Samuhik Pahal

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Continuous professional development for teachers

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This issue of Samuhik Pahal has been guest edited by Kanavu. The organization's name means "dreams." Kanavu empowers schools and communities of rural Cuddalore, by bridging the skill and opportunity gap. Its work focuses on two thematic areas – Education and Community Development. In the domain of education, it works with four affordable private schools to deliver sustainable and holistic education.

Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers: what needs to be done and why

Team Kanavu

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What does continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers entail

While discussing continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, one often begins with the question, "What is continuous professional development?". A simple online search or a textbook will throw up many answers, one of them being - CPD is a set of learning experiences that help you develop and improve your professional practice. This can include building on your strengths, and developing where you have capability gaps.

In his Dictionary of Education, C V Good and W R Merkel (1973) define Continuing Professional Education as "the continuing education of adults for occupational updating and improvement conducted by a wide variety of institutions, organizations, and businesses, which usually consists of short-term, intensive, specialized learning experiences often categorized by general field of specialization, such as continuing medical education or continuing legal education."

Day (1999) explains professional development in terms of "all natural learning experiences, where consciously planned activities directly or indirectly benefit individual or group of teachers who review, renew and extend their commitment as change agent to the

moral purpose of teaching and acquire skills, knowledge and professional thinking throughout each phase of teaching."

Further, Wallace (2015) defines Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the context of teaching as "continuation of a teacher's professional development beyond their initial training, qualification, and induction. This may take many forms, including participating in short courses to update skills or knowledge; longer courses of study, such as diplomas and postgraduate degrees in education; staff development events held within the teacher's own institution; conferences; mentoring; and peer assessment."

Richards and Farell (2005) attempt to categorize teacher learning under three categories. These include: (i) Teacher learning as a cognitive process; (ii) Teacher learning as personal construction, and; (iii) Teacher learning as reflective practice.

CPD for teachers as a layered practice

From these different definitions, we see different layers to CPD. If we were to look at the teacher's role in these categories shared by Richards and Farell, we see how all these require time for introspection and deepening practice. Does our system really build all this into a teacher's role? A teacher is expected to deliver across-classroom teaching and learning and support their school to run efficiently. To meet each of these requirements of their role, teachers need support across a variety of skills, knowledge pieces and most crucially, time to deepen practice.

Teaching isn't a "profession" that is simply about transferring knowledge and skills. It is about a teacher bringing her whole self, and developing the ability to view her students as whole selves, with lives beyond the four walls of the classroom. At the same time, it is also about a teacher opening herself up to the world and its new ways of working, with a firm grasp of the content that she delivers to her students.

Teaching is then an experience, co-created by learners and teachers. What kind of a CPD space will enable this? NEP 2020 mandates 50 hours of CPD per year, across a variety of modalities like in-person training, online training, self-learning, and peer learning spaces.

If we look at these hours globally, we see a country like Japan, follow a lesson study approach. Here teachers put approximately 35% of their efforts and time into CPD. Countries like Singapore invest close to 100 hours per year in CPD. Here teachers are trained to use action research projects in the classroom. South Korea mandates a similar 90 hours per year. It places a requirement to complete 180 hours to be eligible for a promotion.

The time that a teacher needs to spend on CPD continues to be varied, to be debated globally. One must also critically look at how the time that is allotted is being spent. As we explore CPD experiences from a variety of lenses, we hope this issue is an invitation to take a peek into different windows of perspectives on the continuous professional development of teachers.

The diversity of perspectives in CPD for teachers

Over the last seven years at Kanavu, we have been working with an inspiring team of teachers working across four rural schools in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu. Who are our teachers? Why do they teach? What does ongoing learning mean for them? What is happening state-wide and what does it mean for our teachers' classrooms? These have been some questions we have explored in this journey.

This edition of Samuhik Pahal explores these, and similar, questions with organizations whose work we have admired, been inspired by, learned from, and collaborated with.

The diverse locations of CPD in the system call for unique approaches that best suit teachers in each of these contexts. In this issue of Samuhik Pahal, we have attempted to bring together voices from CPD at large and local scales, perspectives from urban and rural contexts, and approaches of CPD from mainstream and alternate schools.

This edition of Samuhik Pahal is an invitation to think about the evolution of CPD in the country starting from the 1980s and to locate its current challenges. The contributors of the issue tackle the theme from multiple vantage points. The aspects they deal with include the importance of creating a positive opinion about CPD amidst teachers, the challenges of CPD at a state-level, and the need for data-driven approaches, and the complexities of working on CPD for teachers at scale.

The importance of teacher agency and collaboration in their CPD

Two key aspects of teachers' continuous professional development that are often missing in practice are teacher agency and collaboration. Building schools that foster teacher agency, creates an environment for teachers to experiment, make mistakes, take risks, fail and learn. This, along with an ecosystem to share best practices, failures and reflections, creates accountability organically.

Much of the systems rely heavily on teacher accountability, fearing autonomy. This leaves teachers mostly as recipients of a teacher development program, built for them by others, as against a program co-created by them. Attempts to improve the current situation must include building strong communities of practice among teachers and nurturing spaces for collaboration.

Pressures of the school system, syllabus completion, and resource optimization leave little room for teachers to have adequate time for reflective planning and practice in the everyday. Factoring this in as a key ingredient of a teacher's professional development can become a starting point for teachers to build it into their practice, as a way of thinking about their role. In this issue of Samuhik Pahal, many different CSOs across the country discuss how they make it happen within their schools, programs and teams.

In human history, there has never been one kind of a great teacher or one approach to great teaching. Especially in the post-pandemic world, there are so many modalities and opportunities open for teachers, to learn, grow, and reach students. Teachers remain the largest of workforces employed globally, continue to be underpaid, and are not supported to be their best in their classrooms. It is in this background and context, that we set place this exploration of teachers' CPD in this issue.

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The origins of continuous prefessional development for teachers in India

Subir Shukla

The origins of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers in India, as we know it now, may be traced to DPEP (District Primary Education Program). Though there were a few 'smaller' EFA (Education For ALL) projects at the time, such as, Basic Education Project (BEP), UP-BEP, AP-PEP, etc., it is DPEP that has had the greatest influence. DPEP began in late 1994 in India, as part of the country's EFA endeavor.

Several features of the program, and its background, influenced how in-service teacher training evolved. In this article I trace the evolution of "in-service training," as it was commonly referred to at the time, the context, the early steps and struggles, and the form that it eventually began to take. Though there is much to say on developments after DPEP, I do not explore those. Apart from space constraints, it is also that these aspects of DPEP are now not as well-known.

I was Chief Consultant (Pedagogy and Curriculum), DPEP-MHRD from 1995-98, and later Educational Quality Advisor – SSA, MHRD from 2009-11, to lead the development of the Quality Framework for RTE. As I was closely involved in the processes described, it must also be said that this is a subjective perspective and others might well have different views. I have tried, however, to describe the period as objectively as possible and used documentation available to me as a basis.

The evolution of in-service training of teachers in DPEP

The poor status of school education was an impetus: NPE 1986 emphasized "learning through exploration, activity, and projects" in a "warm and welcoming atmosphere." However, that was far from happening in schools. Baseline studies had shown limited access and low levels of learning. These revealed that the quality of school processes was responsible in 40% cases of drop out.

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Apart from high PTR, there were issues of teacher absenteeism, teacher isolation, the absence of TLM, textbooks that burdened children and teachers alike, and exam-based evaluation leading to a prevalence of rote learning. "Inspectorial" supervision was the norm, and teacher training tended to be lecture-based and ritualistic.

Under the EFA projects, efforts were made across several fronts, on improving enrolment, enhancing community involvement, initiating the data system (that eventually became UDISE), strengthening contextual educational planning capabilities, renewing curricula and textbooks, and, of course, strengthening in-service teacher training.

Institutional limitations: Institutions such as NCERT and SCERTs tended to be

understaffed and poorly equipped. This resulted in them being unable to deliver committed programs, especially in in-service training. To get DPEP off the ground and functioning, the MHRD, therefore, created a group of professionals at the national level, who would provide resource inputs into various aspects of the program. Especially in the early years of DPEP, this body, known as the Technical Support Group, provided critical inputs both at the national and state level implementation.

Studies were done about the status and capacities of SCERTs and DIETs. Substantial provision was made to strengthen these too. However, there was reluctance on the part of the states to invest in these institutions, as they were unsure if they would be left with the liabilities.

Most states began by relying on NCERT and their SCERTs to deliver in-service training. However, they were repeatedly unable to do so in time, leading to funds lapsing. The states then created State Resource Groups, which were carefully selected through tests and workshops. This led to a major shift in how in-service training was developed and conducted.

Very quickly, the mode of implementation began to move away from expert committees to empowered resource groups. The latter comprised practicing teachers, CRC-BRC personnel, trainers, and resource persons. This had its own issues. DPEP was being accused of creating a "parallel structure."

The effect of the funding mechanism: State activities tended to be constrained by central funds being passed through the state treasury, leading to delays in fund flow. Hence, under DPEP, autonomous state implementation societies were created to receive funds instead. This freed states to conduct large-scale programs within time limits.

More critically, the funding guidelines restricted construction costs to 24% and management costs to 6% of the overall investment. The remaining 70% was to be spent on quality related issues. The bulk of this comprised expenses on state-wide in-service teacher training. Without implementing it, states could not construct schools or even fund salaries in the state project offices. That is why, in later years, even when training was not entirely necessary, it continued to be held, leading to "training fatigue."

Sorting out the pedagogy: DPEP tried to move away from the prevalent "pedagogy of punishment," toward an activity-based, learner-oriented pedagogy. Here children were envisaged to be encouraged to use their own minds in interesting and meaningful circumstances. Apart from "traditional" pedagogy, there were still vestiges of "joyful" learning programs. These often tended to result in "joy without the learning" or a set of random activities implemented in the classroom with little rigor.

The prevalence of this "song and dance" notion of child-centeredness had to be overcome too. One had to move toward more balanced, carefully planned learning strategies, which would involve children, be more meaningful for them, and ensure learning.

National workshops were held with state representatives on pedagogy and training methodology. Early on, it became apparent that key implementers needed to *experience* this pedagogy for themselves and articulate the classroom processes and outcomes it would lead to as well. These were dubbed "visioning" workshops and were also conducted at state levels. These contributed strongly to the development of SRGs and in-service training.

There was also a considerable emphasis on identifying and using TLMs from the environment to the extent possible. The intention was to reduce the time teachers spent on creating materials from thermocol,

paper, etc. “TLM Melas” were held across the country to help teachers showcase their innovations.

Multi-grade teaching was an important issue. Large classes in several states were also of concern. Interestingly, India sent a delegation of state and DIET personnel from around 18 states to Columbia for an exposure to Escuela Nueva - Spanish for “new school” – a model of learning that focuses on understanding rather than memory and gives importance to interpersonal skills. Many of the members of this exposure visit to Columbia initiated small projects in their own districts later.

A national workshop was held on this theme, after some fieldwork done by different states, especially Gujarat, where 50 schools with different categories of multi-grade were worked on. It was agreed that academic solutions should not be found for administrative problems, and the focus of Multi-Grade Teaching (MGT) related efforts would be on small-class MGT and multi-level learning. MGML (Multi-Grade and Multi Level) became a theme for a few years.

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Training methods and materials: Like the typical classroom, in-service training had consisted of authoritative lectures, delivered mostly by non-practitioners. DPEP sought to move toward a more participatory, experiential, hands-on process. This was to be backed up in the field through CRCs and BRCs. The term “in-service training” was understood as “workshops + on-site support visits + peer meetings + provision of needs-based materials periodically.” In the initial years, in some of the states, administrative and supervisory staff were also included in training, along with teachers.

In terms of training methodology, the visioning workshops showed how an experiential and reflective process could be effectively implemented in our circumstances. After a “training methods” workshop in Kerala, the state made changes to its in-service training. To this, teachers responded by saying, “If this is the pedagogy we want, our teachers’ handbooks are all wrong! Please change them.”

When the handbooks were changed, this led to the demand: “If our state can make such good handbooks, why do we have such bad textbooks!” And this led the state to change the curriculum and textbooks over 1997-99. This was followed by intensive in-service training on the new components. It was after this that Kerala started figuring in the top three in national surveys of learning achievement.

A major issue being struggled with was that of the “cascade approach.” A cascade approach was one where a group at the state level trained master trainers, who trained trainers, who in turn trained teachers. This was commonly adopted as the number of teachers was large. The cascade approach often led to “transmission losses” and distortion down the line.

Different models were examined and tried out, including one in Assam involving “lateral movement” of resource persons. However,

over the next few years, the one that worked best was the "reconstruction model," which emerged in Karnataka. Here, resource persons would be trained over 8-10 days, to be able to conduct, say, 40 sessions. However, the actual training they would conduct had only 24 sessions. They would have to *choose* and sequence the sessions they wanted, defend their choice before peers, and work out how they would conduct it in a holistic manner. It was the *ownership* that led to a high degree of quality across a large state such as (unified) UP.

It was also realized that instead of 'modules,' a training 'package' would serve our needs better. This first emerged in Karnataka. It included the following four components.

The first one involved a teachers' booklet. This would have *thematic papers* on an activity-oriented classroom. Teachers could take this away for reference. It also had spaces where they could write their own comments, and thus personalize it.

The second component was the trainer's booklet. It contained detailed hints/practical advice and notes on what a participatory training program is. It also had support material on the process of conducting participatory training programs. It was intended to enable trainers to be independent and to continue their growth as trainers, on their own.

A flexible training design was the third component. It would provide options and was envisaged to be adaptable to different circumstances. This had to be used by trainers to construct their *own* design.

The fourth component is an activity bank. It would contain activities and learning experiences. These could be used by teachers and trainers. It is intended to keep growing with use.

The trainers' booklet and activity bank needed to be produced only once every few years. The teachers' booklet would need to be issued only if something new was being added. The training design would be developed for each round of training, building on identified needs.

On-site academic support structures: Several quality improvement efforts in school education have floundered. This has generally been due to the lack of on-site support mechanisms for teachers. This support is necessary to help them undertake the complex endeavor of effecting changes in their classrooms. It was to facilitate this that the Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) was conceptualized.

Typically, a school was designated as a CRC. It would then be strengthened with the provision of space for meetings and a library useful for teachers. It would serve around 40 teachers, from 6-10 schools located within a distance of a few kilometers of the center. The full-time coordinator would undertake support visits to the schools, organize monthly meetings, and make the center available as an academic resource for teachers.

The CRCs, in turn, were facilitated by the Block Resource Centre (BRC). Located at the block level, the BRC was a sub-district training center. It was envisaged to provide in-service training to teachers of the block, and academic monitoring and supervision. This was at a time when DIETs had little infrastructure and capability.

Both the CRC and the BRC facilitated grassroots implementation, while providing on-site and on-going academic support to teachers. They increased the reach of the program. They also enabled it to connect with hundreds of thousands of teachers every month. This happened through school visits, meetings, and dissemination of materials. These centers also facilitated community involvement with schools and acted as an outreach medium.

It can be said that these centers were the cutting edge of DPEP. In the initial years they did work well too. They contributed greatly to enrolment, community mobilization and teacher motivation. The 'Gath Sammelan' of Maharashtra, the innovative selection measures adopted in Assam (with finalists being interviewed in front of each other and all the teachers of the cluster), the interesting building designs for BRCs in many places (hexagonal training rooms, wide doors to allow quick entry and exit of a large group to save time) were among the many innovative measures taken.

There were also initial efforts to implement "needs-based training" at the block level. "Job charts" of CRCCs and BRCCs were discussed in many states. It was recognized that CRCs' meetings could easily become ritualistic. Thus, yearly agendas in combination with topics covered in in-service workshops were worked out.

This was also the first structure within DPEP to be derailed. As SPDs (State Project Directors) and secretaries or governments changed, they questioned the roles of CRCs and BRCs or tried to appoint those from the open market (usually with disastrous results). As the data system was being set up, bureaucrats found the CRCs-BRCs as the vehicle to address the pressure they faced from the center on this front. This inverted the role completely. Instead of serving children, communities and teachers, these structures ended up serving the needs of the leaders. This represents a dark chapter in the history of TPD in India.

The four-step process for holistic quality improvement: Within a few years it was clear that curriculum, textbooks, assessments, and in-service teacher training needed to be seen in a holistic manner. In the initial years, institutional departments would not confer with each other. Components would be developed in isolation. All this led to mixed messages. A four-step process was therefore worked out and implemented in over 12 states. This led to good results and solid improvement.

First, a common group of resource persons was identified who would work as the "Quality Improvement Team." This team went through a visioning workshop, followed by school placements. Here they tried to implement what teachers were expected to.

Then an "underpinnings workshop" was organized. Here beliefs and assumptions related to children, learning, teachers, equity and aims of education were debated and documented. Their implications were also worked out. Fieldwork was undertaken post this too.

As a third step, an "approaches workshop," took place. Here the approach to knowledge in general and to the subjects was deliberated upon. Implications for quality-related components were also being worked out at this stage.

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The outputs of the above three were written up as "base papers." These provided a guiding framework for the development of curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training. The teams used these to review existing components, plan for changes and then worked separately. However, because of the "foundational discussions," there continued to be commonality across all strands of action.

Interestingly, Kerala used the outcomes of these workshops to create a tool used by its "Internal Academic Review Missions." This helped assess the effect of training. UP used these to develop a long-term "perspective plan" for teacher development.

Post DPEP

Many of those involved in the processes mentioned above will refer to that period as the "golden days." This is mainly because it was a time full of enthusiasm and innovation. Different echelons were being empowered. The system was also experiencing provisioning and processes that had been missing. However, as DPEP transited to SSA, several structural changes impacted what happened in in-service training.

The SRGs were made ex-officio, instead of their selection being based on performance. The institutions were the "competent authorities." However, they had received (and continued to receive) only limited inputs to strengthen them. They evolved more into those organizing the development of in-service training rather than taking academic lead.

The budgeting criteria were norms, rather than built around outcomes or shifts to be delivered in the classroom. Module development became a fairly routine process. Training fatigue was commonly reported. Very often, teachers ended up attending training on similar topics as before.

An interesting phase came in 2005-7, with the nation-wide launch of a process to develop performance standards and indicators for teachers, trainers, CRC-BRCs, DIETs and SCERTs. Known as ADEPTS (Advancement of Educational Performance Through Teacher Support).

This was a joint initiative of MHRD and UNICEF. Later this led to the development of PINDICS, Shala Siddhi and the current National Performance Standards for Teachers.

The period post-RTE saw a push for child-oriented teaching and learning, along with an emphasis on CCE. A little later, as CSR-funded organizations proliferated, the nature of inputs to teachers began to change. A CPD perspective began to be discussed. However, as state systems began to take external help, multiple programs were implemented, often with perspectives that were not aligned.

The introduction of technology too led to a shift in how CPD was conceptualized and delivered. It is difficult to know how effective this has been. We can get data on how much teachers have learnt. However, we do not yet know how much of this is implemented in the classroom. And if implemented, whether it is leading to improvements in learning levels.

A project implemented in UP, TELOS (Targeted Enhancement of Learning Outcomes through Supportive Supervision) successfully tied together an indicator-based CPD process with demonstrated improvement in learning outcomes. It involved supportive supervisors from DIETs, BRCs and clusters. However, this was discontinued after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

A few reflections

The fact that the initial efforts were seen as an "educational change" prevented the understanding that this was also a change in power relations. Empowered teachers and resource persons who asked questions were troublesome. Many officials actually worried that if the children of the poor get good education, how would their children get jobs.

While institutions were ineffective, they were often led by those with "connections" and worked behind the scenes to undermine or take over the CPD initiatives, with corruption as a motivation too.

Despite substantial investments, both the center and the states were unable to bring about the needed transformation in DIETs and SCERTs. These institutions are now better resourced and more active than before. However, they function more by outsourcing their academic work to NGOs and others. They often lack ownership and continuity, as they are liable to change from year to year.

On their part, NGOs tend to be driven by donor requirements as much as children's needs. They do not see their work as replacing that of institutions (and thus weakening them). They also generally do not have an exit strategy. On the contrary, every small act, such as participating in a meeting, is highlighted in social media as an achievement. Overall, this runs the danger of fracturing and diminishing CPD efforts across the country.

Key aspects such as pedagogy or the programs' academic direction remain hostage to the whims and vagaries of leadership. An effort was made to create a protocol wherein new SPDs could not uproot ongoing projects without an evaluation. However, with the change in national government, this did not go forward.

The recent data driven approach still does not measure teacher performance. It tends to use student learning as a proxy. This needs to examine classroom processes and teacher empowerment processes far more.

Interestingly, with technology, it has become easier to pass on instructions to teachers. Overall, teacher autonomy appears to be far less than it was in the early years of DPEP. Teachers are now burdened with all kinds of data to be uploaded. They are also instructed on what to teach on which day, irrespective of their context. As was the case with CRCs and BRCs, teachers too are now spending more time serving the needs of those above them in the hierarchy instead of those for whom they exist – children and communities.

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Teacher professional development (TPD) in India and Azim Premji Foundation's efforts in this domain

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The criticality of TPD

Teachers have been identified as the most significant of stakeholders in all education policies. Therefore, teacher capacity building has been at the forefront of provisions related to improving the quality of education. More than half a century ago, the Education Commission under the Chairpersonship of Prof. D. S. Kothari (hence, more popularly known as the Kothari Commission) said, "Of all the different factors which influence the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the quality, competence, and character of teachers are undoubtedly the most significant. Nothing is more important than ensuring a sufficient supply of high-quality recruits to the teaching profession, providing them with the best possible professional preparation and creating satisfactory conditions of work in which they can be fully effective" ("The report of the education commission," 1966). This belief that the education system can only be as good as the teachers in it, and therefore it is imperative that teachers are well-capacitated, has been heard across many reports all over the world.

The policies have also said what should be done to ensure that teacher quality is of the highest standard. The fourth chapter of the Kothari Commission report was entirely focussed on teacher education. It covered topics such as removing isolation of teacher education, improving the quality of the education as well as the institutions, continuous professional development of

teachers, and maintenance of standards in teacher education.

Since then, the focus on teacher education has been maintained in all policy reports, including the most recent one – National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). NEP 2020 emphatically states that teachers are the torchbearers of our educational progress. It says, "teachers must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in the education system. The new education policy must help re-establish teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens. It must do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible" (NEP, 2020).

The story so far: lessons from the past and the policy direction

The status of the teacher is not what has been imagined by our policy documents. NEP in fact says, it has "undoubtedly and unfortunately dropped" even further today. To improve the status of teachers in our country and thereby improve the quality of education, one of the most significant aspects is what we do regarding teacher development. Teacher development has always been an important agenda of the Ministry of Education of the Union Government as well as Education Departments of most states.

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From the early 2000s, through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the entire country witnessed the focus on teacher development through what was known as SSA's 20-day teacher training. This model has run aground for many reasons. Teachers were disenchanted with training. There are many studies which have indicated that teachers did not find it useful and hence were averse to the idea itself.

For example, using the term "teacher training" is wrong as it implies that teachers are untrained, and worse, that they are without any agency and capacity, and therefore can be "trained." This perspective ensured that programs for teacher development were designed without taking into consideration what areas the teachers wanted to develop in. These were also implemented in a top-down manner through orders of superiors, rather than considering various needs of the teachers such as content, timing, location, etc., which hardly benefited them in any meaningful way to become better teachers. This approach damaged the idea of teacher development to the extent that teachers have found it to be a waste of their time to attend any development programs.

It is in this context that the idea of teacher development had to be re-introduced to the teachers as an essential component of their professional life. The re-conceptualization had to ensure that the three Ws of TPD – What, Where and When – become part of the teachers' agency.

Today, under NEP 2020, teacher development is not seen as a mere training but as professional development. The policy

states that the system should be geared toward providing professional development opportunities for teachers currently serving in a manner that they have the agency to choose how they want to develop their capacity and, in the domains, or topics of their choice.

In this article we present a Teacher Professional Development (TPD) model for in-service teachers that has been used in Azim Premji Foundation for over a decade. This model aligns with the policy recommendations on TPD and takes into account the 3Ws.

TPD through TLCs (teacher learning centres) at Azim Premji Foundation

A TLC is the Foundation's primary working space that is set up in towns of the blocks (talukas) it works in. It is usually set up within an existing office of the Education Department such as DIET, BRC/BEO office, or a government school. Although the space itself is usually small and limited, the objective is to create a space that is familiar and accessible to teachers.

It is done with the understanding that for a teacher, visiting a TLC should fall within the fold of visiting any education department space. Any process initiated by members of the Foundation team is aligned with the educational objectives of the government or the education department. With this rationalization of the location, the kind of work that has been done in the TLCs over the last decade or more has continuously varied. It has depended on what are teachers' key needs in the field. This takes care of the "what" and "where" questions of TPD.

TLCs were established as spaces for teachers to come together to meet their learning needs, consistently, and thereby contribute to their professional development. There are multiple modes of engagement that take place in the TLCs. In this article we will focus on two successful approaches using the TLC platforms. The Voluntary Teacher Forums (VTFs) and Evening Discussions are the two approaches we discuss here. What takes place within these two interactions are designed differently. However, both these modes address the third "W" – that is the "when" question – because the principle followed is that they are held when it is most convenient for the teachers to attend.

The VTF is a mode of engagement where a single need is taken up and addressed over a period of time. For example, VTFs have been held regularly on social science and science concepts that the teachers were expected to teach in their classrooms, and English language proficiency sessions for their own development. Teachers attend a series of daily/weekly/fortnightly sessions voluntarily in the evenings to improve their content

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understanding and its associated pedagogy. The mode for each session also varies from discussing a reading, using models to do the experiments, developing questions to enhance understanding, demonstrations of mock classrooms, developing short write-ups, creating posters, or other materials, developing teaching learning materials for classroom usage, and so on.

Evening Discussions is a different kind of forum. It is slightly more informal. However, it is considered as an integral aspect of maintaining a teacher's curiosity and motivation to learn. Unlike VTFs that are content or subject-specific, evening discussions are more open groups. Here teachers can join in to have an open, lively discussion on any educational topic of choice. The topics chosen are around building educational perspectives. These include policy documents, position papers, articles around learning assessments, larger social issues, or even current events.

The content for a discussion could come from newspaper articles, videos, films, books, journals, or department websites. This mode is being carried on consistently for years. This has created groups of enthusiastic teachers who view Foundation established TLCs as a space for continuous learning. It is also seen as a forum to evolve perspectives, question scenarios, and collectively arrive at informed decisions.

These two modes of teacher engagement have played a significant role in teacher capacity building. These have also helped to evolve conditions that enable teachers to adopt professional development as an essential part of their teaching careers. Along with this, TLCs act as resource centres that have materials such as books, models and equipment. These have a setup that helps teachers to develop materials for any classroom or subject across the various stages of school education. These also have resources and displays that give teachers ideas around content, pedagogy and perspectives.

The success of the Foundation's TPD model has also shown that it is possible to turn around the "unfortunate and undoubted drop" in teacher education quality that the NEP has flagged. It has also been able to create a positive opinion about teacher development programs among teachers. Along with other modes of teacher engagements such as classroom scaffolding, teacher melas, seminars on crucial topics, etc., it is hoped that Foundation's efforts contribute toward establishing TPD in the country as envisaged by NEP 2020.

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Connect on:

Our journey toward collective growth

Reflections from building strong connects with our teacher community

Nisha Subramaniam

Summer of 2017. A group of teachers enter a large hall. The blackboard has a clear agenda written out. The facilitator starts the session with a question and is met with deep silence. The facilitator tries to joke, “Am I audible?” and doesn’t even get a laugh. The day progresses, as silently as it started. Lunch is announced and teachers eat in their school teams. The rest of the afternoon is stifling hot, grows further quiet, and the day ends earlier than planned.

Cut to 2024. Teachers walk in armed with teaching resources and planning books. There is music playing as teachers walk in, and there is a welcome committee giving high-fives to teachers. The opening activity has over fifty percent of hands shooting up to respond. The day progresses with teachers engaging in sessions in smaller groups to engage in different aspects of their role.

Teachers sit in grade-level groups and share their classroom report cards. Their reflections summarize the term gone by. These highlight the wins of their journeys with students, some datapoints on the number of students who have grown along the parameters they have focused on, a few challenges that have been tiring. Teachers in the circle share their appreciation, and ideas for what can make the challenges easier, and take inspiration from each other.

Post lunch, there is a resource mela. Teachers demonstrate various teaching and learning materials and activities. School leaders sit in different teacher groups listening to their team and their reflections. Teachers write

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a letter to their students ten years from today. They reflect on what they wish to see for their students a decade from now. The letter reflects hope and power, a confidence that teachers have, in their dreams for their children. The day ends with a big happy group photo, teachers exchanging last-minute requests, promises to share resources, and goodbyes.

Understanding our teachers

What we see in 2024, amidst the 50+ teachers we work with, in our 7th year of work here, is the closest we have been to creating spaces that positively enable teachers’ CPD. The core of our work involves thinking about teachers, their role, and their development.

So, we often ask ourselves, who are our teachers? What is their experience of the work? When we begin to explore this question, several complexities surface.

She is the teacher whose “work” typically begins 4-5 hours before she is in school. The one who comes into school after wrapping

up unpaid work at home, spends 6-7 hours in school shuttling between academics and administrative duties. She may most likely be taking on additional duties at school and may not be teaching subjects or grades she is most familiar with.

She spends time slowly figuring out data entry for the day, while her students wrap up writing work she has set up for them. A hurried lunch, and some more hours of teaching later, she rushes home. Evening tuitions begin - a little support system for an additional income to make ends meet, while meaningfully spending her evening. She is then greeted by unpaid domestic work, and her own children's educational needs, homework, and learning time. Soon, it is time for her to choose between completing corrections from the day or planning for the next day or getting to bed on time.

Weekends are a rinse and repeat of this, with an added load of domestic chores, working Saturdays or training days at school. Of course, amidst all this, she is the one who is planning for the annual day, sports day and school showcases, identifying struggling students and working with them after school hours (before her tuition), preparing mark sheets and report cards, attending to election or exam duties and will be the first person to step forward, in case a child's safety is compromised. As we understand our teachers, we have realized that building a collective narrative of our people becomes essential, if we wish to contribute to their professional development.

All our teachers come from the same villages as our children. They have studied in local government schools in Tamil medium. They have broken several social barriers to complete multiple degrees. All our teachers have completed formal professional education - D.T. Ed. or B. Ed., after which they have fought societal pressures and stepped out of their homes to work. At the first instance of a family member being unwell, or a possibility of marriage, families push women to stop working.

High attrition rates lead to instability in school systems. This puts pressure on the teachers to constantly do "more than their bit." As we got to know our teachers, it became evident that we have to understand them as whole people, support them in their journeys as women, mothers and primary caregivers, and as professionals who need support to excel in their job. Building awareness of "Who am I, what is my world and how does this play a role in my classroom," has been a constant theme of exploration with our teacher teams.

The other powerful realization, has been that CPD is not one path that we take every teacher on. Everyone has their own curve and path on this journey. Teaching is expected to be a transformative experience. Hence, CPD also demands to be transformative for each individual. It must be designed in a way to put everyone on their own learning paths.

Our vision for CPD

Our vision for our team of teachers is that we evolve into reflective leaders who will practice a growth mindset, learn and grow with the ecosystem, and reflect continuously toward the development of self and the students. Our team of teachers create safe and joyful learning environments for children, where rigorous learning and engagement is enabled. Our work spans four affordable private schools, 55 teachers working from KG to 10th standard. As we work with affordable private schools, the biggest challenge this sector faces is teacher attrition. Hence teacher development is an ongoing, continuous effort. Here we aim to support a group of teachers who have varying experiences.

Toward this vision, we have been working on building professional and personal leadership in each teacher. A big learning for our team over the years has been that while **"the what"**

of teacher development will keep changing based on the system, the grades they teach, the context of the school, designing an effective, meaningful, and holistic **"the how"** of teacher development is critical.

Over the years, there has been an evolution in our approach, beliefs, systems, structures, and formats. This has been possible with active participation from all the teachers who have proactively contributed to shaping **the how**. School leaders play a very crucial role in nurturing a culture of risk-taking, participation, and agency in their teams. This has enabled teachers to participate at a cluster level of four schools.

A core aspect of enabling continuous professional development in all teachers is for them to have the agency to engage, design, and shape their path. On the path to making this happen, our chosen pathways include building awareness in them as individuals. We have tried to facilitate nurturance of a collective identity and belongingness with the teacher community. We have also tried providing contextual support through training, resources, and in-school support.

So, what wins have we collected?

What is a win when it comes to building a team of teachers in a rural setting? Does a teacher negotiating with her family to schedule her wedding in May during school vacation tell her she is growing? Does a teacher volunteering to travel to another school to observe and learn, demonstrate her professional development? How about a teacher conducting training for new teachers in their school and leading teacher circles at cluster-level? How about generating 200 written pieces from teachers across key social themes over the course of a month when we focused on self-expression?

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The numerous stories of teachers demonstrating their growth, learning and leadership are a big motivator for our team. As we dig into the chosen pathways, we see that each of those efforts contributes to these stories that we consider as our wins. Building awareness in teachers through conversations, books, and circle time, with different speakers on themes of feminism, equality, and breaking barriers, we believe has contributed to the teacher, a 26-year-old woman from a coastal rural village, negotiating with her family to make things possible for her students.

Every month, teachers come together and meet in grade-level and subject groups, where they share their challenges, learnings, wins and experiments. These spaces make teachers feel most understood, as all our teachers teach unique grades and subjects in our schools. Therefore, meeting another grade three teacher creates a sense of belonging in a very different way. Such spaces have led to teachers knowing the successes and stories of another teacher. Therefore, they have begun to see them as a person in their ecosystem who can support them with their growth.

To sustain these communities, sharing, online communities have been leveraged. Teachers share lesson plan ideas, student work, resources and reflections with each other through their WhatsApp group. Lastly, inviting teachers to create an agenda for training new teachers, co-leading sessions, and creating resources, has enabled them to play an active role in enabling the development of teachers in the cluster.

The "What's that matter"

Over the years, what is critical for teachers to engage with in terms of their learning and development has varied. It has grown from focusing mainly on pedagogy, which involve general pedagogical skills that can be applied by teachers across subject domains, to understanding policy, its implications in the

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present and future. Working with a diverse group of teachers across kindergarten, primary, secondary, and co-curricular domains has enabled us to recognize some key pillars of CPD for our teachers. These have also been influenced by theoretical frameworks such as Shulman's PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge), NCFTE (National Curricular Framework for Teacher Education) and various other alternate schools of thought.

Currently, we see the following as pillars of our CPD for our teachers - general pedagogical knowledge and skills, pedagogical content knowledge, content and curricular knowledge, understanding of learners and learning, personal leadership, educational aims and purpose, and lastly, technology enabled learning. We work with our team of teachers across these seven domains.

We believe this enables their development as a professional with agency. Working with these domains has also helped us understand that development across these domains is a very subjective journey for

different teachers. It is very challenging to pick just one domain or sub-domain as the focus for an entire school or a grade level. Therefore, enabling teachers to understand these pillars, and identifying their strengths and skills to be developed through reflective conversations, have been our focus areas over the last couple of years.

We have done discussions from books, gifted a select set of books for Teachers Day, and encouraged teachers to borrow and read from each other, invited a range of speakers, and conducted sessions on content domains, NEP (National Education Policy), NCF (National Curriculum Framework), and development theories. Some of the opportunities are created for all teachers, while some are choice-based. Engaging with these themes over a period of time, and bringing these back every once in while, have allowed for ideas to simmer, aided reflections, and enabled deeper learnings.

Miles to go

Despite several years of working with a small set of 50 teachers, the language barrier feels like an unsurmountable one. The English language acts as a gatekeeper for many opportunities. It has been a rather tough road in supporting our teachers to break this barrier. Working in an affordable private school, the poor pay that the system offers, social barriers and limitations of infrastructure such as public transportation, permissions from families to participate in opportunities, still largely determine the scope and possibilities of enabling CPD for teachers.

While in-person spaces create meaningful collaboration, online communities have their limitations. Sometimes it creates pressure to share when the teacher might not find it meaningful, there is more sharing of the "correct" responses as opposed to reflective sharing of what has emerged in their classrooms. Debriefs on how these WhatsApp communities can be leveraged by discussing possibilities, facilitators proactively sharing examples with mistakes in them, and sharing reflections, have helped in making these groups more candid and reflective. Teachers do not find sufficient time for their own development across content, pedagogy or learning. This is a huge limitation in a financially constrained set up like an affordable private school in the rural setting.

Being first ever graduates in their families, mostly the few in the village, there is immense hope placed on them to do well for themselves. Especially as a teacher, there is immense pressure to do the right thing, at all times. This pushes teachers to feel defensive about new ways of thinking and working. A feeling that their methodologies are in question, comes in the way of self-development.

As much as we celebrate what has moved forward, we also share and pause at what has not. We often ask our teachers, what they recommend as solutions. Many wonderful ideas around modalities of training, how we follow up, what the content is, have emerged from these spaces. As we see what is ahead of us, we see different materials and tools available for us, to collectively come and build a path with our teachers. It makes the most sense, for us to traverse what we build, and build together, what we can all traverse.

Nisha Subramaniam, with more than 14 years of experience in the social sector, is one of the co-founders of Kanavu, leading efforts in education and community development in rural Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu. Nisha also runs a social enterprise, "Sura" that trains and recruits rural women to stitch affordable lifestyle products for a global audience. Elementary education, gender and leadership are themes of deep passion. Nisha believes that a potential to challenge the status quo lies in the intersections of these themes.

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Building teacher capacity: data-driven approaches and state reform

Srivathsan Ramaswamy and Dr R. Poornima

In the wake of the 2021 National Achievement Survey (NAS), the outcome presented insights on the academic landscape of Tamil Nadu's schools. These were performing below the national average in terms of the learning outcomes. The study became a catalyst for change. It paved the way to establish the Ennum Ezhuthum (EE) Mission (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission) as a collective acknowledgement of the learning gaps that the survey brought to the forefront, particularly in grades 1-5.

The mission has established itself as a narrative of recognition. It has evidenced a commitment to bridge educational disparities in the state. These are systemic and programmatic. Their mission has had its effects in operational areas across different domains in the government machinery. These include curriculum, teacher training, assessments and governance.

Within the Ennum Ezhuthum ecosystem, teacher capacity building is specifically crafted to empower educators. It aims to address the unique challenges posed by multigrade and multi-level (MGML) elementary classrooms. This has been implemented across 38 districts in the state. The training employs a scaffolded model. It encompasses three layers of building capacity - state level, district level, and cluster level. With participation from ~1 lakh teachers in Tamil Nadu, the blended model is a comprehensive approach to professional development. It is contextual and rooted in pedagogical insights.

A typical Ennum Ezhuthum classroom is a microcosm of policy being translated into practice. The aim is to build a robust learning environment that binds all its stakeholders - the student, the school and the community. Differentiated instruction is a key lever for the teachers to execute level-based instruction through buckets such as - Arumbu (seed), Mottu (bud) and Malar (flower). The teacher has a tool kit of a Teacher Handbook (THB), Student Workbook (SWB) and the Ennum Ezhuthum TLM Kit (collection of sensorial teaching-learning instruments).

The scope for training and capacity building of teachers was not prescriptive, where the teacher was introduced methodology in silos. Instead, it was fractionalized to provide opportunities for reinforcement, transferability of skills and reflective practice during the training. It built off from the prior knowledge of teachers. It also tried to include the rich expertise in context and ground-level awareness. The key tenets adopted by the state were need-based training method and content, contextualized tools to capture quality and efficacy of teacher trainings at scale, and iterative model of teachers' capacity building monitored through data-driven training needs.

Teachers' capacity building at scale did present to the state the challenge of planning for sustainable training structures, which had to be standardized across clusters. The priority of the state was to employ accessible immersive communities of practice for teachers, meeting diverse needs presented in an MGML classroom, and integrating contemporary pedagogical practices through approaches, strategies and tools for effective teaching practice. Our training model has three pillars. We share details about these in the following sections.

Scalable content delivery

Everyone has always appreciated the need for differentiated training or need-based training. One of the biggest challenges in executing such a model is the scale of operations and hence the capacity of the system to deliver it effectively at scale. Hence, one of the key aspects of innovation for teacher training was to use technology to enable effective delivery of content. Facilitation at scale was administered through digital content with one-click access through agenda and guidelines. Access was also provided to all training collaterals such as presentations, video scribes and playlists before the training. This promoted readiness in teachers to engage effectively during the training.

Initially, there was a lot of resistance from the teachers and resource persons (RPs) to adopt the new methodology. For instance, some RPs felt that the structure of the agenda did not allow them to express or share their innovative ideas with the teachers. When we began the training in 2022, the Training Alignment and Effectiveness Level (TAEL) was less than 50%. This meant that the training spaces were not aligned with the design, and there was significant deviation from the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) laid down.

We listened to the feedback. For instance, for many RPs the infrastructure in the training venue was not adequate to conduct an effective blended learning experience. We institutionalized a set of training sessions for the RPs particularly around facilitation practices rooted in the principles of andragogy. Over time, we observed that the TAEL went up by 36% in one year. Setting up platforms for delivering content at scale is a great beginning. However, rigorous follow up, along with measuring data at every stage of the user experience, is critical to improve adoption of practices over time.

The TAEL is measured through an observation tool for classroom teaching and training,

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teacher performance in quizzes and demonstrations. First, a digital training observation tool was developed to be used by administrators during training observations. This tool facilitates the assessment of various aspects. These included facilitation practices, participant engagement, content delivery, infrastructure, and the incorporation of Ennum Ezhuthum-specific practices during the training. Teacher adherence is gauged through attendance, while understanding is assessed through teacher quizzes along with a feedback checklist. This is utilized to provide peer feedback and observations by facilitators during teacher-led group demonstrations.

Need-based design and iteration

The classroom observation data serve as a rich foundation for developing teacher training content by offering a nuanced understanding of teaching practices. Data analysis is conducted to identify patterns and Areas of Strength (AOS) and Areas of Development (AOD). The findings are shared with the mission's steering committee, state subject experts and training coordinators.

Subsequently, targeted training content is tailored to address specific needs identified through the observations. This content is embedded into the training through multiple modes. These include input sessions and tasks, reflective spaces and thought partnering, and planning and teacher demonstrations.

Implementation of the training sessions is followed by ongoing monitoring and iterative adjustments. This ensures that the content remains responsive to the evolving needs of the teachers, and promotes sustained professional growth. Through this comprehensive approach, data from classroom observations become a dynamic source for enhancing teaching practices. This also elevates overall teacher effectiveness.

One example of a success was “Assessment practices in the classroom.” One of the new practices instituted in the EE Mission was conducting one-on-one assessments for young learners. Though a global best practice, the assessment practice was new for the teachers. And this became evident in the data collected as well. Hence, we focused training sessions on conducting effective training assessments. Over time, we saw that the alignment of teacher practices around assessments improved.

One example of such an approach not being effective was with the phonics training we provided to the teachers. The data showed that the teachers struggled with teaching English letter sounds and reading fluency lessons in the classroom. Based on this information, we had planned for the training.

The training resulted in increased stress among the teachers, as phonics and English language teaching was a sensitive topic with them. The teachers being trained in the vernacular language themselves, were not comfortable with the “phonics” approach. This bears an important learning that though data may provide us with insights, the decisions need to be based on context and some qualitative information. After this experience, we currently talk to 3-5 teachers based on the data trend to hear their perspectives before deciding on a course of action.

On the other hand, the TPD framework developed by Madhi Foundation maps a progression of pedagogical components that align with the curriculum, EE teaching methodology, and theoretical modular components such as lesson execution, effective use of Teaching Learning Material, etc. The strategy of using the TPD framework is very similar to the theory of leading and lagging indicators. The data from classroom observations give us the lagging indicators for targeting efforts to improve teacher training. Whereas the TPD framework gives us the leading indicators to structure the TPD course plan.

For instance, this year, the training delved into the cultivation of vital parental engagement strategies. The aim was to establish robust parent-teacher partnerships. This is a focus area for the 15th to 24th months of execution of the mission. Ensuring strong parent-teacher communication is vital to improving student learning outcomes.

Simultaneously, based on the data collected, the training placed a significant emphasis on equipping educators with effective classroom management techniques. These have been tailored for the unique challenges of MGML classrooms under the Ennum Ezhuthum initiative. During the sessions, hands-on strategies for crucial elements of classroom management were actively employed and demonstrated by teachers.

There is still a long way to go to institutionalize the need-based approach. For instance, the current training modules are based on trends observed at the state-level. But the true spirit of need-based training lies in being able to differentiate at the cluster level (a group of 20-30 teachers). Furthermore, it is not only the targeting that needs to be improved, it is also the thinking and the agency. How do we equip districts and blocks to decide on the training needs over time?

On the other hand, is the reliability of data. As with many self-reported datasets, there is strong evidence of upward bias of data.

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Which means that having access to reliable data is a critical prerequisite for empowering educators and administrators to conduct need-based training. This requires sustained effort on training the observers and setting up verification mechanisms.

For example, we conducted an experiential training to improve the inter-rater reliability of observations. In these sessions, the observers were asked to observe the same classroom situation and complete the observation tool. They were then asked for their rationale and thinking. They discussed this in small groups. Lastly, the ideal response was provided as feedback to the observers.

After this training, we observed that the reliability of data improved by 46%. This further validated the need for training administrators on effective observation and the strength of the data-led approach to need-based teacher training.

To further democratize the training structure, we developed asynchronous training nano-modules. These are specialized learning units that focus on delivering specific skills, knowledge, or competencies in a concise format. These were created using the trends identified from the data. Through this modular approach to training, each module is designed to address a particular aspect or topic that will support in reinforcing concepts pre/post training.

These modules are made available through the EE Champions playlist on the state-run YouTube channel for easy reference. The design is inclusive to meet the needs of access, for example, availability of subtitles, setting the pace of the video, flexibility to pause/repeat the content anytime from anywhere. Artefacts (images and videos) shared by teachers on the Telegram group are leveraged to be presented as exemplar or best practices along with highlighting the theory behind the practice.

Embedding evaluation and learning as part of training design

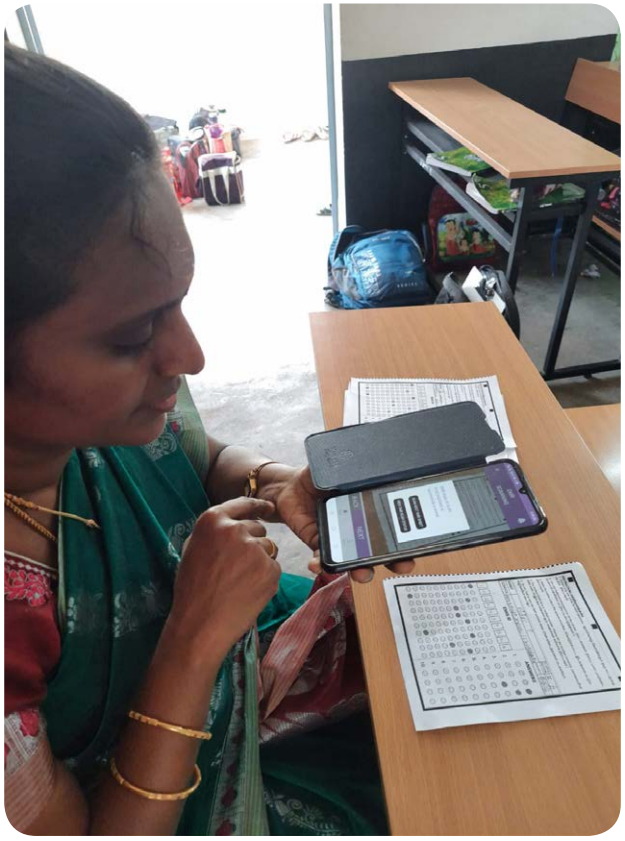
Kirkpatrick's framework is anchored into our training pathway through four levels of evaluation. These serve as a continuum to each other. These four levels include - reflective spaces for cross-pollination of ideas (teacher demo and feedback), acquisition of knowledge through caselets (translating theory to practise), behavioural shifts identified through classroom

observation data, and tracking overall impact in teacher-student outcomes.

We measure reaction through observation and teacher feedback forms. Quizzes and demonstration observations provide data on learning. The classroom observation tool gives feedback on change in behaviour. And the culmination of these efforts shows us the improvement in teacher and student outcomes.

This was an intentional aspect of the design. Most policies and reforms are good on paper. However, these are plagued by implementation inconsistencies. Hence, getting consistent and constructive feedback cyclically on both the outcomes and processes was important. It was a critical necessity to ensure the success of the training efforts undertaken by the department.

One of the long-standing use cases for the data collected via training is for improving teacher motivation and excellence in practice. We use the data to recognize the teachers for best teacher's award, incentives for grants and other recognition avenues. This continuous use of data for recognition of teachers has allowed us to strengthen classroom practices over time.



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We continue to navigate in establishing a strong system of self-directed educators. In this process, a learning we ground ourselves to is that the training model must be iterative and responsive to the stakeholders we serve. Hence, we must always reflect critically, diagnose challenges and course-correct, as we strengthen implementation of a state-wide policy. However, our anchor for these decisions must be the outcomes - both teacher and student outcomes.

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Connect on:

Enabling teachers' community of practice at scale

Purpose, role and impact of teachers' communities of practice in enabling meaningful CPD

In conversation with Dr Bindu Thirumalai

Dr Bindu Thirumalai is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Education at TISS Mumbai. She aims to increase teacher capacity through action research and collaboration between academia and governments. She has participated in research efforts aimed at driving large-scale improvements in teacher education, teaching-learning, and curriculum and pedagogy inside government education systems. She has competence in course design and development, including the creation of MOOCs for practicing instructors, and in the delivery of blended certificate programs.

Continuous development of teachers who are currently in-service is a challenging pursuit. Teachers have little time that is available for their upskilling. Moreover, the everyday challenges of their role makes it harder for teachers to implement newer learnings into their practice. Over the years, spaces that enable teachers to collaborate with each other, and share their learning and challenges, have emerged to contribute meaningfully to their learning and development. This conversation with Dr. Bindu Thirumalai brings out key ideas on how communities of practice (CoP) can be set-up, sustained and used as a platform to strengthen teachers' practice.

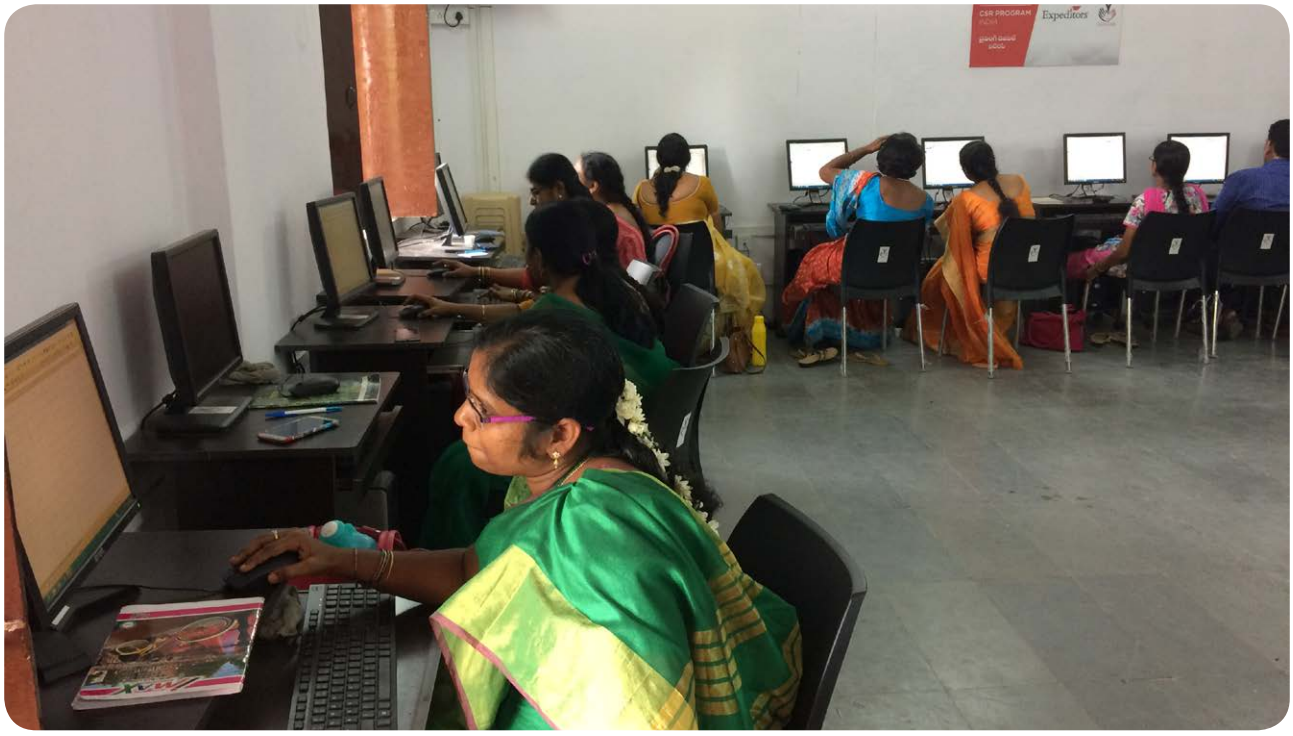
Kanavu: How and when did your work with teachers' communities of practice begin?

Dr Bindu Thirumalai: I began working with teachers' COP in 2010 through an NGO called IT for Change, based in Bengaluru. Our objective was to enable the integration of technology in math pedagogy in secondary learning. Over 2 to 3 years, we conducted several workshops for the teachers selected from across Karnataka, toward effectively using ICT for math in the classrooms. After the workshops, we continued engaging with the teachers through Google Groups.

In 2015, I began working at TISS. During that time, I was part of a large team that was working on the flagship program of Center of Excellence in Teacher Education – CLIx. This was a large-scale program implemented across four states - Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram. It was a hybrid one. Here teachers came together for workshops.

During these, they were introduced to online communities of practice on Telegram, a mobile app. They received continued support through this. These courses were designed to be practice-based courses. Here teachers were expected to implement their learnings in the classrooms. They also had to engage with each other through an online platform.

My PhD work particularly focused on online CoP for secondary school mathematics teachers in government schools in Telangana. We introduced teachers to ed-tech modules toward making mathematics learning conceptual. They were taught how to use various online tools and games to teach each of the concepts. They also engaged in integrating these with everyday teaching and learning processes in schools.



Bindu Thirumalai

The communities of practice acted like teacher support. Here teachers could reflect and share their experiences in implementing these modules. I managed this online community for the mathematics course for two years. This also enabled teachers to connect to teacher educators, subject experts, and other teachers.

Kanavu: How did you craft the online community of practice at scale? How was the experience of managing it?

Dr Bindu Thirumalai: The purpose of the online community was to create a space for teachers' sharing and reflections. However, it is not likely that these communities will organically develop by themselves. It had to be intensely managed toward achieving specific goals. I managed the COP by providing teachers with weekly prompts on specific topics every Friday. The goal was to build pedagogical content knowledge in mathematics with teachers.

We called it - "Friday Math Education Time." Here I would share a variety of prompts with the group. These prompts ranged from "How do you teach this particular topic in fractions?" and "Which is the correct method?" to sharing tricky problems that teachers could work out and share the solutions of. Some of the prompts created scope for interesting dialogues. Different teachers shared their reasoning. And this led to learning for all the teachers in the group.

Over two years, I created over 80 to 100 prompts. Teachers engaged with these prompts by responding with pictures of their solutions, pictures of children working in the computer labs, pictures of computer screens, and so on. This gave us real-time feedback on how the courses were being used by the teachers. These prompts motivated teachers to try and implement their learnings from the course.

Just conducting workshops isn't effective. This is because there are so many operational barriers to implementing a program. It is especially so when it involves ICT. Workshops are conducted in well-resourced and set-up environments. Therefore, everything works very well in these. However, teachers face a lot of barriers in their own schools and contexts.

Therefore, this form of continuous engagement through which teachers could

see pictures of what is happening in some schools acted as a motivation for other teachers to try. This became a model for teachers when they saw that in a very similar context, some teachers were making it work. It made them believe that ed-tech can work in their schools. This was the purpose of such a space.

Kanavu: What role do teachers' communities of practice play in the continuous professional development of teachers? How does it align with the larger structures of CPD?

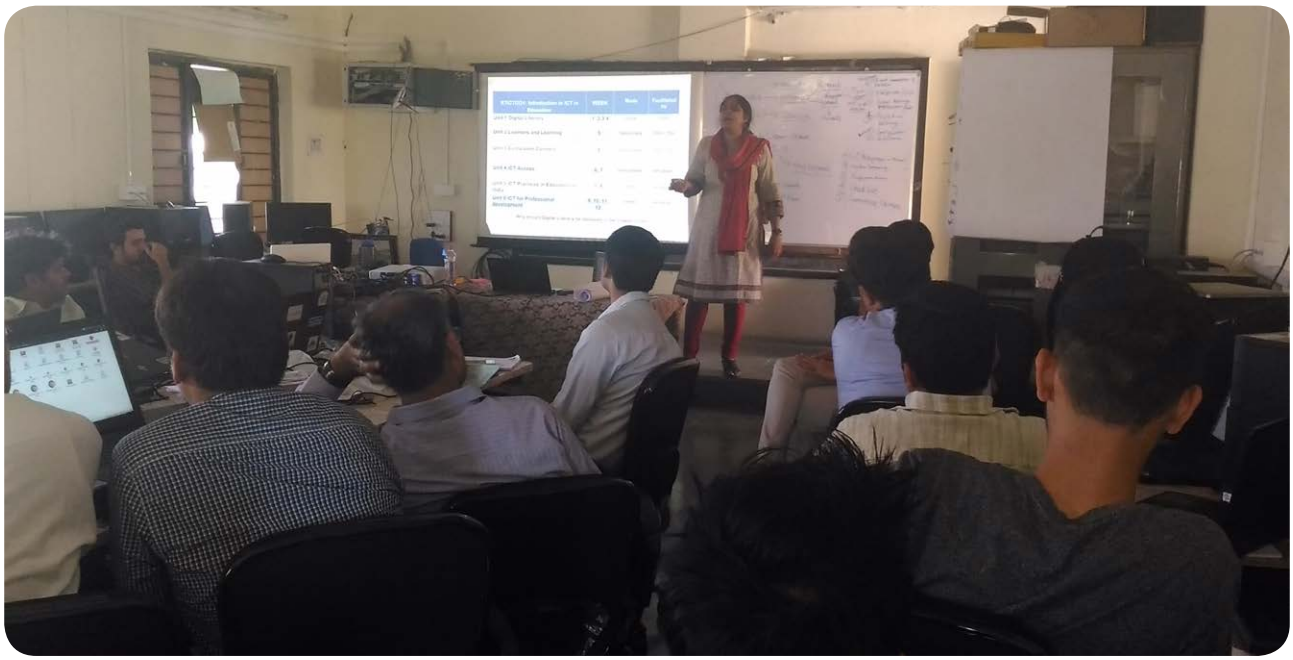
Dr Bindu Thirumalai: Firstly, it acted as a space where teachers motivated each other to try integrating ed-tech in their mathematics teaching and learning. Secondly, it enabled exposure to teachers outside their school, block and district. These teachers were from across different districts in the state. They felt like they were part of a larger ecosystem outside their schools.

We also encouraged some of the active teachers from these communities to participate in national and international teacher conferences. These teachers shared their experiences with the group. This led to others in the community feeling pride in belonging to such a group. This built a professional identity for the teachers. It did not happen in the initial few days or weeks. It was a long process and a result of efforts over nearly two years.

More importantly, the COP enabled deeper engagement of teachers with pedagogical design and ideas. The learnings from the program were not limited to using it through the ed tech modules. We observed teachers taking the design principles from the ed-tech modules and integrating them with the chalk-and-talk method.

When computers did not work, ideas from the course were used in the classroom and were shared with the community. This inspired more teachers to build deep engagement with the content in their classrooms. We recognized that ed tech is just a hook, anything can replace it. However, the conversations that created engagement in the online community were about pedagogical content knowledge. The COP enabled peer learning and collaboration, which is an underlying need for teachers' development and growth.

Kanavu: Did something emerge from these COPs that is of relevance at the larger systemic level? How did it contribute to teachers' personal and professional journeys?



Bindu Thirumalai

Dr Bindu Thirumalai: While there were four hundred teachers enrolled in the course, only fifty teachers were active. The other teachers merely observed the interactions in the group and did not react or respond to the prompts. However, the teachers who engaged actively were recognized by the government and were given an opportunity to become resource persons for the district and block-level training. After the workshops, they shared their learnings and experiences with the community and brought in more teachers to the COP.

The interesting fact is that most resource persons in government trainings are typically from the capital city. However, this COP enabled us to identify teachers from remote parts of the state, who were able to get the deserving recognition. Moreover, teachers took their learnings from the COP into their school complex meetings. Some of the prompts and ideas were discussed in the cluster-level meetings. Some reflections were also shared after such discussions.

These are some of the ways in which the learnings from the COP have percolated into the system. We have not yet studied to what extent this has impacted other teachers. These COPs have created a safe space for teachers to try new methods and fail as well. It has been a space of no judgment. Therefore, it fosters more honest sharing of both successes and failures.

It has given teachers a feeling of belongingness and purpose. They have articulated that usually no one follows up on any of the workshops that are conducted. Hence, there is no motivation to make efforts, when the daily circumstances are so challenging. However, this COP provided support, recognition and motivation for the teachers.

Most continuous professional development processes of teachers are designed from a deficit perspective, where the system recognizes that teachers are not fulfilling the current needs of students and their development. However, our course is designed acknowledging teachers' practice, and that teachers understand the most about children and the context.

We promoted collaborations between teachers, teacher educators, and university researchers. We could thereby enable an ecosystem where ideas and strategies were shared across all these stakeholders. Researchers had a window into schools without having to go there. And teachers had regular interactions with research-based strategies, and got support to implement newer methods. This led to strong connections both ways.

Kanavu: What are some principles that organizations and teams working with teacher communities should keep in mind?

Dr Bindu Thirumalai: First, learning does not happen organically in CoPs. It needs to be managed and facilitated with a lot of focus. We have tried to develop this among other active teachers. However, it has been tough. While someone needs to facilitate the space, they should not take away from teachers' voices being heard. Facilitation is a serious task. It needs enabling equal spaces for all the participants and ensuring that there are no hierarchies that are getting formed.

Online continuous professional development strategies have the potential to easily scale the support for teachers. In this course, we were able to enable 400 teachers across 13 districts with very few of us managing the COP. However, the scalable design includes engaging research-based courses, in-person workshops and effectively run communities of practice. All these pieces must interact with one another and come together through the COP.

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CPD for teachers from a distinct lens

Approaches of organizations working closely with teachers

Gowtham, in conversation with Namratha Bhat, Poornima Arun and Shruti Manerker

Key Education Foundation

The role of a teacher is multifaceted and complex. The complexity only increases when one sits down to put a professional development plan for a teacher. Many diverse factors need to be taken into consideration while designing a plan that would be beneficial for teachers, and hence students. For this piece, we spoke to a few educators - Shruti Manerkar from Akanksha Foundation, Poornima Arun from Marudham, and Namratha Bhat from Key Education Foundation, regarding their organization's beliefs (why), interventions (what) and approaches (how) to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. Also discussed in the piece are the successes and (more importantly) the challenges each of them continues to face in their respective journeys. Their inputs, often quite different from each other, provide for a very insightful and thought provoking read.

Gowtham: Please introduce yourself, your organization, and the work that your organization does with teachers.

Shruti (Akanksha Foundation): I am Shruti Manerkar. I work as a school leader with Akanksha Foundation. The organization runs 26 schools across three cities - Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur - in Maharashtra, catering to low resource communities. All these schools are community centric schools. So, all the students come from within a radius of two

kilometers. Akanksha believes in holistic education, and it does that by developing high performance and innovative schools.

Poornima (Marudham): My name is Poornima Arun. I am the headteacher of Marudham Farm School, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. Marudham is a sustainable, nature-based school. It believes in "alternate" education. This involves exploring children's holistic development experientially. We focus a lot more on developing well-being and understanding the contemporary world through relationships with animals and the non-human world. It involves a lot of working with hands, and not necessarily recognizing qualifications through degrees, but by recognizing experiences in a certain field. We have 120 children from grades LKG to 12th standard.

Namratha (Key Education Foundation): My name is Namratha Bhat and I work as Product Lead - Teacher Professional Development at Key Education Foundation (KEF). KEF works in the space of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). We work with three different segments in this area. We work with Anganwadis in Madhya Pradesh, low-income private schools in Bengaluru, and government pre-primary classrooms in Karnataka. Across these spaces, we have identified teacher as the primary driver of change. A large part of our work is around the capacity building of the teachers delivering ECCE to children.

Gowtham: What is your organization's philosophy around CPD for teachers? How does that show in action?

Shruti (Akanksha Foundation): All the stakeholders that work in the school system need to be continuous learners to provide the support required for children's holistic development. To be able to meet these learning needs, Akanksha believes in a two-pronged approach. Here we have a central Professional Development (PD) progression and a team that helps capacity building through cluster-based sessions once a month. These sessions help drive organizational priorities that are aligned to the learning principles of SHARP: Skill-based learnings; High expectations; Authentic experiences; Rigour, and; Personalized learning.

The second level of PD for teachers happens at schools. We have team meetings once a week. These celebrate teachers' successes and provide important updates. In these weekly team meetings, we also have mini-PD sessions based on the schools' needs. In addition to these, we have weekly cluster meetings as well. Here every priority is broken down into a cluster implementation plan.

Apart from these, half day of the second Saturday and half day on the last day of the month, is reserved for additional PD sessions for teachers. These sessions happen across different domains. These include academics, students' well-being and parent and community engagement. In addition to these input spaces, there are implementation checks in the form of Observation Debrief Cycles. All teachers in our school get observed once in every two weeks by subject specialists, and once a month by the instructional specialists who come from the central team.

New joinees have a week-long orientation at the beginning of the year. This gives them the bigger picture of their role in the organization. There is also an opportunity to showcase best practices at the end of the year through a forum called "Edventures." Most recently, a 'rewards and recognition' system has been introduced which incentivizes innovative practices across schools. Teachers can either self-nominate themselves for this or nominate another teacher.

Over and above these, Akanksha has a lot of PD partners for various aspects of learning for a teacher. Akanksha also organizes

exposure visits to other schools and communities across the country.

Poornima (Marudham): We never embrace one type of philosophy. It is based on the interest of the teacher. Child pedagogy, of course, is something we take into consideration based on the age of the child. We have a core group of 14 teachers, who have been with us for more than 10 years. These teachers are the ones who handle the classroom, and design the curriculum etc.

The rest of the teachers are interest-based, like physical education, music, etc. They offer their expertise to children. In a week, we have two meetings. One is a pedagogy meeting, which is based on the groups like primary, middle, and secondary. Apart from that, the whole teacher meeting happens every Wednesday. In addition to these, once a month, we meet for other areas of interest like art, crafts, etc.

Of course, nature education is big for us. Every week, we go outside for 3-4 hours to the mountain or somewhere in the region. The idea of training at Marudham is toward learning. “Can I make my own food?” “Can I read and enjoy something?” “Can I write my thoughts and express something?” “Do I know my town?” - and aspects like these are meant to be for everyone – both students and teachers. When a teacher comes to Marudham, they take about six months to get to understand their timetable, because of the organic mix of structured and unstructured set up we have here. We have some (around 40%) teachers coming from the community, some from other areas/states/countries. Hence, it is a very diverse set.

Namratha (Key Education Foundation): We believe that every teacher should have aligned ‘Knowledge, Skills and Mindsets’ (KSMs) to deliver quality instruction to his/her students. Our interventions with teachers

Akanksha Foundation

also address the same. At the beginning of every academic year, we have 25 hours of training scheduled for the teachers.

One of the biggest gaps of teacher training in general is in its translation into classroom practice. Toward that end, we always give a view into a real classroom during our training. Our training also helps to align on a common vocabulary with the teachers, so that when used later in conversations there is greater recall. This is followed by in-service coaching which happens at the frequency of 1-2 touchpoints per month.

These touchpoints are observations of classrooms followed by a conversation around successes and challenges in the class. We use an internally developed holistic rubric to engage in these conversations. We believe that teachers need continuous access to resources, which they can always go back to, for effectively delivering instructions in the early years' classroom. This includes demonstration videos, printable resources such as worksheets, stationary/supplies, and a variety of teaching learning materials.

We also encourage forming a community of teachers (WhatsApp groups), so that they can share and learn from each other. As for mindsets, we have internally defined four key mindsets needed for teachers of this age group. Through a psychometric assessment, we benchmark and assess teachers' journeys with these mindsets.

Gowtham: What successes have you seen over the years in this direction?

Shruti (Akanksha Foundation): Teachers strongly value the opportunities provided and the space to develop as a professional and an individual. Some of our teachers have grown in their role to impart their learnings in other spaces. For example, we have our KG teachers go and conduct sessions for government teachers. We are not just looking at developing our educators. We also look at how the educator is helping the larger ecosystem. The number and the variety of opportunities have significantly increased the different kinds of expertise to learn from that might not have been possible in-house.

Poornima (Marudham): Most of the growth happens through 'doing/experiencing' and hence learning and unlearning. There are several areas we see growth in, like nature education, relationship with children/peers, emotional, personal, relationship with animals, working with hands, and physical education. By engaging children in all these areas, teachers themselves grow in these aspects. Among the teachers, friendships are very important. Discussions cannot be only about children. We need to talk about ourselves as well. This growth of relationships is very important among teachers.

One very successful thing for us has been circle times among teachers. Here we discuss anything and everything like patriarchy, burning personal issues in life, politics, etc. Everybody has different opinions. Hence, giving spaces for each other, knowing when to stop etc., are all learnt through these circles. Another area that has worked well, is to engage in contemporary studies like reading a book or watching a film and discussing it in a circle.

Namratha (Key Education Foundation): Coaching support is important. Reflection is a crucial skill for any teacher. Yet, it is a difficult skill to build. Through our observations and conversations, we have been able to work on this crucial skill with our teachers. Teachers appreciate and value the relationship they share with the person entering their classroom to observe and have a conversation with them. They are nervous about these observations. However, we have seen that over time, the teacher is willing and able to build those bonds with a coach and work on their skills in the classroom.

Creating and supporting teachers' communities is also crucial. Most of the

teachers in ECCE work separately from the other teachers in the school. They often feel very lonely. In all our interventions, we create teacher communities via WhatsApp groups. These give teachers a space to share their challenges and best practices with each other. We have seen that these spaces add to a teacher's motivation.

Digital training is increasingly crucial. Digital training can be leveraged in teacher capacity building. We ran a pilot with four courses on DIKSHA. In doing so, Karnataka became the first state in the country to have online courses for ECCE. As against a target of 1,200 teachers, we were able to enroll 1,500 teachers for these courses. This indicates that digital penetration is not a challenge anymore. We also had a very healthy completion percentage of 70% on these courses.

Gowtham: What challenges do you continue to face?

Shruti (Akanksha Foundation): One key challenge is transition. There is so much effort invested in an individual that any transition causes turbulence in the system. A lot of capacity development that has been done is lost when a teacher leaves us.

The second challenge is that there are a mix of teachers in the system. On one side, there are month-old teachers. And on the other side, there are teachers with over 14 years of experience. So, differentiating for their support, while subscribing to a common goal and vision, is a challenge for us.

Poornima (Marudham): Not everyone might be open to learning in a new set up. When there isn't this openness, it becomes a challenge. Sometimes we feel hurt, sometimes we feel overwhelmed and sometimes inadequate. Overcoming any or all these aspects is also a challenge.

Whatever we see in society, like gender discrimination, is also a challenge for teachers. Our teachers come from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, respecting and responding to teachers from different backgrounds is something they learn over time. How to take another person's opinion into consideration and not think that "only my opinion is correct" doesn't come naturally to everyone. Hence, it becomes important that whatever experience they have, they contribute and be open to learn new things that they don't know.

Namratha (Key Education Foundation): Reflection as a skill. Given that teachers in most of the early years' classroom are products of such classrooms, they lack the ability to reflect on their own. Most times during a coaching conversation, the teacher wants their coach to land the plane, since they are unable to identify success indicators in their classroom or identify their own focus areas. Without this skill, a teacher will struggle to grow. But we have seen that with consistent support and conversations, teachers are able to get there.

There is absolutely no metric for hiring of ECCE teachers. No growth path is defined for the role and the pay is abysmal. The workforce entering is usually young women, who are looking to keep themselves busy with an "easy" job and some pay. They are generally looking to stay in this profession for 1-2 years and then move on to teaching higher grades or shift professions entirely.

So, their willingness and readiness to do what it takes for their classroom is extremely low. Nothing in their environment is really encouraging otherwise. At KEF we believe in holistic capacity building of the teacher in terms of building her knowledge, skill and mindsets. However, we end up focusing more on skill building even during training. This is because ultimately a teacher is asking for support in getting through each day of teaching to a point where she wants someone to point her to lesson plans and resources for her to merely execute.

Key Education Foundation

We have identified some mindsets we believe that an early educator needs to bring into her classrooms. However, very often the ecosystem she works in expects the exact opposite of that. We want the teacher to believe in play-based teaching practices. But the children's parents believe that play is a waste of time and heavily push her back. This results in a teacher who might believe that play is important, but does not rely on this belief to make decisions. These are what we have observed in our preliminary mindset assessments as well.

Shruti Manerker has a bachelor's degree in biotechnology, a master's degree in literature, and multiple certifications on learning and development over her 12 years of experience in the education sector. She is a voracious reader and loves spending time in nature and exploring new cuisines and culture on her travels. She can be reached at shruti.manerker@akanksha.org and at shrutimanerker@gmail.com

Poornima Arun is a founder member and head teacher of Marudham Farm School in Thiruvannamalai, which was started in 2009. She is involved in all aspects of running the school - from curriculum development to teacher training and administration. She is an active member of the Alternate Education Network since the past nine years, and was instrumental in starting a Tamilnadu chapter five years back. She can be reached at poornima.arun12@gmail.com

Namratha Bhat holds an MSW degree from School of Social Work, Mangalore University. In her time working in the education sector, she has played the role of a teacher, a teacher coach and a trainer, and currently leads product development for early educators at Key Education Foundation. Her areas of interest include training design for adult learning, professional development of teachers, and early childhood education. She can be reached at namratha@keyeducationfoundation.org

An engineer by education, yet a teacher at heart, **Gowtham** has been working at the intersection of the social and education sectors for almost 14 years now. In the age of ChatGPT, he vociferously vouches for the critical role a teacher plays in enabling a meaningful school experience for students. He can be reached at gowtham@kanavu.in

Resources for teachers' continuous professional development

Shivaranjani

Samait Shala

"Where can I find new ways to teach this lesson?" is one of the fifteen hundred decisions a teacher makes every day. In this piece we share with you three sets of ready-to-use resources in the space of continuous professional development of teachers (CPD) curated by three organizations - Samait Shala, Aavishkar and Firki.

These resources have diverse nodes of accessibility. These include online, app-based, videos, and paper-pen, etc. They cover domains such as self-development, pedagogy and content development. The three curated lists of resources take various forms.

Samait Shala's list includes magazines for teachers being run by a university, NCERT's self-assessment rubric, and open-source video resources for teachers. The curated list also shares reflections on the use of these resources by the organization.

The section by Aavishkar talks about the organization's discussion practice called "ganit/vigyaan charchaa" or "math/science talk" in some detail. They share videos that provide a sense of what happens in these talks. The shared reflections and the videos can help other organizations who want to carry out similar activities for teacher development through deliberative discussions.

The section curated by *Firki* discusses their work in the space of professional development of teachers through an eponymous online platform. It hosts in-service and pre-service courses for teachers, and other learning offerings for school leaders. It also offers learning paths, resources and webinars for teachers who want to hone their skills in specific areas. This section discusses all these offerings available on the Firki platform in some detail, and provides the relevant links.

Samait Shala

The vision of Samait Shala Education Foundation is to create an inclusive learning environment for every child. Its mission is to create an inclusive environment in schools by enabling instructional leadership in teachers, school leaders, and resource teachers, so that they can make data-based decisions. Samait Shala enables instructional capacity in schools with two key stakeholders, school leaders and teachers. Its approach is to enable schools in building instructional capacity through inclusive teaching-learning practices. It supports the schools in developing their resource capacity through accessible teaching-learning materials for diverse learners. The organization also helps the schools in nurturing their partnership abilities to collaborate with relevant special education partners to bring required support for teachers and students in schools.

Tic Tac Learn: Tic Tac learn is an open-source video resource for math and science, led by Central Square Foundation, and contributed by other NGO partners. It is one of the largest open-source repositories of high-quality,

curriculum-aligned digital learning resources (~12,000 videos, aligned item bank, etc.) available for everyone, free of cost. The video resources cover concepts in math and science of grades one to ten in six different Indian languages. Each video uniquely defines the chapter and the learning outcomes. It also provides subtitles and transcripts for increased accessibility of the content. One can replace English with the language's name to access videos of other languages.

The strength of these resources lies in clarifying teachers' own understanding about a particular concept. Samait Shala has used TIC TAC Learn to map all math chapters of NCERT textbooks with the requisite videos for that chapter or concept. The same videos are used in math training for concept demonstration and self-work. This ensures that teachers get fully comfortable in using the videos and the concepts. Teachers have also used these videos as a recap tool for children.

Link to the video resources: TicTacLearn English - YouTube

Magazines by Azim Premji University (APU): APU publishes magazines in print and online formats to provide good quality learning resources for teachers and educational functionaries. These periodicals promote dialogue among schoolteachers, practitioners and educationists on current discourses and perspectives on education, classroom pedagogy, research and on-the-ground experiences.

These periodicals provide valuable resources for science, mathematics, and language learning. They help build teacher capacity and facilitate meaningful teaching-learning processes inside the classrooms and in school processes. All these magazines are available in the public domain free of cost. APU also conducts weekly webinars where interaction sessions with the authors contributing to these periodicals are also facilitated.

Samait Shala has used these magazines to build dialogues and reflections on experiences in its learning circles. At least two learning circles (45 mins each) in a unit of

Samait Shala

six weeks are planned to discuss and reflect on different articles from these magazines. Teachers take pride to learn about the contexts and initiatives from other states, as it expands their knowledge. They find similarities in the struggles of other teachers, which helps them feel hopeful about solving them.

Resource Link: https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/magazines-for-school-teachers

The Teacher Self-Assessment Rubric (TSAR) of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT): Teachers' self-assessment promises to encourage teachers to reflect on the personal, organizational, and institutional factors, which have an impact on their teaching. Keeping this idea at the core, NCERT has come up with a guideline and a tool called TSAR. Its goal is to help teachers right from the elementary to senior secondary levels to participate in their self-assessment.

At Samait Shala we have used the Teacher's Self-Assessment Rubric (TSAR) with teachers in two of the six standards – "Knowledge and Understanding of the Subject Matter" and "Strategies for Facilitating Learning."

We briefed the whole rubric to the teachers at the start of the year. We then arrived at a consensus that it will benefit them. However, in the first three months we realized that it must be facilitated by the school's Principal, as there are pointers specific to the school context. Hence, we stuck to the two where we had the direct support and intervention and helped teachers to evaluate themselves.

We asked teachers to write their scores and not share them publicly, as this would ensure there is no comparison with one another. They were asked to record their reflections based on these scores, twice a year. The first year it was all factual details of their feelings about the classes, school conditions, time, load of syllabus, etc. During reflections at the end of the first year, they saw the evidence from their classrooms and built trust and transparency. They also developed understanding of how the self-evaluation will help them in their regular work. Then, in the second year, the self-evaluation process was conducted four times in a year with teachers rejoicing seeing growth in each other.

Link to the Self-Assessment Standard: https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/announcement/TSAR.pdf

This list has been curated by Kushal Dattani, the founder of Samait Shala. He is a passionate advocate for inclusive education, and conducts workshops and training sessions to empower educators and leaders to define inclusion for themselves. Write to him at kushal@samaitshala.org.

Aavishkaar's Charchaa initiative in teacher development

Aavishkaar's mission is to eradicate the fear of mathematics and science and replace it with love for these disciplines. To this end, they research and craft cutting-edge resources, making mathematics and science education experiential, hands-on/minds-on, engaging, and accessible to all.

They build capacity in educators by fostering conceptual understanding and subject-specific teaching practices. The organization is also promoting a mindset shift toward mathematics and science among various stakeholders within the education ecosystem.

Aavishkaar

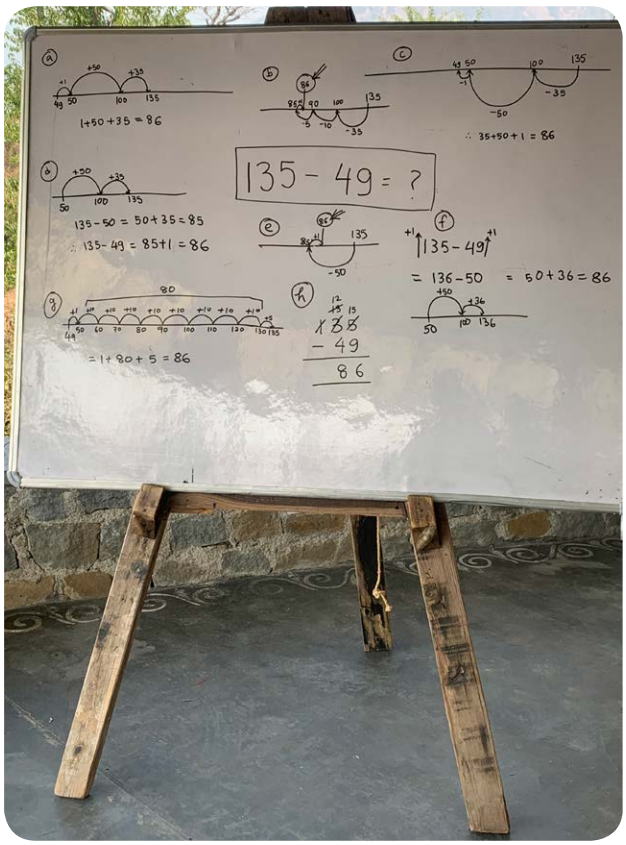
At Aavishkaar, the language of mathematics and science unfolds like a story with a unique discussion practice called *"Ganit/Vigyaan Charchaa"* or "Math/Science Talk." Its goal is to foster an environment of collective learning and empowerment. Every morning, the Aavishkaar team comes together for the *"charchaa"*.

The rules are simple – no hands raised, no pens or papers, just a subtle thumbs up when the answer clicks. These rules create a safe space for everyone. This is particularly so for the teacher trainees from the Math Educator Program. They are on a one-year journey toward becoming experienced educators for primary grades. These *charchaas* help in guiding them on a path to developing self-efficacy.

The journey begins with the facilitator transcending the boundaries of traditional learning with a rather ordinary question. The real magic unfolds not just in arriving at the correct answer, but in articulating how one reached that conclusion in simple language. In one such session, the facilitator, armed with the question of 49 subtracted from 135, was presented with not one but seven different ways to solve this simple subtraction.

All the responses find space on the board. This sparks collective learning, where each response opens doors to new realms of understanding. This breaks down the barriers of fear and instils confidence in every trainee. In the spirit of *charchaa* or discussion, another humble yet powerful transformation occurs. With mastering mathematical concepts, trainees pick up the art of effective communication as well.

But how do the learnings from *charchaa* manifest in classrooms? *Charchaa* provides a unique insight into students' abilities and struggles. Therefore, it helps educators tailor their lesson plans accordingly. During teacher training, the trainees experience this unique quality of *charchaa* in real-time. Facilitators identify areas where the



Aavishkaar

trainees need support. Then, they carefully create opportunities for them to practice their skills in a safe space, e.g., by providing trainees struggling with articulation with an opportunity to practice the art of articulation. Additionally, the open-ended nature of the discussion also encourages trainees to pose questions to each other, fostering a culture of curiosity and exploration.

Every *charchaa* ends with a brief reflection time. Questions like, "How does the white board make you feel?" or "Were you scared to share your answers?" allow everyone to synthesize their experiences and personal assessments of their growth.

Thus, as evidenced by Aavishkaar's experience, the simple yet profound act of *charchaa* can help the process of CPD for teachers. Watch this video to experience a *charchaa* in motion. What teacher actions do you see the facilitator playing? Which of these actions do you see yourself taking back to your classroom? To access more videos, please go to www.youtube.com and search for #GanitCharchaa Series #1 to #13.

Personalized capacity building of educators at Firki

Firki is Teach For India's online teacher education platform. It offers learning experiences in the form of courses, webinars, learning paths, online learning circles, and curated resources, in partnership with several organizations. At the core of Firki is the deep admiration for the role of educators. It strives to provide a sustainable platform for continuous professional development, as they drive the nation-building process through excellent education. You may contact them at programs@firki.co

Courses: With over 200 courses, Firki provides a range of materials tailored to various levels of teaching experience and expertise. These courses are organized into categories such as Classroom Culture, Classroom Instruction, Self-Development, School and Community, Subject Instruction, and Student Leadership, among others.

Most of their courses take the learners through the four stages of design thinking - Feel, Imagine, Do and Share, and finally an assessment to make the learning visible. The courses also have offline packets. These include a reflection journal that helps teachers document the strategies they learned and reflections from practice. The packets also have an offline learning circle plan that allows teachers to debrief the course theory and practice with peers and experts. The courses are available in six languages - English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi – and have seen 70,000+ enrollments. The content is downloadable for offline use in the Firki app.

Links to the courses: In service courses | Pre service courses | School leader courses

Learning paths: Learning Paths are certified, blended learning opportunities for educators to engage with rigorous content and be part of workshops led by experts. These are designed for pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, teacher trainers and school

Firki

leaders, and are offered in partnership with organizations. Participants engage with pre-work, expert-led sessions, post-work and assignments, while interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds.

Resources: The Firki portal hosts 1,200+ resources across grades I-XII on various topics including science, math, social science, English, computer science, well-being, general pedagogy, etc., in the form of lesson plans, content videos, worksheets, and articles, in partnership with 16 content partners.

Webinars: Firki conducts webinars by partnering with experts in the field on a variety of topics relevant to educators. These are recorded and uploaded on YouTube for future reference too.

The three curated lists shared here have the potential to help teachers make choices for their classrooms and students in an informed manner. We have included the experience of these organizations using the resources as well, so that it inspires the conviction to use them in an appropriate fashion.

Shivaranjani is a co-founder of Kanavu. She believes in the power of opportunities in transforming the lives of rural women and children. She currently leads community development initiatives - skilling and parent empowerment programs - at the organization.

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Teachers' well-being: stories from the ground

Dravina Seenivasan

What are the different roles a teacher plays in the system? On any given day, what are the different expectations that are placed on them by the students, principal, administration, communities and the larger systems? Who are the people in the system who trust, appreciate and recognize their work in its entirety? How can we enable their learning and development while recognizing the larger context?

One can hold these questions at the core, to explore what impacts teachers' development, while keeping in mind their contexts and needs. There is an undoubted growing pressure on teachers to complete a barrage of duties. These include writing documents, digitally entering data, picking up and distributing materials, completing administrative tasks, and so on. In a race to compete with global education standards, there is a directional shift to collect data, collate and share student learning data, follow safety protocols, etc.

The only way to get through that big list of tasks for a teacher, is to be efficient. An increased focus on improving efficiency, leads to a culture of urgency in task completion and a view that a successful teacher is one who completes all tasks on time. This does not give them the time and space to be with students and enable learning. A journey like a student's learning, which is meant to be transformative and powerful, is reduced to a series of tasks and milestones that are often rushed.

A culture of performance, incentives, accountability and competition has become entrenched in the current system. This has been changing the dynamics of engagement between teachers and students, school managements and teachers, CSOs, public administration and teachers and so on. These play a big role in a teacher's day, energy levels, motivation, and the time she gets to teach. For any teacher development program to be successful, it must be rooted in this context. Is that even possible? Is there space to imagine a paradigm where this context is taken into account, while we keep teachers as a whole at the center, weave in aspects of care and well-being into a program?

In this article, we will look into the work of three organizations that work with teachers keeping their well-being, learning and development at the core of their interventions. The objectives of their engagement include important themes such as inclusive learning, literacy, and experiential learning for students. Their commitment, long-term lens, and holistic perspective provide key insights into how the system can enable teachers' well-being in the short and long terms toward improving the quality of education for all children.

Prayas

Prayas is a not-for-profit organization working in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The organization began their work in 1996 with a vision of enabling inclusive education for all. Over the years, the team at Prayas have set up two schools in Jaipur. They have worked with children in mainstream public schools and run a home-based therapy program helping families to support children with special needs. They have also developed courses to build capacity in individuals toward inclusive education, and much more. They set up the first successful integrated school in the state. A key aspect of their program in setting up the integrated school was building

Prayas

Awareness camp in the community

capacity in regular in-service teachers to become effective special educators through a combination of trainings and on-the job coaching.

Upon successful implementation of their program in one school, they began working with twelve government schools in the district. The goal was to replicate their model of an integrated school. Over the years, they have conducted several workshops for teachers to build their capacity in the methods of inclusive education. Special educators from Prayas have supported teachers in classroom by sitting with children with special needs and supporting them to learn the concepts taught through focused pedagogy suitable for them.

However, they realized that conducting workshops didn't have the intended impact in the classrooms. Teachers were not adopting the practices toward creating individualized plans for children with special needs. Building capacity through training alone did not allow for building relationships with teachers. One had to understand the barriers in implementing what's taught in training.

Therefore, they altered the model and increased the engagement period with teachers. The special educators visited the schools twice every week and ensured regular conversations with the teachers. These conversations helped to recognize and acknowledge their challenges. These also enabled teachers to build trust on the special educators and not see them as external people who were there to impose newer expectations, but rather as volunteers and peers who are available to support them.

The team also identified a smaller group of teachers. It built deeper engagement with them. The relationship was not one where there was pressure on teachers or a system of accountability.

However, it was one where the special educators understood teachers' challenges, identified solutions that can be implemented, and supported the entire process. Two schools out of these twelve were chosen to deepen their impact. They currently focus on a group of eight teachers in building their capacity as special educators.

In addition to building strong relationships, the team has worked toward supporting teachers with concrete resources and skills that can be used in the classroom to solve the problems faced by teachers. These include workshops on creating teaching learning materials for supporting students, providing low-cost assistive devices to enable students' learning processes, and demonstrating the use of these in the classroom.

Lastly, they also felicitated the actively engaged teachers during their annual program. These teachers were gifted a book on disabilities. This has motivated and encouraged the teachers to continue their efforts to reach out to the students with special needs in their classrooms.

In the schools in which Prayas intervenes, teachers face numerous challenges for mainstream learning. These include student attendance, learning gaps, student behavior, and deficit of resources. Therefore, it is inspiring to learn from the organization's work of supporting regular teachers in the system to act as special educators.

Shaheed Virender Smarak Samiti (SVSS)

Shaheed Virender Smarak Samiti (SVSS) began their work in 1992. They have been working toward a vision of a society built on the values of social justice, democracy, scientific temper and equity. The work mainly focuses on the ideas of education and women's empowerment in the Panipat district of the state of Haryana. Since 1997, they have worked toward supporting and enabling education for drop-out and left-out children through the Jeevanshala program. This initiative has been based on alternative methods.

Based on the learnings in language learning and experiences of this program, in the year 2016, they began their work with teachers and children of eight government primary schools. The goal was to promote meaningful language teaching. Through consistent presence and building relationships with teachers, the team has been able to take the program to more schools in the district.

The organization currently works with 110 teachers across 36 schools in the district. It intervenes in these schools through a program called "Meaning making through children's literature." The team visits every school once a week. It supports teachers in the schools toward implementing newer pedagogy toward language learning. In addition to working on pedagogy and materials for language learning, they spend substantial amounts of time building strong relationships. This happens through conversations, informal discussions, motivating teachers, recognizing their efforts, and acknowledging the challenges in the system.

A key leverage for them to successfully implement their program and scale it to more schools in the district has been strong relationships they had built with all key actors in the system. Through the Jeevanshala Program, the team had worked alongside teachers to bring drop-out and left-out students to the schools. During the pandemic, they established community centers in the villages. The goal was with the aim of minimizing learning loss. This built trust with the teachers in the system that they shared a common end goal with the team.

SVSS had already developed a comprehensive understanding of the ground reality through their prior work. They interacted with teachers to understand their challenges in depth. This was an opportunity for the teachers to share several challenges in their classrooms related to language teaching and learning. Their engagements with the teachers showed that they mostly used traditional methods to teach language. They did not have any relevant means to identify which children were making progress, and the ones who were struggling.

The teachers also found it hard to motivate children to take books from the library to read. Many students were unfamiliar with the formal written language, as they spoke completely different languages or dialects at home. In addition to these challenges in the classroom, the system imposed several additional ones. The teacher-student ratio was very high. There were regular transfers as well. This removed any consistency or stability in the teachers' efforts.

Toward solving some of these challenges, the SVSS team began with conversations with the teachers. They provided new TLM that could prompt teachers to try newer pedagogical strategies. Some of these have involved flexibly designing classroom arrangements to make the space better for both learning and student behavior.

To support teachers to understand students and their levels, the team provided them with assessment templates. It also supported them in executing these. School libraries, which were an abandoned space in most schools, were transformed into spaces that are useful - with recommended books and purchases. The central aspect of the approach was that when the team experienced challenges, it ideated solutions, and modeled their implementation in the classroom. Teachers were supported with creating weekly plans and lesson plans. Ideas were also suggested for implementing newer pedagogical strategies.

The SVSS team also took successes, ideas and wins from one school, and shared these with the others. This motivated teachers to try out new things. It also helped them gain recognition from the larger community. Expert teachers were identified as resource persons. They were encouraged to conduct workshops at the block level. These practices nurtured the larger community. It also built strong relationships toward the collective vision.

Over the years, the team has observed student attendance increasing steadily. There

SVSS

is increased engagement of children in the classrooms. Regular community visits and conversations with parents have been key in making this happen.

Moreover, most of the classrooms had students who spoke a different language at home. The team worked with teachers on how the languages spoken at home could be integrated in everyday teaching and learning processes. This has been able to create belongingness for these students in the classroom. It has also been enabling their learning and growth.

Teachers were encouraged to learn words from students' languages and use these in classes. Students were asked to paraphrase the stories and sentences in their own language and share these in the classroom. These practices have created observable changes in the students' classroom behavior. Teachers initially thought that it was very difficult to work with these student groups. However, upon trying these strategies, they were able to support the language learning of the students.

Vedpal from SVSS shares that to work with teachers in the long-term, one must build trust and strong relationships. This includes regular conversations - both formal and informal. One must also listen to the teachers' challenges, model strategies in their classrooms, and work directly with children. One must also appreciate teachers and recognize the work they do. The public perception of teachers is very poor. Therefore, building a collective identity of teachers in

a positive light by discussing their success and challenges in the wider community is important.

"Over the pandemic, we had the opportunity to discuss a wide range of reading material with our teachers. We read Summerhill, Totto-Chan, Krishna Kumar's writings, and so on. These books and articles helped us build conversations on the themes of language learning and child development. We encouraged teachers to write reviews and summaries, and respond with poetry. These responses were shared with the group. This built deeper engagement," Vedpal shares.

His comments throw light on powerful possibilities of teacher learning experiences that can be crafted. The learnings and experiences of SVSS demonstrate how teacher development gets built over a long period of time with both depth and scale.

Caring with Colour

Caring with Colour has been conducting a program called the District Education Transformation Program (DETP) in the Tumakuru and Madhugiri educational districts of Karnataka. The goal of this initiative is to address the challenges of teacher professional development and help teachers adopt experiential teaching methods in their classrooms.

The teacher training program designed under this initiative has been called *Sanchalana*. The program has been co-designed and developed in partnership with the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in Tumakuru and Madhugiri educational districts of Karnataka. Sanchalana's goal was to provide teacher training and create a community of practitioners who can share experiences and expertise on their collective journey in shifting toward adopting experiential teaching methods in their classrooms.

One of the key design goals of Sanchalana is to provide a platform for educators and teachers to come together, share insights, discuss innovations, learn new pedagogical practices, exchange best practices, and collectively work toward addressing the academic gaps in the education domain.

Caring with Colour partnered with DIETs in Tumakuru and Madhugiri educational districts to identify a group of teachers who can act as effective facilitators in the Sanchalana program. These facilitators are called "Teacher Mentors."

These are teachers in government schools, who have good subject expertise and facilitation skills. The program required that these teachers be able to take on this additional workload of conducting the Sanchalana sessions.

Caring with Colour

With the support of the teacher mentors, the team has managed to conduct monthly learning programs (monthly learning cycles) for more than 3,000 teachers each month across Tumakuru district. This training program has helped improve the subject and pedagogical knowledge of the teachers. It has also significantly improved the teaching methodology adopted by the teachers in the system.

The training sessions are conducted on a specified Saturday each month. These are planned well in advance in the academic year. The training programs have been conducted at a Hobli level. A Hobli is an administrative unit of the system that is larger than a school cluster and smaller than an academic block. On the specified Saturdays, teacher mentors and teachers all congregated into a subject specific community of learners. Cluster and block level officials became an active and integral part of the entire process. They monitor the implementation of the training session in the Hobli learning centers.

In these monthly learning sessions, teacher mentors address teachers' subject knowledge gaps and provide pedagogical knowledge. Hands-on experiences of various experiential activities that can be conducted in the classrooms on the topics for discussion are also shared. The hard spots that teachers have in teaching specific topics are also addressed.

Mentors facilitate the discussions. They encourage teachers to share existing practices and areas for improvement. Teachers have been learning from each other's experiences. Senior teachers have been sharing solutions and newcomers have been able to clarify their doubts and teaching strategies. Mentors and teachers have been actively exchanging ideas, teaching materials, and new approaches.

This initiative, aptly named "Sanchalana" has fostered a dynamic and collaborative learning

Caring with Colour

environment for teachers. The collaborative learning experience gained by the teachers and teacher mentors have managed to avoid a top-down approach. The initiative has been motivating teachers to adopt the learnings from the training in their classrooms.

Conclusion

The work of these organizations in different geographies of India, effectively highlights two key things. First, there is a need for voices of challenges and solutions to emerge from the teacher group. Second, nurturing communities of teachers, so that they can come together, learn from each other, and deepen their practice, supports teachers' growth. This on-the-ground work deepens conviction in the power of teachers to transform how India learns.

You may reach out to the organizations featured in this story at: prayasjaipur17@gmail.com (Prayas); svsssmk.org@gmail.com (SVSS); and contactus@caringwithcolour.org (CWC).

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