A new Triple Helix

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Synopsis

A triple helix is not a new concept for a science student - it’s comprised of congruent geometrical helices along with the same axis differing by translation. A bio-science student may even relate this to the DNA structure. Third year science students of the University of Colombo are offered a credit bearing course that resembles a triple helix. Here, the University, Corporate organizations, and Community represent the helices. The bond between the helices is the Service Learning program.

Service Learning is a new pedagogical tool that provides opportunity for the students to acquire learning outside the classroom activities. As it associates an effective learning method of experiential learning, the students can extract firm understanding of the concepts taught in the classroom. However, Service Learning is yet to become a natural choice in Sri Lankan university curricula despite of its benefits. Unemployment rates in Sri Lanka over the past several years have been at a healthy rate of 4%-5%. However, graduate employability rates paint a different picture with average unemployment rate at 26.4% in 2012. Employers - especially in the private sector from where the large part of Sri Lanka’s economic growth comes from, employers lament over lack of soft skills in fresh university graduates.

On the other hand, having selected through a highly competitive selection process, the main expectation of the students out of university education is to get employed immediately after graduation. However, the education students receive in Sri Lankan universities is not primarily targeted at employment. In a developing economy like Sri Lanka, universities hold a key responsibility in preparing the knowledge workers to participate in economic development process early as possible. Therefore it’s timely for the educators to adopt innovative solutions for improving employability within university curricula. Service Learning can be a catalyst for sharpening soft skills that are valuable to fresh graduates in securing employment.