the Higher Education system of the country. What we have been producing through our traditional and Higher Education system is now inadequate since the external environment has changed drastically and demands a modern product (graduate) in contrast to the traditional graduates whom we have been producing.

For long, the ability to write with a pen was good enough for a graduate, but today it is not enough to make him/her a "Knowledge Worker" and (s)he should be equipped with a computer or ICT knowledge and English to make him/her employable and effective human capital. Traditionally, University graduates were mainly employed in the public sector of Sri Lanka, and being in possession of a Degree Certificate was enough to obtain an employment after facing an IQ test and/or an interview. Today, IQ itself is not enough to pass tests and interviews, and (s)he should

demonstrate additional skills like EQ (Emotional Quotient), ExQ (Execution Quotient), soft skills and conceptual skills. Today's job market is demanding up-to-date knowledge (both theory and practical) and skills (human/soft skills: initiative, commitment, innovative, pragmatic and practical, problem solving, results oriented, team work, leadership etc.), right attitude and right mind-set too.

ET: Could you please share what are the steps being taken to raise standards of Higher Education in Sri Lanka?

SN: The Higher Education environment of Sri Lanka has changed dramatically with the open market operation and under the influence of international and global Educational flows and Institutional operations. Many foreign Universities and Institutes are offering affiliated degrees and other qualifications in the country at a comparatively low cost. Many world-recognized professional courses are being offered and many students are simultaneously following both degree and professional programs to market themselves competitively, locally and globally.

Further, the policy directions under Mahinda Chinthana focus on:

- Increasing the access to Higher Education by enabling more choices in courses, modes of learning and alternate Institutions within a regulatory framework for all prospective students
- Enhancing quality and upgrading standards with emphasis on employability and ability to cope with national development needs and global competitiveness
- Fostering a culture of research & innovations
- Ensuring accountability, sound performance and financial stability. Universities are encouraged to become centres for economic development, agents of innovation and incubators of entrepreneurship

The National Higher Education Strategic Management Plan of Sri Lanka (2012-2015) aims at:

- Increased opportunities and access to Higher Education
- Converted and new world class Universities
- Improved employability and quality of graduates
- Improved satisfaction of stakeholders
- Improved global compatibility, global links and exchanges
- Enhanced research, publications and commercialization
- Converted Higher Education for attracting investments and foreign exchange
- Empowered Universities and Institutes with freedom to be competitive and unique
- Enhanced entrepreneurship of graduates
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency of the Higher Education sector
- Enhanced contribution to the national development, reconciliation and peace
- Improved infrastructure facilities of the national Educational system

Apart from these, the budget speech this year also emphasized on University townships and to provide suitable land free of charge to build hostel facilities for University students. The investment in the sector is to the tune of Rs. 4,000 mn for 2013.

ET: An interesting initiative that is being considered in Sri Lanka is mLearning initiative. Could you please elaborate on this?

SN: The mLearning initiative was one which began in September 2008 with the collaboration of the University of

Colombo and Mobitel, the country's telecom service provider, with an aim to enhance Higher Education systems in Sri Lanka. With the advancement of mobile technology, and the country moving into the 3G network spectrum, it was highlighted that traditional learning shortcomings can be addressed through the concept of "mlearning" (mobile learning). "mLearning" is the teaching and learning process through the use of mobile and hand held devices such as mobile phones, PDAs, laptops and tablet PC's.

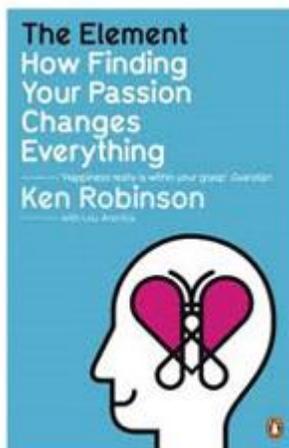
Basically this initiative addresses the needs of all stakeholders including lecturers, course coordinators, students and Education Institutes. It also sets an Educational stage which explores new frontiers of knowledge and matches it with the needs of the global market. The initial course started in March 2009 with the Faculty of Graduate Studies Executive Diploma in marketing course. With the success of this course many other faculties have now joined mLearning and are currently delivering their courses over this unique and progressive Educational tool.

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We Recommend

Book Review: The Element - How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything By Ken Robinson



World renowned Educationist and creativity expert, Sir Ken Robinson elucidates in his book 'The Element', the truth behind why a child gets bored easily in class or why people in general are disillusioned and frustrated with whatever they do in their day to day life. The author is of the opinion that finding the Element in oneself is essential to discover what one can really do and who you really are. In other words, the Element is a point where natural talent meet personal passion.

Through various real life stories of well-known personalities such as Gillian Lynne, Matt Groening, Paul Samuelson, Mick Fleetwood, Bart Conner, Albert Einstein, Paul McCartney, Meg Ryan, Debbie Allen among many others, the author presents examples of how these people realised their capabilities and unique talents which eventually helped them to make a living (and a very successful one at that), by just doing what they loved the most. Sir Ken Robinson suggests that we really do not understand our own natural capacities to grow and change in spite of being born

with imagination, intelligence, feeling, intuition and sensory awareness, of which we only use a fraction. This lack of understanding is further compounded by peer groups, culture and our own expectations of us.

Sir Ken also tries to bring about a paradigm shift in the views held by most Education systems in the world. The book highlights the fact that till date, the Education system in most parts of the world is a 'one-size-fits-all' that teaches children what is right and what is not, although this might differ from person to person. The author puts forth his stance stating that intelligence and creativity is interlinked and further describes the same.

Yet another aspect highlighted in the book is 'the Zone'. To be in the Zone is to be in the deep heart of the Element. One of the strongest indicators of being in the zone is a sense of freedom and authenticity. When we are doing

something that we love and are naturally good at, we are much more likely to feel centered in our true sense of self. Nearing the end of the book, the importance of finding our Elements individually and all of us together is stressed upon.

A book written in simple, straightforward and down to earth language touches various topics such as passion, talent and achievements through various anecdotes and personal experiences.

More videos from Sir Ken Robinson:

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms.html

About the Author:

Sir Ken Robinson is an internationally recognized leader in the development of Creativity, Innovation and Human Resources in Education and in business. Sir Ken works with Governments and Education systems spanning Europe, Asia and the USA, with international agencies, Fortune 500 companies and some of the world's leading cultural organizations. For twelve years, he was Professor of Education at the University of Warwick in the UK and is now Professor Emeritus. He has received honorary degrees from the Rhode Island School of Design, the Open University and the Central School of Speech and Drama; Birmingham City University, the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and Oklahoma State University. He was honoured with the Athena Award of the Rhode Island School of Design for services to the Arts and Education; the Peabody Medal for contributions to the Arts and Culture in the United States, the Arthur C. Clarke Imagination Award, the Gordon Parks Award for achievements in Education and the Benjamin Franklin Medal of the Royal Society of Arts for outstanding contributions to Cultural Relations between the United Kingdom and the United States.

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Standing Ovation

Bani Mandir



In August 1945, a group of local school Teachers took the initiative to build a platform and render help to the poor and needy people in distress. What started off as a village library dedicated to educating the rural masses then, is today what is known as Bani Mandir, an NGO aiming at the eradication of illiteracy, superstitions and other socio-economic problems in West Bengal.

Its mission is to uplift the socio-economic development of the downtrodden people with special emphasis on Education, health, awareness generation, income generation through women self-help-groups, care of orphans/needy children & elderly persons in distress and the empowerment of the rural poor men & women.

Some of the activities at Bani Mandir

- Education: Imparting quality Education to the under privileged is the primary focus of Bani Mandir. Bani Mandir supported 1,396 children by the sponsorship programme of SAHAY and from the financial support from Children International, USA.
- Technical/Vocational Education: Children who have completed up to class eight but not interested to go on for further studies are provided with technical/vocational Education by Bani Mandir.
- Youth Activities: Youth activities for the development of the villages is another important programme of Bani Mandir. In 13 villages, Bani Mandir has organized youth programmes to develop villages.
- Women's Right Programme: Women's Right Programme is aimed at women development and empowerment activities with the involvement of women members of working class families in Diamond Harbour II Block.
- Crèche Facilities: Bani Mandir has been running two crèches since 1989. In 2010, it started two more for the children of working parents. Here, children are provided with food and Education through joyful learning and playing.

Bani Mandir certainly deserves a standing ovation for its noble cause!

For more information about Bani Mandir, you can email them at banimandir06@rediffmail.com or log on to <http://www.banimandir.org>

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