



Teacher Learning Centre: An Effective Space for Teacher Development

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The quality of a school depends on the quality of its teachers. What students learn in schools is directly associated to what and how teachers teach. What and how teachers teach, in turn, depends on the teachers' knowledge, skills, motivation and commitment. If school teachers are expected to bring about significant changes in their approach of teaching, the same change must precede and find a place in their pre-service education and programmes for in service professional development. Many teachers in government schools are willing to enhance their knowledge, learn new things and adapt changes as per the changing demands of classroom. A large number of government school teachers are serving in rural areas. It is necessary to examine the facilities available for such teachers to upgrade their subject knowledge and receive support in addressing day-to-day academic challenges. It is also essential to understand basic mechanisms established to provide academic support to teachers.

In fact, one could observe that there is little space for teachers for academic development in their workplaces, with the the only official activity addressing teachers' professional development being training programmes under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which are broadly organized in discrete manner. The accountability of government school teachers is a hot topic of discussion today, especially in the background of lower enrolment and retention rates. The professional capacity of teachers plays a key role in enhancing their accountability.

Formal training and workshops include the ongoing efforts of teachers' professional development. These training sessions are organised in two or three batches in a year on specific content. However, apart from the cursory treatment of the content, such training sessions often have no space to discuss the need of the teachers, classroom problems and the perspectives of education and nature of a subject with little connection being established between the content discussed in two successive training programmes. Quality teacher development requires more than couple

of sessions of training per year. Providing space for formal and informal interactions for teachers along with continuous nature of engagement based on the needs of the teachers would speed up the process of development. Also, training would become more effective when teachers identify the topics that need to be learnt and make autonomous decisions on whether or not to engage in professional development.

The Azim Premji Foundation conceived the concept of Teacher Learning Centre (TLC) to provide a free and voluntary space for the development of teachers and was part of its strategy to engage teachers in a continuous process of professional development. The physical space of TLC is just a skeleton which creates an ambience of learning, but the life breath of a TLC is the human interactions taking place under its aegis. The TLC model is a bottom-up approach to professional development, as opposed to current in-service programmes. The first TLC was established in Shorapur block of Yadgir district, Karnataka in 2009. Now the TLCs are spread across all the six states where the Azim Premji Foundation operates, with 72 of them in 44 districts across the sub-continent, mostly in rural locations. Our experience in the field of teacher professional development confirms that TLCs are the most consistent and cost-effective method to reach out to and academically engage teachers. Therefore another 60 TLCs are planned to be established in the current academic year and in next few years over 300 TLCs will be established across the country.

What is a Teacher Learning Centre?

- TLC is an open space that provides teachers formal, informal and non-formal opportunities for engaging with their subject. Its library of academic resources, with access to all these resources includes books, science laboratory apparatus, mathematics kits, computer with internet facilities and other Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs).
- TLC creates the space for the professional development of the teacher community by

promoting peer learning, self-learning and expert-driven learning.

- This provides opportunity for the teachers to sharpen their conceptual, technical and human relation skills.
- TLC also acts as a non-formal space for teachers to share their experiences and learn from each other.

Available academic resources

The following resources are usually available in a TLC:

Books and journals – content, reference, stories, encyclopedias, dictionaries, educational reports, educational policy documents, magazines, newspapers

Apparatus and TLMs – equipment which can be used to enhance learning in chemistry, biology, physics, geography and astronomy

Raw materials for developing TLMs – which can be used by teachers for developing TLMs for classroom use

Digital materials – Computers with internet access, e-resources (soft copies of articles, videos, academic interactive software, academic videos)

Materials for leisure and entertainment - shuttle cock, volleyball, chess, carrom etc

Human resources – Subject resource persons and resource teachers

How does a TLC operate?

TLCs remain open from 4.00 pm to 8.00 pm on weekdays, and from 10.00 am to 8.00 pm on weekends for teachers to use the facilities in their spare time. Activities of both formal and informal nature are organised. The workshops, seminars, conferences and subject specific exhibitions of classroom projects by children of a given geographical area constitutes the formal activities. Casual visits, borrowing of materials, voluntary teacher forums, peer discussions, evening discussions, self-learning etc. are classified as informal activities. The Informal space creates continuity, connectedness and addresses the need-based enhancement of teachers' knowledge, attitude and skills.

Regular workshops are organised in TLCs. Some workshops last for a duration of up to five days. Such workshops attempt to provide deeper understanding on the topic and encourage

teachers to reflect on their learning. Seminars and conferences organised regularly encourage teachers to conduct research and present their paper and assist them in their interactions with subject matter experts.

On an average ten to fifteen teachers visit each TLC every day to read, borrow materials for the classroom, use the internet and interact with peers. A Voluntary Teacher Forum for each subject is organised every month on a scheduled weekend. These forums help 20-25 teachers of a specific subject to gather together and explore a topic using the resources available in the TLC, with a resource person from the Foundation often moderating. A typical forum lasts three to five hours. Evening discussions, which attempt to throw light on broader educational discourse, are another way of engaging teachers for shorter periods (two hours per session), with teachers having read selected articles to deliberate on the same in the discussion. TLC resources are also used to prepare for the next class.

TLCs as learning hubs

TLCs have developed as learning spaces where teachers from a particular town come together to learn about topics identified by the teachers themselves. They also prepare the schedule for evening discussions and voluntary forums. Apart from preparing notes and conventional TLMs teachers have developed video films for classroom use. Working in groups encourages bonding among them and this helps them learn to from one another.

Continuity and relevance

The activities of TLC bridge the gaps in teacher training common in government schools. TLCs supplement the workshops with appropriate academic inputs. Teacher development interventions have to be a continuous process of engagement and demands continuous feedback and regular reflection. Disconnected and compartmentalised training limits the assistance teachers might need to understand a concept completely and then impart it effectively in the classroom. Often the topics considered for formal training are themselves disconnected from the classroom needs of the teachers.

These sessions may not always help teachers develop their skill sets holistically. Therefore, teacher development programmes need to be contextual, relevant to geographical and individual

needs and also provide the chance for continued development through non-formal means such as self-learning, peer learning, guided learning, need-based discussions, demonstrations etc. The content of the training needs to be imparted using multiple modes (not exclusively the lecture mode).

Engaging with available resources

TLCs have enabled teachers to access both physical and digital materials and, further, encouraged them to utilise additional resources and TLMs in the classroom. Materials available in the TLCs are systematically organised to help teachers to identify the right equipment for a particular lesson. All the materials are procured after mapping the same form the formal curriculum/syllabus of the primary schools.

The most important aspects in the TLCs are, firstly, the academic activities in the centre and secondly, reaching out to teachers. There may be many activities, which are not academic in nature, such as sports, reading newspapers, watching non-academic videos, chatting with each other on general topic, etc. While formally scheduled academic activities are the nucleus of the TLCs, informal discussions on understanding education, children, school, learning, teaching, content, pedagogy allow teachers to connect to their role and to practice/apply the lessons learned in the day to day work of a teacher. There could be peer groups meeting regularly at different venues, such as the local tea shop, temple, campus etc, or organising programmes for themselves such as seminars, discussions etc. Visiting schools with books and TLMs, encourages interacting with students and later with teachers. Once, few teachers start coming to TLCs and feel interactions in the TLC adds value to their professional development, they bring more teachers.

The following is some of our learning from operating TLCs

- The utilisation of the TLCs is optimum when it is located in an area where more than 100 teachers reside.
- Teachers residing within three km from TLCs access them more frequently. It is essential to provide open access of all materials.
- Quality learning environment such as sufficient space to sit, clean environment, drinking water, toilet facilities, quality learning materials, books from diverse genres, computers, continuous power supply and recreation and leisure equipment, along with resource persons on each subject are essential for the success of the TLCs.
- Teachers volunteering with a sense of accountability towards their professional development create vibrancy in the TLC.
- While TLCs can be an integral part of teacher development activities, they can also function in isolation.
- Activities in the TLCs need to be directly connected to classroom demands and must promote professional development of teachers. Only then teachers be encouraged to continuously visit the centre.
- TLCs need to upgrade regularly based on the need of the hour.

Teacher Learning Centres are an effective method for engaging teachers as they make teachers voluntarily accountable for their own professional development. There are many anecdotes describing how teachers took up the task of their professional development. A study conducted in Yadgir district has discovered that TLCs have brought positive changes among teachers. TLCs encouraged teachers to upgrade their subject knowledge and adapt more child-friendly classroom practices in everyday school life. Hopefully, the continued use of TLC will result in the enhanced quality of learning outcome among students.

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