MARIS STELLA COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), VIJAYAWADA
BEST PRACTICES: 2019-20

1. **Title of the Practice: Student Leadership**

Objectives of the practice:

Student leadership development helps create skills that the students can carry over to adulthood. The chief objective of this practice is to train students to take active roles in their education and develop positive skills in the process. The goal of inspiring student leaders is to create a culture of ownership, collaboration and community in the classroom and beyond.

By training students to be responsible, fair-minded, positive and caring representatives of the student body it is expected that they will actively demonstrate, promote and encourage involvement in creating a positive college community and initiate community activities. They will develop a comprehensive set of practical skills and tools to rely on through leadership practice.

Context:

Quality education for leadership and social responsibility is part of the vision of the college. To develop leadership of high caliber and integrity is one of the stated objectives of the institution. These objectives and goals can only be realized by addressing all aspects of a student's life. So it became necessary to take into account many issues in designing and implementing this practice. Leadership plays an important role in every aspect of a student's life. In the modern world, students face many career challenges, employment problems and value-conflicts. They need leadership skills to accept challenges, solve problems, analyze career directions and find happiness.

 All-round development of the student is critical to this practice. Activities need to be designed to develop leadership skills such as team building, time management, confidence-building, problem-solving, networking to enable the emerging leader to impact society, communities, nation and most importantly, nature and environmental sustenance and development.

The Practice:

Realizing the need for leadership training for students, the college began by initiating measures to make it a part of extra-curricular activity. In collaboration with The Forum for Free Enterprise and M.R.Pai Foundation, Mumbai, the institution has been organizing Leadership Training Camps every year since 2008. Sessions are held on topics such as Setting and Achieving Goals, Sharpening Vital Skills, The Power of Habits, Effective Communication, Coming Together and Understanding Self and Others by established resource persons of national stature with funding from industry houses such as Godrej. Even during the pandemic, this practice was not discontinued. A virtual leadership programme 'Learn to Lead' arranged by M.R.Pai Foundation was held on 26th and 27th Sept. 2020. Alongside, A.D.Shroff Memorial Elocution Competitions are also held to encourage confidence-building and public speaking skills.

Workshops in Leadership for class representatives is another initiative that has been put in place. During the last two years, training in leadership has been held by Dr. Fr. Casimir SJ, XLRI, Amaravathi, Dr.M.C. Das, Management Consultant and Fr. Bala Kumar Bollineni, Founder-Director, Yes-J & Counselling Psychologist. They dealt with topics such as Effective Communication, the Capacity to Transform Vision to Reality and the Power to Influence Others and Get Things Done – qualities needed for a good leader. Similar workshops are also held for floor leaders who help the wardens in the running of the hostel.

Taking advantage of its autonomous status, the college incorporated Leadership into the curriculum as a Foundation Course in the revised curriculum of 2015. In the recent revision of curriculum in 2020, Personality Development and Leadership is offered as a Life Skills Course. Structural changes had to be effected in order to accommodate these courses as part of the curriculum with credits allotted.

As policy, the institution makes every effort to involve students in decision-making and to provide opportunities to show initiative and take the lead. Student representatives are consulted whenever important measures are taken. Students have representation in most of the committees, cells and forums of the college. They are given a chance to play organizational roles during events such as College Day, Teachers' Day, Activities of Departments, Cultural Week

Celebrations, Celebration of National Festivals and other days of significance. Students also take the lead in organizing and managing fresher's parties, farewells and felicitations, thus providing them with ample opportunities to be shaped into leaders who can influence others and contribute to positive changes.

Evidence of Success:

Over the years, the student profile has been changing so that the bulk of students are from socially and economically challenged backgrounds, poorly-schooled and lacking in life skills. Despite this, it is creditable that the general performance of the students has been good on all fronts.

Students have shown consistently improved participation in classroom as well as extracurricular activities. Placements have been going up steadily. Students have shown initiative and drive during periods of national disasters such as floods and cyclones or on occasions needing voluntary services such as crowd management during festivals or awareness raising. Their contribution to the institution's Covid relief has also been creditable. They have reached out to the old and the needy through initiatives of their own.

Students have been chosen for awards and recognition at levels such as at the National Youth Parliament Festival and the Study of United States Institute for Student Leaders sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required:

A major obstacle for most programmes is funding. The leadership training programmes held every year in collaboration with the M.R. Pai Foundation are funded by the foundation. It has been running smoothly through the years with the organization and execution at the institution end taken care of by the Dept. of Economics.

The workshops for class representatives are funded by the management. Problems related to freeing the student leaders from academic work to facilitate attendance at the workshops are addressed by the Deans and Vice Principals.

The budget allocated for curriculum revision covers the bills for expert opinion on the design, content and duration of the courses in leadership.

Mentors and coordinators from among the faculty are assigned the job of averting any clashes or possible controversies in events and activities led by students. Any other issues that come up are addressed by the relevant administrator.

Notes:

One of the chief purposed of education is to mould students into good citizens. Leadership is a crucial element of the graduate attributes an institution wants in its students and alumni. Every educational institution should have leadership training as an integral part of its curriculum, giving it as much importance as academics, for this is a life-skill every individual needs.

2. **Title of the Practice:** Capacity Building of Teachers through Job-embedded Professional Development

Objectives of the practice:

The objectives of this practice are grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning. It is part of a cycle of continuous improvement, an on-going process that is locally rooted and makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice.

It aims at facilitating teachers in developing and applying the skills and knowledge necessary to support student achievement. The goals focus on student academic needs and the skills and knowledge teachers need to meet these goals.

Context:

The institution has been organizing professional development programmes and workshops every academic year. But during recent years, the approach to teaching-learning has undergone a shift from the teacher-centric to the student-centric. With technology revolutionizing travel and communication, mobility has increased and students need new skills to match global standards.

In turn, teaching methodology and delivery have also been necessarily modified to cater to the new requirements of today's student.

Most teachers are fixated on traditional modes of teaching which are rapidly becoming outmoded. There was an urgent need to help teachers understand and accept the changes and to be convinced of the need for re-training in the new approach to education. In many cases, the concept of technology-based teaching, learning and evaluation was unacceptable to large section of teachers, particularly the older ones. Furthermore, training alone is not enough. The confidence to implement the training received in day-to-day teaching and evaluation is also needed. Time and resources must be found to facilitate the practice. This is the context in which the institution took up this practice.

The Practice:

A series of workshops were held through the academic year as part of the practice. The first, a workshop on Constructive Alignment and Outcome Based Education introduced the faculty to the concept of outcome based education. It identified gaps in the existing process of curriculum and syllabus design and proposed an action plan to address these gaps. It drew up strategies and resources needed to design a constructively aligned curriculum and outcomes, to align the outcomes with teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, to build constructively aligned course plans and to integrate technology and digital tools to aid the teaching, learning and assessment process.

This was followed by a workshop on Designing Effective Assessment Practices and Digital Technology that focused on different kinds of assessment practices, choosing appropriate assessment design for each course, identifying learning outcomes for the different kinds of assessment and aligning these learning outcomes with the course outcomes, teaching strategies and assessment. Designing comprehensive and effective assignments and tests, framing questions which address the higher-order thinking skills, formulating rubrics for assessment and facilitating effective feedback were other aspects of the workshop.

Next was a Five Day Digital Workshop on Outcome Based Education: Teaching and Learning Online and Measuring Outcome Attainment that helped to map Programme Outcomes with Programme Specific Outcomes and Course Outcomes, to identify appropriate digital tools to suit the needs of the classroom, adopt pedagogical strategies for both online and offline platforms, to design and implement lessons and assessment components for both synchronous and asynchronous learning and to measure outcome attainment of a course. The sessions on digital learning and techniques addressed the potential learning space for staff and students and incorporated them into Outcome Based Education thus helping faculty and students move closer to global pedagogical practices.

The Five - day Online Workshop on Question Bank: Preparation and Validation that came next trained faculty in preparing question banks in all the courses according to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy levels, framing questions and strategies to ensure that the assessment schemes address all levels of cognition and accommodate learners at various levels of accomplishment. They were trained in the processes of validation and evaluation, and to create questions as per the blueprint and to map them with the course outcomes.

Workshops were also held on Office Automation Tools and on Formal Written Communication to strengthen skills required in any teacher's day-to-day transactions.

Evidence of Success:
The success of the training imparted through this practice familiarized faculty with new approaches to education and equipped them with the skills required for ICT-enabled teaching. They are now offering online classes confidently through google classroom and making video lessons and learning material for their courses. They are able to contribute to a teaching-learning process that has vastly reduced its use of paper.

Newly revised courses have clear objectives and expected outcomes which are measured scientifically.

Question banks have been set up, eliminating the dependence on external support in the testing process. Attempts are being made to frame questions at progressively higher RBT levels for successive semesters.

The workshops on Office Automation Tools and on Formal Written Communication have improved the quality of reports and other necessary documentation required of every teacher. It has also helped in easing the technical difficulties in administrative work to be done online such as posting of attendance, continuous assessment marks, etc. As a result, all-round efficiency has improved.

The whole process of teaching-learning and evaluation has become more focused and outcome based and faculty and students as beneficiaries, are advancing towards acquiring global competencies through the training received from this practice.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required:
Change is often met with resistance. Initially, there was reluctance, diffidence and sometimes, hostility from different groups of faculty. Persuasion, and in some cases, compulsion had to be used to ensure participation in the programmes. Time had to be made for not only attending the programmes but also to complete and submit tasks and assignments as most of the workshops had a large component of practical work. It was challenging to ensure that, simultaneously, course work and academic schedules went on, undisturbed.

Another problem was that of funding. Fortunately, this was overcome by a $5000 grant from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. Most of the expenses for the workshops were met from this grant. As pandemic restrictions were in place, the workshops were held online, helping in reducing expenses. The necessary infrastructure and technical support were provided by the management.

Notes:
Faculty are the backbone of any teaching institution. Their quality is of crucial importance in the over-all performance of an institution and to its image. It is of utmost importance that faculty

stay abreast of developments in the field of higher education and constantly equip themselves with the skills required to meet changing trends and practices. This practice addressed a need at a time when Indian Higher Education is ushering in momentous changes. All institutions would be well-advised to facilitate similar training for their faculty in the interests of updation and relevance.