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Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

Issue 5: Taking responsibility for professional development (1)

Edited by Brian Tomlinson

Contents

Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

Issue 5: Overview

Taking responsibility for professional development (1)

All three papers in this issue of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* focus on the professional practice of taking responsibility for professional development. Through this professional practice, teachers can identify their own needs and interests and stay up to date with developments in education, teaching and learning. They can take part in continuing professional development opportunities and reflect on the impact of these on their teaching.

The three papers in this issue all investigate some current modes of provision of continuing professional development and make suggestions on how the scope of this activity can be expanded. In her examination of story-telling, **Deepa Kiran** looks at ways to help primary school teachers to increase both their motivation and their proficiency through storytelling. **Balantrapu Kalyan** describes experiences of encouraging teachers in Andhra Pradesh to take responsibility for their own development including diary writing and action research, emphasising the need for reflective approaches. **Krishna Dutta Deka** reports on teacher development programmes delivered by Master Trainers on a British Council project in Assam designed to introduce innovative practices to improve the teaching of English in selected schools and identifies both the achievements and the scope for further development for the programme.

About the authors

Deepa Kiran is the founder of Story Arts India, and is a storyteller, writer and educationalist engaged with employing story-arts as a pedagogical intervention that can deeply impact both the learner and the teacher.

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About the English Language Teaching Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme

India has a long tradition of educational research but the results of this have not always reached the wider world. Through a range of programmes, British Council India places considerable emphasis on encouraging and supporting inquiry. A key strand of that work between 2012 and 2016 has been the English Language Teaching Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme. The programme aimed to facilitate high quality, innovative research to benefit the learning and teaching of English in India and to improve the access of ELT policy makers, professionals from India and the United Kingdom and the global ELT community to that research. All writers contributing to the eleven issues of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* were selected and

supported in their research by the ELTReP Award programme.

All three papers in this issue have been written by practitioners in the field, whether teachers, lecturers, educational department personnel or other roles that involve day-to-day contact with the teaching and learning of English. The researchers, many of whom will be seeing their work published for the first time, have designed and implemented their studies and present results which in each case are innovative and thought-provoking. Each paper reflects the creativity, detailed awareness of context and practical suggestions of a wide range of writers, from different backgrounds and working in different situations.

We very much hope you enjoy *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* and that you feel the insights the papers provide into a variety of educational environments are applicable to your own context, wherever you may be working.

Acknowledgements

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All the papers in this issue were edited by Professor Brian Tomlinson in collaboration with the writers themselves. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Professor Tomlinson.

The opinions expressed in the papers in this issue are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the British Council.

1

Scope for teacher development through employing storytelling in the language classroom

Deepa Kiran

1. Introduction and research questions

The intent of this project has been to explore the scope that storytelling offers to the English language teacher both in her classroom performance and her proficiency in the teaching of the language. The aim was to work with English language teachers, first by training them in the art of storytelling (theatre and storytelling activities) and moving on to implementation of a guided programme where the teachers begin to use storytelling in the classroom. The structure of the programme was designed to introduce the art to the teacher, bring a comfort level in story performance in the classroom, and explore multiple post-storytelling options aimed at specific development related to language and language-teaching.

Once the teacher grasped the concept of using the same story in different ways for developing different skills of language in her learners, she was likely to engage with storytelling and might begin to employ it more frequently and effectively. The project looked to explore these possibilities that a simple, easily accessible and impactful tool such as storytelling could give the English language teacher who is struggling with two parallel concerns. The first is the task of getting her students interested in learning English and the second is the task of finding ways to work

on correcting both her own proficiency level in English and her language teaching skills, even as she teaches the language. The approach to this project was not quantitative but qualitative and therefore a small number of teachers were part of the project. The participation was totally voluntary. The data collection followed a least-intrusive pattern with observations, interviews and journaling.

The research questions focused on the potentials for transformation that opened up for the language teacher when she began to use stories and tell stories in the classroom, and followed them up in a structured manner. The questions were:

- How did teachers change as users of language?

- Was there any change in their communication patterns and language proficiency?

- Were the teachers becoming more confident and/or interested in accessing and engaging with the language resources available?

- Was there a self-sustaining interest in language teaching being generated?

- What did the teachers do, say and ask initially in the language classroom? What were the changes particularly with respect to unrehearsed classroom communication?

- What are the challenges that storytelling poses to the teacher?
- What are the challenges that storytelling appears to successfully address for the teacher?

1.1. Background

Working as an English teacher in various Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Government Schools) across India, I had the opportunity to discover the impact of storytelling in the classroom. It brought deep engagement with the subject and curiosity to learn more. With a PGCTE (Postgraduate diploma in the teaching of English) from EFLU (English and Foreign Languages University), I was later able to connect the dots and place them in a theoretical foundation which allowed me to both comprehend and articulate my learning.

Meanwhile I had taken a deep interest in storytelling not only in the classroom but as a performing art in itself. It was a natural progression to pursue an MPhil at EFLU on the same subject. While the research was discontinued for medical reasons, the informal research continued with constant guidance from my mentors.

Furthermore, becoming an empanelled resource person with the central government helped me reach teachers from across the country. In this capacity I am regularly invited by the government, to conduct 'refresher' and 'orientation' workshops on 'Storytelling in learning environment.' As a teacher trainer, I could carry forward the findings through interactive activity-based workshops and lecture demonstrations where teachers not only developed an experiential understanding of storytelling but also learnt how to use the same in the classroom.

The most interesting episodes related to this work happened almost a decade later though. The impact that storytelling had on teacher development was too deep to be ignored any more. There was a large scope for teachers' proficiency and professional development through the employment of storytelling in the classroom. Recent research had brought the focus on storytelling and its benefit for the learner but minimal research had been happening with respect to its scope for teacher development.

Pendurthy, a school in the outskirts of a tier-2 city in India, had students with a near-zero knowledge of English. Much like elsewhere in India, the teachers too had issues with their English and faced the dilemma of teaching it nevertheless. Working with teachers of class LKG, UKG, grade one and grade two, for over seven months of training that involved storytelling in the language classroom, revealed interesting answers.

The teachers were trained in the art of storytelling and had a regular 15-minute storytelling routine in their classroom every morning. The project lasted for seven months meandering through unexpected territories. Not only did the children begin to listen, speak, read and even attempt to write in English voluntarily, but they also became confident, cooperative, punctual and began to express their creative side with ease. Children undoubtedly benefitted immensely from this but what caught my interest was the teachers.

They were touched by the students' responses and began to take more interest in their teaching and preparation. They became more confident, resourceful and self-observant both as users of the language and teachers. Having worked with school teachers across India (in private and government schools), one becomes aware of the dire need for such simple yet accessible ways to further language proficiency and language-teaching skills.

1.2. Literature review

This project aims to document the scope for teacher development through the employment of storytelling in the language classroom. The implications of using stories particularly in the context of the Indian education system has been aptly addressed in detail by Krishna Kumar. 'What they [stories] represent is our desire to interpret life' (Kumar, 1986). Additionally, he emphasises the need for teachers and children to orally narrate stories. 'Indeed, any story requires us to manipulate language in a creative manner, and

listening to stories provides us examples of skilled creativity of language. This is why storytelling is a great resource for a teacher of young children.' (ibid p14). There is a plethora of learning theories that resonate or converse with the understanding of storytelling the researcher has arrived at.

Communicative Language Teaching

Prabhu once claimed that CLT-based language teaching involves negotiation of meaning and teachers teaching this way are bound to find improvement in their English. Looking at the framework of CLT we find that storytelling also presents similar opportunities for the language teacher such as:

- placing meaning before form – given the oral nature of telling where the teacher uses his/her entire body for communication, comprehension of meaning is reinforced through gestures, expressions, body language and other such elements

- language learning in context – the context of the story in its entirety and in its parts, provides an appropriate context for the learner to decipher and possibly arrive at the meaning

- focus on communication rather than accuracy – much like CLT, initially storytelling responses are structured to be open-ended encouraging communication without inhibition

- grammar taught inductively – grammar is not the overarching agenda but engaging with language in context is.

Whole language acquisition

Contradictory as this might seem on the surface, oral storytelling as a teaching tool, also has its foundations in the tenets of whole language acquisition. Let us address the commonalities here.
Most of the research supporting and negating WLA has focused on reading and writing skills and not on speaking skills. It does not focus on the teacher employing the 'oral tradition' of storytelling in the classroom. However, 'oral storytelling' lays emphasis on speech, before progressing to reading tasks thereby generating

opportunities for the language learner to inductively arrive at the 'sound and spelling' relationship.

- The semantic cuing system - the learner can attempt to relate to the newly learned word using prior knowledge for making associations with their personal experiences, the text and the structure of the text. Thus the learner begins to explore language independently and discover syntactic patterns (for example) based on meaning.

- The pragmatic system – this is in play while meaning is constructed and it lies within a socio-cultural context. Stories and their telling provide for engineering such relevant constructs. No literature is devoid of context, but we could certainly advocate stories and oral telling of stories as holding strong promise, for creating and enabling the learners to receive and create texts they can identify with.

Whole Language Education

'Whole language is not a program, package, set of materials, method, practice, or technique; rather, it is a perspective on language and learning that leads to the acceptance of certain strategies, methods, materials, and techniques' (Watson, 1989).
The principles of Whole Language Education are relevant for appreciating how the English language teacher facilitates consistent engagement with the text in the classroom. Some of them are:

- acceptance of learners – being aware of the learner's environment as well as the concerns stemming from the curriculum and seeking to create motivation and interest in language learning

- flexibility within structure – bringing choices to the learner for tasks, which could be few but satisfying ones that infuse curiosity and responsibility in language and learning

- engagement in 'real' learning – the premise is that the learner need not be given 'preparation' for learning tasks but can benefit more from directly engaging with whole texts (for example – complete stories).

Teacher's learning and development through storytelling

We find that storytelling is a powerful trigger motivating the teacher to research on her own work from new standpoints.

- New sociocultural approaches to English language learning advocate multilingual classrooms steering away from the traditional monolingual recommendation. Culturally rooted storytelling allows for bringing in the student's and the teacher's language into the classroom, to further the involvement in the learning process. This is supported by Hall and Cook (2012).

- Recent developments in SLA research have brought in the teacher as the researcher who is interested in more than purely pedagogic concerns alone (Ellis, 2010).

- Borg (2003) has addressed the area of teacher cognition and its consequences for the language classroom particularly where the teacher is not a native speaker of the language. He argues that the teacher's classroom transactions stem from constructs based on her thoughts, understandings and beliefs. This project proposes that storytelling can impact and positively alter attitudes, approaches and understanding. These need to studied in depth as the article suggests.

2. Research methodology

The initial plan was to work with a group of 24 primary school teachers across two months. However, I finally worked with a single school, Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, run by a charity foundation providing highly subsidised education to the underprivileged children of the local community. It is an English medium school following the State Board syllabus. The project involved three teachers, teaching Class 2, Class 5 and Class 6, starting in mid-January and continuing up to early April.

The teachers were initially interviewed to understand their command of English, confidence in expressing themselves in English and notions about learning and education. The three teachers belonged to different classes, Class 2, Class 5 and Class 6.

Teacher Class 2: a senior teacher with over fifteen years' experience in the field

She was comfortable with class management but had issues with language in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Her concerns revolved around her English competency and that of her students. She was eager and willing to explore how storytelling could benefit her and her students. Pronunciation and sentence constructions that involved the past tense were the primary areas for improvement as identified by her.

Teacher Class 5: a teacher with over five to six years of teaching experience

She was working with Classes 4 and 5 and chose to work with Class 5 for this project. She was self-assured but lacked confidence in her classroom transactions, particularly when it came to English teaching. Aware of and concerned with specific issues in her grammar, she prioritised the challenge of introducing new vocabulary to her students without relying heavily on translation.

Teacher Class 6: a teacher fairly new to the profession, with two years of experience in the field

She worked with the higher grades Class 6, 7, 8 and 9. For this project she chose to work with Class 6. Her language issues were far less compared to her colleagues. She was quite sure and confident of her sentence constructions but had concerns with respect to teaching of the language, especially in generating and sustaining the interest of the students in language. This was her focus as a participant in the project.

All the teachers went through an initial basic training module together, spread across one working day of five and a half hours. The training involved: introduction to the art of storytelling, eliciting language learning likelihoods, theatre activities to open up and shedding inhibitions to work on whole-body-communication skills. The teachers were taken through stories, their telling, ways to cut or flesh out the story and ways to embellish the story with their style. They

developed an understanding of how to revisit the same story in multiple ways so that it becomes the take off point for not only listening and speaking skills but also reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar.

Based on their respective classes, the teachers were given age – appropriate story scripts to choose from. They could choose two stories which they believed their children would relate to. We worked with the understanding that the teacher knows her classroom best.

The methodology followed was to work with one story each for a fortnight, which came to around ten working days. After choosing the story the teacher was given the copy of the script and given a week's time to read and reread in her free time. A meeting was held where teachers could clarify any concerns, be it pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or performance queries. As this was a new beginning, just for the very first story concepts and demonstrations were prearranged for the teacher this once.

A storytelling session running up to 15 to 20 minutes was held every day. The teacher told a story and was guided on ways to elicit and allow for open-ended responses. For about ten working days the teacher and students revisited the same story in different ways. A semi-structured module was designed for the teacher involving storytelling and post-storytelling tasks. These were designed to develop reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar skills as well generate interest in the learners which could help them to become independent leaners.

The teachers read aloud and also performed their respective stories before a small group that included researchers and peers. Following constructive feedback, the teachers went on to 'perform' the storytelling in the class.

While the Class 2 teacher was very excited and highly optimistic about the impending activity and response, the Class 5 teacher was rather nervous and the Class 6 teacher, had serious doubts about older children responding to storytelling without writing it off as something silly. Nevertheless, all

three took up the gauntlet and went ahead and did the storytelling as scheduled.

The teachers were introduced to strategies for revisiting the story such as:

- re-telling the story with pauses which the listeners could fill, since they were familiar with the story

- art-response activities where students get to express their response to the story through a drawing. This was different from the regular oral or written comprehension task

- reading aloud by the teacher with students having copies of the story script

- identifying their likes and doubts in the story while reading

- chain reading aloud by students. Children enjoy this as there is scope for dramatisation which is also a big draw for them.

- story-reading performance by the students

- story performed as a small skit.

These were some of the options proposed for joyful as well as confident exploration by the teacher.

2. Data collection

It was a conscious decision not to video record sessions to ensure the teacher was not nervous and the students were not distracted. The observations therefore are primarily researcher notes, diary entries by teachers, recorded review sessions, and recollections. The choice made was to acknowledge and work from the teachers' point of view. What the teachers felt about English and English teaching would be documented to give us a better understanding of any changes in perspective or approach to teaching and learning. This would be critical to the project as the attempt here was not to mindlessly thrust upon the teacher pedagogic tools to engage with but to propose ways to empower themselves and address critical areas of language teaching that they have identified. The prospects that existed had to be absolutely practical, relevant to the teachers' specific context, easily implementable and yielding positive outcomes.

The attempt was to reengineer the Pendurthy school scenario and see if similar episodes emerged. The common anxiety that ran through Sarvodaya Vidyalaya school was the fact that all the children came from a background where there was negligible help on the home front. The parents were not literate and situations included domestic violence and financial challenges. The students' behaviour, utter lack of interest in learning, and low levels of competency in the English language were key concerns. The teachers were looking to find strategies to address these problems along with equipping themselves with tools for English language teaching.

As the research progressed, it posed many other challenges. One of the remaining three teachers had become highly irregular in attendance because of a medical situation at home. Another teacher was allotted more classes with the higher grades and subsequently could not make much time for the project.

And so the final project narrowed down to the case study of a single teacher who was deeply engaged, enthusiastic and dedicated. She stuck at it alone and the researcher's fortnightly visits and intermediary phone calls also helped keep the momentum going. She not only employed storytelling in the classroom but also began to share more stories with her son at home. The final report wraps up on this note: one teacher's journey in employing storytelling in the language classroom along with her students and the storyteller/researcher/trainer.

The project required that we begin with understanding the context of the teaching. The background of the children, the attitude of the school management and the issues the teacher grappled with, which were all critical for successful progression at every stage. This was perhaps one of the reasons why the research trickled down to a case study eventually.

3. Findings

The initial findings gave much hope that storytelling and its role in teacher development was not just a one-time occurrence but a repeatable process which, if designed and implemented in the appropriate manner, could certainly yield similar results in different learning contexts.

The stone had been thrown into the pond and now we were waiting to watch the ripple effect. The ripple effect happened at both levels - student and teacher. The interest in this approach did not seem to wane as the project continued; rather the interest grew in the children, who soon began to look forward to the storytelling-based learning and in fact demanded it when the teacher for some reason could not take a storytelling-based session.

Based on the data collected there were interesting and notable changes that emerged early on in the project. We found about a month of this regular storytelling session in the classroom brought about the changes described in Section 3.1.

3.1. Classroom changes with respect to the learner

- Learners became interested in listening to the teacher in the English class.

- Thanks to the dramatisation and sound effects they felt like retelling over and over the story aloud voluntarily in their free time. Thus they were 'repeating' English phrases and sentences, which was unheard of.

- When the story script was shared with them, they were very excited about the reading activity. The teachers were extremely surprised by this very pleasant development. They had expected resistance to reading and moreover to the reading of a 'known' text.

- Learners began to guess meanings of words and began to ask for the meanings of the ones they could not decipher.

- Leaners began to replace the sentences with their context and reframe it for regular daily use. This was very similar to the learning of the mother tongue.

- Learners loved the unexpected sound effects, rhymes and ditties woven into the telling.
- Learners were pleasantly surprised and gladly related familiar regional language phrases that they unexpectedly encountered in the English classroom.
- The universal and the local folk themes were very popular with the children.
- One of the best responses was that the 'storytelling teacher' had become very popular among the students and even the neighbouring classes.

A gentle self-guided course correction became visible in the teachers. They had become interested, motivated and resourceful about the journey of noticing and working on words and phrases which were dramatically different from the normal. Since the emphasis was not on minor deviations, teachers could choose to be aware of the major deviations. They felt the need and found ways to work on these primary issues and grow. Teachers began to carry a dictionary with them to answer all the vocabulary queries that sprouted up spontaneously, they began to search for more stories, they spent time consciously planning and practising their stories.

All the three class teachers began to consciously and correctly repeat words especially from the story which they had been mispronouncing. They began to consciously look at their intonation patterns and rectify where required.

Specific instances included certain language errors associated with a certain geographical location. In this part of South India a common error occurs when asking questions in the simple past. The teachers were unaware of this and all three used this errant pattern in their speech. A phrase commonly heard in the school was: 'Did you took the book?'. The stories were scripted keeping a remedial role in mind. The stories therefore included repetition of this structure wherever possible. This directed the teacher and her students to use the right pattern.

'Did you eat the biscuit?'

'Did you dance?'

These were phrases that the children and teachers became familiar with. So whenever they got questions in the simple past wrong they would quickly refer to a line from the story and correct each other. Not only that, but the right pattern began to gain currency in their general usage as well. This was a natural consequence of the teacher sharing stories in the classroom and it was not 'taught' to the learners.

Example: A story about a rat losing his biscuit had a repetitive question that went, 'Did you take my biscuit?'. The children began to repeat this question just for the joy of it initially and later one day when a child had lost his pencil, he asked his classmate, 'Did you take my pencil?, and the classmate replied from a sentence in the story, 'No, I did not take your pencil (biscuit in the story) but I think you should go and ask someone else.'

Needless to say this gave the English language teacher the much-needed impetus in her journey.

3.2. Classroom changes with respect to the teacher

New found confidence
The teacher became confident in her classroom performance finding faith that she could take English classes that deeply engaged her students. This is very significant because more often than not the English teacher is fighting against the odds when she is speaking a language alien to the children in many ways and is trying to 'enforce' interest and learning.

> *'I cannot believe it,' said the Class 5 teacher. 'They have never listened to me with such rapt attention. And they even ask me to repeat the story and listen eagerly every time.'*

> *'The neighbouring class heard about the story and they have insisted that I visit their class too and tell them the story,' said the teacher who taught Class 2.*

> *'I was quite sure they'll laugh at me but they laughed with me and have complimented me on my drama skills,' was the first feedback from the Class 6 teacher.*

Relevance to daily routine

The texts and their oral narration together made their work purposeful, particularly with reference to speaking skills.

> *'I do not get to use such conversational sentences usually Ma'am. I am surrounded by others with whom I converse mostly in the regional language':* Class 5 teacher

> *'I am picking up pronunciation and intonation and getting the chance to rehearse in my retellings and improve my speech':* Class 2 teacher

> *'I get a chance to introduce conversation to my children in such an interesting way. It is a very useful tool for me':* Class 6 teacher

Understanding the need for working with less rather than more

The teachers were encouraged to revisit the same story repeatedly for the next two weeks in different ways. What stood out for me the researcher, the children and the management was that the teachers were now speaking English in the class with fewer inhibitions.

For example in her storytelling the teacher had used the phrase 'And she climbed up the mountain….' The student was curious about the word 'climb'. Traditionally the teacher would refer to the dictionary and simply read out the definition given there. Having told stories, she did look up the meaning in the book but she said, 'I would like to help him know the meaning without using the dictionary and without translating into his mother tongue. Are there other ways? '

The teachers were now asking new questions about the classroom transaction which they had not considered before. It would be significant to mention here that the school management was deeply impressed and has asked for follow up on the work and proactively sent a testimonial about the project.

Language of science and science learning

Seeing the impact of storytelling in the English language classroom, the teachers and management requested the researcher to create stories based on the science syllabus of grades 4 and 5. This was a delightful progression in extending the realm of storytelling in learning. Stories based on three science topics were prepared and the story scripts were given to the teachers for sharing as oral narrations.

The response was much more than anticipated. The children not only understood the topic but also went on to perform the stories at science exhibitions and were highly appreciated by the Education Inspector. 'The comfort the children displayed in science communication is on par with that of students from private schools', was the response of the Education Inspector. Needless to say that this was a memorable moment for all of us.

4. Conclusion

The teacher can determine how to become a self-learner both as a user of the language and an educator, by employing storytelling and post-storytelling activities. The teacher's creativity and imagination is invested in the preparation for story narration and therefore storytelling can in a simple way bring to the English language teacher artistic growth as a performer in the classroom. Storytelling being informal, conversational and contextual in nature, could hold the key to motivating the teacher to uninhibitedly and ingeniously exhibit her skills, which in turn can inspire her learners. Working with the same story over a period of time and anecdotal journaling about the same, can create the groundwork for becoming a teacher-researcher, who questions her work and therefore gets insights into her classroom transactions. The teacher's insights on using storytelling in science comprise one such instance where she had begun to extend her learning into other areas of her work.

Thus the process can be empowering for the teacher, who now appreciates that with a little effort put in for a rehearsed storytelling performance, she can pave the way for confidence and ease in routine, unrehearsed communication in the classroom.

Another significant aspect to note is the student's response to storytelling which ranges from uninterrupted listening, to curiosity about new words, voluntarily speaking and writing in English, and even asking for more stories and story books. This response progresses into eager involvement with the 'text' when the themes are culturally rooted or (universal in nature), and not alien to their realities. Peppering the telling with the local lingo can contribute much to strengthening the connection with the text and does not take away from the learning of the English language. Rather it eases the journey to the world of a new language by generously employing drama, mime, ventriloquism, onomatopoeic words and sounds, small rhymes and ditties, which bring in the element of surprise, break the monotony of regular word-heavy narrations and effectively hook the child's attention.

These responses can be a powerful trigger for the teacher who feels more energised and responsible for the student's enhanced interest in the language. In addition to this, the act of using drama, music, regional poems and songs in the English classroom becomes a liberating experience for the teacher who is pushed out of her comfort zone. The use of regional language phrases, rhymes and ditties allows for the teacher to bring in slices of her life into the English language classroom and thus roots the learning in the local cultural context.

The teachers do get anxious about being pushed out of their comfort zone and some also have their reservations about using drama, music and movement in front of their students. However, hand holding and repeated reassurance from the facilitator is important and finally the overwhelming student response becomes the sustaining factor.

Storytelling can thus become the level playing field where learning of English comes to be seen as a joyful, relaxing, effortless, creative, and cooperative experience between the facilitator and the learner. And when there is such a marked change in perspective half the battle is won. We have allies who are willing to explore and learn together. These responses can catapult the teachers' confidence and enthusiasm levels, which are both key factors that contribute to the teacher's growth.

What was the motivation for the change? Storytelling focusses on flow of speech and an engaging content (the story itself) and its interesting delivery. The focus is not so much on accuracy and continuous self-editing, but on building the confidence and motivating self-learning for the teacher.

What prompted this new notion? Storytelling is actually a conversation with another. When the teacher converses with the students much like in everyday life, both the student and the teacher receive continued opportunity for using language in the act of everyday speech, and also build a wonderful bond with each other.

What did the teacher discover that prompted a change in her approach to 'knowledge,' 'syllabus' and language learning? The learning from this was that teachers deeply understood the role storytelling was playing in their growth and that of the students. So contrary to the expected idea of teachers struggling to 'complete' the curriculum and resisting any new intervention, the teachers began to ask for more stories. They began to read up the words, their pronunciation, meanings, grammar etc.

The project findings have been optimistic and encouraging about the way forward for storytelling as a tool for English language teacher development. The science extension also holds significance. At the primary level, many of the teachers work as mother teachers which means they teach all the subjects. Thus storytelling can be employed not only for teaching English language but also for establishing the fundamentals of the language of science and other subjects at the conceptual level. Once the child's language for learning and comprehending English and conceptual teaching through English is well-developed at the primary level, the foundation or basis for higher learning is naturally taken care of.

One understands the scale of this research is small; nevertheless the findings documented have been highly reassuring. As a practising storyteller, a performing artist and an educationalist, I would like to put the case for the use of storytelling as a developmental tool for teachers, particularly in countries such as India where the English language teacher struggles with her own language issues while she continues the task of teaching.

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2

Towards a viable model of continuing professional development of ESL teachers in India

Balantrapu Kalyan

This paper reports an experiment conducted on the Reflective Approach (RA). This one-year project proposes the Reflective Approach (RA) as a viable model for the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in India.

1. Background of the project

ESL education is becoming increasingly important and teachers, trainers, and learners all over the world are working together to develop English language education. In countries such as India, where English is either taught as a foreign language (FL) or a second language (SL), this is a challenging enterprise and the onus is on the teacher to develop a high level of professionalism and ownership towards language teaching. These qualities cannot be acquired in an instant: they demand continuing efforts for years.

In the Indian context, ESL teacher education is 'largely an undefined affair' (Ramanujam 2009: 09). I think a self-satisfied attitude is predominantly noted in the teachers, for they think learning English is *just* enough to be able to teach the language. These non-progressive and self-congratulatory attitudes result in a poor delivery of the teaching of English language to the stakeholders: the learners.

An ESL teacher should be open to learning continuously to be able to teach the language more effectively. The fact is clear: a teacher may not acquire 'professionalism' or become 'professional' just by formally reading a course at a college or a university. It is not a process with a start and an end point; it is an ongoing process.

In India, so far, the institutionalisation of CPD has not found a place, at least on a wider spectrum. Though the institutional mechanism in the form of in-service training is in existence to ensure teacher education, the mechanism has far more problems than advantages.

1. The existing in-service training cannot ensure any teacher development, for the training concentrates only on mechanical delivery of proposed content ignoring the pedagogical aspects.

2. The prevailing models of teacher education such as 'the Applied-Science Model' (in this model, the trainee studies theories related to Applied Linguistics and other allied subjects, which are later applied to classroom practice) and 'the Craft Model' (in this model, the trainee observes and imitates a 'master teacher') have proved to be deficit models.

3. None of the said teacher professional education models place the teacher at the centre of the development process.

Having dismissed the theorist-generated teacher education models as deficit models and said much about why life-long learning is needed, I need to talk about the 'responsibility' aspect. In fact, it is the teachers' responsibility to take care of their CPD themselves. Hence, we need a model that can place that teacher at the centre of the development process.
It is here that the Reflective Approach fills the lacuna created by the deficit models. RA involves various procedures of self-reflection such as journal writing, critical incident analysis and peer observation.

RA is increasingly becoming a predominant teacher education model because:

1. it places the teacher at the centre of the development process

2. it encourages a teacher to reflect on his/her classroom behaviour through various practices

3. through reflection, classroom problems can be solved effectively by the teacher himself.

What is more, this Reflective Approach (RA) is demonstrated to be a viable and workable model for the CPD of ESL teachers. The study is relevant in another respect also. In general education research, 'teachers' way of knowing', which is referred to as the 'new scholarship' (Schön 1995, Zeichner 1999) or 'practitioner research' (Anderson and Herr 1999), is gaining recognition. The process of legitimising this knowledge calls for a broad-based movement that seeks to examine and make public the new scholarship. I expect this study to serve that purpose.

2. Methodology

An experiment was conducted with 25 ESL teachers from technological universities, colleges and schools of the Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh. Initially, a two-day workshop was organised for 25 teachers, who under the guidance of a CPD expert, were initiated into some of the strategies of teacher reflection.

The teachers were motivated, at a CPD workshop, into adopting any one or a few of the reflective strategies in their regular teaching schedules. The reflective strategies adopted by the teachers were journal writing (individual), self-observation (questionnaires and lesson reports), peer observation, critical incident analysis, and collaborative action research.

Initially, those teachers who had opted to conduct action research in their classes drew up some action research proposals after identifying the potentially researchable areas of their classrooms.

I met the teachers occasionally in their institutions to monitor the progress of their work. Also, the teachers were in a regular contact with me through e-mails and phone calls to seek for any clarification. The teachers who opted to do classroom-based research were also regularly monitored and were given guidance on the necessary areas. Moreover, on a regular basis, informal meetings were conducted to share the data and to discuss concerns the teachers faced. An initial questionnaire was administered before the teachers began to be a part of the project on analysing their view of professional development. Later, at the end of the project, questionnaires were administered to see if the teachers still held their earlier views about professional development.

3. Data analysis and findings

Data collection was carried out using qualitative techniques.

3.1. Journal writing

Diary writing/journal writing is a very important strategy in teacher reflection. A journal entry gives very reliable data about one's own class. A teacher's reflective journal entry records 'events and ideas for the purpose of later reflection' (Richards 1996: 7).

Teachers on the project made journal entries on a wide range of classroom practices ranging from pedagogical practices to managerial aspects.

The following is one of the journal entries of Teacher 3:

Today, in the last hour, I took my first-year class. I held a discussion on the short story that I had asked my students to read. I was very enthusiastic to discuss the philosophical aspects that the story has. I have started the discussion by writing one of Coleridge's statements on the board. I tried to explain to my students the relevance of the statement to the text. Now and then, I sought for some responses from my students. But the responses were poor. I didn't know what to do, but continued my discussion. After a 35-minute lecture, I dismissed the class.

Afterthoughts:

1. *Management was the major problem in my class. I should have understood that students' moods will not be good in the last hour of the day.*

2. *I should not have planned for a philosophical discussion in the last hour, which turned out to be potentially boring.*

3. *Maybe, I should have conducted a more enjoyable activity to lift up the spirits of my students.*

Another journal entry of Teacher 6:

Today I have conducted a pyramid discussion. As I entered the class, I told my students that they were going to participate in a new kind of discussion. I explained to them the way a pyramid discussion should be carried on. Later, I gave them a topic for the discussion. I asked them to arrive at a checklist for effective telephone conversation. My students discussed individually, then in groups, and finally, I asked the representative of the group to read out the points discussed. As the points were read, I have written them on the board. All the repeated points were marked by a tick (✓) to denote the importance. Finally, after a long 40-minute discussion, we arrived at the five most important tips for effective telephone conversation.

Though the activity was successful, there were some pitfalls. Control over the students became slightly problematic.

Afterthoughts:

1. *The discussion was managed well; however, the classroom management would have been well taken care of.*

2. *Next time, I would conduct a pyramid discussion for a comparatively smaller classroom.*

In the two cases above, the journal entries reveal: first, how the teachers have reflected on their classroom management style; and second, how they have thought to manage it more effectively in the future. For both the teachers their journal entries, which were a result of reflection, serve an authentic mode of examination, which could not have been possible through other means.

A journal entry of Teacher 11, revealed a new dimension for a journal entry.

The entry goes this way:

I encountered a very interesting experience in my second-year class today. I conducted a very interesting activity called 'Hot seat' – a vocabulary activity. I explained the rules and divided the class into three large groups. I began the activity. Shortly, the activity picked up momentum. However, there was a student who has not been responding and has not been part of the activity. I pulled him out after sometime and asked him to respond to one of my questions. There was no response. I repeatedly asked him in vain. His behaviour got on my nerves, and I started flying off the handle. Everyone was so dumb-struck that the activity came to a halt and didn't resume later.

After the class was dismissed, I spoke to him. It is then I understood that he was passive in the class because of his personal problem. He even cried to me.

The teacher, when asked about the 'afterthoughts' of the entry, said (reformulated):

That experience taught me a very important lesson. I learnt to be sensitive towards students' behaviours. I wanted to learn to study them deeply. That was when I understood that being sensitive to students' behaviour is a very important aspect of classroom management.

The following were the responses (reformulated) by the set of teachers who opted to maintain a reflective journal. However, a few teachers shared concerns against maintaining a reflective journal. In fact, their criticism of keeping a reflective journal was constructive.

I couldn't agree more that maintaining a reflective journal surely helped me a great deal. A few important defects concerning my pedagogical style were revealed, which, otherwise, without my reflective entries, would have remained hidden. (Teacher 1)

Making entries did help me. But, I have to share some concerns that I encountered while trying to maintain a reflective journal. You know, I felt writing was a tedious job. Not every day, and not after every class, I could find time to sit down to put my reflections on paper. So, my writing was rather sporadic. I could only sit two or three times a week to record my reflections. (Teacher 10)

I felt the need for discussing entries of my journal with my peers. Well, this wasn't possible every time. So, I didn't really know if the perceptions I drew from my entries were actually helpful. Despite this I feel journal writing is an awesome way of reflecting. (Teacher 11)

3.2. Self-observation/self-monitoring

Self-monitoring or self-observation forms one of the important sources of data for reflection on one's own teaching practices. Self-observation is generally conducted through adopting various strategies such as audio- and video-recording of lessons, receiving lesson reports, and administering questionnaires and surveys.

The following is a vignette of how a teacher who is teaching in an engineering college overcame an irritating mannerism that he had often used in his speech. He has video recorded one of his seminar presentations to find out to what extent he has been using the word 'right' in his speech.

My friends and colleagues often told me that I had a mannerism of using the word 'right' almost in every sentence of my seminar presentations, classroom teaching, etc. Once I shared a session in a workshop with an ELT resource person. As the workshop was conducted in our college, I asked my technician to video shoot my presentation completely. He did that. The first thing that shocked me in the video was I was using the word very frequently, say, at least for once in every two sentences. It was so hurting. Though the content, accent, etc., in my presentation were good, this mannerism was standing out loud.

I identified the places where I was using the word 'right'. I found that the word was being used to state an emphasis. Now that my reflection revealed a potential area of correction, I searched for other words of emphasis and used them in the future presentations. Though initially, there wasn't a very smooth flow in my presentation, for I was overly conscious, however, through practice, I could see myself doing well at public speaking.

Besides video-recording, lesson reports were also collected to measure the success of the teaching practices. Here, I shall discuss my own instance:

Last semester, I dealt with a course called 'Essential Employability Skills'. As the course was newly designed, I had to use my material. In one of the classes, I decided to deal with one of the employability skills, problem-solving. I prepared three different handouts for my students. The first handout was an introductory one, while the rest of the two led them into independent tasks on problem-solving skill. After the class, I reflected on the success of the activity and the material used. I made a written narrative of the methodology I had adopted, the reasons for the success of the task, and about to what extent the lesson goals were realised. I was, happy as the task was successful. However, I felt to collect more reliable data on how students felt working on the task; hence, the next day I had an oral feedback session with them. During the session, I asked them a series of questions such as:

- *was the material relevant?*
- *how did you like the task?*
- *have the intended goal of learning about problem-solving skill been realised?*
- *was the time spent on introducing and leading into the task sufficient?*

Students' responses gave me more reliable data on the task I conducted.

Self-monitoring, as Pak (1985) felt, can be a very good start for a personal reflection of professional development. Besides seeking for help from trusted colleagues to help us in video- or audio-recording, and to collaborate with us in writing lesson reports, self-monitoring can also be done on a personal basis. It need not be shared. This aspect of self-monitoring was also used to find the efficacy of self-monitoring in developing professional development on the project. A few teachers individually collected feedback or written responses from their students.

On the written feedback session no specific questions were given. Students were given an opportunity to write about both the positives and negatives of teachers': (a) teaching style, (b) classroom management, (c) time management, and (d) relationship with students.

However, not all students' feedback is reliable as they tend to be very subjective. Nevertheless, the activity proved to be useful as it pointed out a few potential areas of improvement on the part of the teacher.

A student of first-year engineering wrote (reformulated):

Sir, you teach us in an interesting way. All of us like your way of teaching. The difference between your way of teaching from the other teachers is that you just don't teach us but motivate us to learn the language in an interesting way.

Another student wrote (reformulated):

Your teaching is very good. I always look forward to your classes. I like your impartial behaviour.

Another instance (reformulated):

Ma'am, we really like your smile a lot. It makes us feel warm and welcoming. You know, ma'am, I also share with my brother the anecdotes you share on life and career. Thank you very much.

When I went through the critical responses of students, it was surprising to know their outlook on their teachers.

For instance, a few students of an ESL teacher teaching in an engineering college in the Guntur District region of Andhra Pradesh wrote (reformulated):

There are as such no evident negatives about your teaching. But I feel you are short-tempered.

You teach us very well. But, at times, we are unable to cope with your accent. Please do consider this.

Sir, I feel sometimes, may be, due to lack of sufficient time, you skip discussing a few grammatical topics. We wish you dealt with them too.

These instances reveal that students are intelligent and aware of various issues that happen in a classroom ranging from teachers' personal strengths and weaknesses to syllabus completion.

Identifying student learning preferences can also be a viable way of channelling teachers' teaching strategies that best suit students' requirements. This demands a great deal of thinking and reflection on the teachers' part. A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered to first-year, second semester students. Having had a semester's learning, we felt that students would have identified their learning styles.

The questionnaire (an adaption of the version in Richard and Lockhart, 1995) elicited information about various aspects of students' learning preferences.

3.3. Peer observation

A teacher closely observing a lesson or part of a lesson or any other aspect of classroom management of another teacher basically forms an important part of peer observation. Not every teacher was willing to do peer observation. Initially, when asked if teachers helping on the project were willing to undertake peer observation, their response was not very positive.

One teacher said (reformulated):

Peer observation? It sounds rather intimidating. I feel nervous when some someone else sits in my class to observe what I do.

Yet another teacher shared (reformulated):

Some years ago, I asked one of my senior teacher-colleagues to sit in my class to observe how a speaking activity that I designed went on. After the class, we sat together to discuss the observations. I was expecting her to be evaluative and objective in her analysis, but she turned out to be highly preachy. I didn't like it. Though I didn't ask her to stop, I've never opted for any such observations later on.

Not all experiences could be so intimidating and frightening. Peer observation is not possible when there is no mutual respect and trust between the observer and the teacher. Personally, peer observation always yielded good results. I have a colleague/friend with whom I share a very close relationship. Both of us conducted peer observation in our classes, which gave us very genuine feedback about our teaching styles. Undaunted by the responses a few teachers gave about peer observation, a few others have adopted the strategy to know more about their classroom strategies. Though there are strategies such as written narratives, field notes, and checklists, to conduct peer observation, volunteering teachers have mostly used checklists.

Teachers 15 and 21 work for a college on the outskirts of Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh. They are close friends besides colleagues. When they decided to adopt peer observation, they were not sure what aspect of the classroom they should deal with. Finally, after preliminary discussions, T21 asked T15 to observe the aspect called 'classroom management'. She prepared a checklist (see Appendix 2) and invited T15 to her class.

The checklist solely concentrated on elements concerning classroom management.

In an interview held with both T21 and T15, they said:

It was a very enriching experience. In a discussion we had before the session, I told her to observe my classroom management. I gave her the checklist and also explained it to her. I was given genuine feedback about my eye contact, my gestures, voice audibility, and a few other important aspects of my classroom management. As we share a very close relationship, the whole process ran smoothly and comfortably. (Teacher 21)

I was pretty well aware of what should be observed, hence, didn't face any problem. We had pre-peer-observation discussion and also a post-peer-observation discussion. I was as objective as possible without room for any personal considerations. Moreover, the checklist had a range of responses, hence, it was easier for me to tick the most appropriate and suitable one. (Teacher 15)

In a discussion with T21 about what was revealed through the peer observation, she said:
This classroom observation was very productive. The purpose was two-folded: one, it demanded a great deal of responsibility and reflection on the observer as she had to critically examine the other teacher's class; and two, it left a good room for the teacher to understand the potential areas for self-development.

3.4. Critical incident analysis

It was some eight months ago that I encountered an interesting conversation with one of my first-year students. That was when my pronunciation

teaching was full of theoretical information about phonetics, vocal chords, etc. One day, a student walked up to me and said (reformulated):

Sir, why have you been giving us a lot of theoretical information about phonetics? It is really tedious. We feel more practical activities are necessary.

Though his observation was short, it was terse. As I critically analysed the incident, it gave me a world of information about my teaching style. I found the real purpose of teaching pronunciation to engineering students and prepared handouts accordingly. Such incidents, if analysed carefully, can reveal a lot about our teaching principles.

Analysing critical incidents has two stages, as proposed by Tripp (1993). They are: 'the first stage is to describe the incident; and the second stage is to explain its meaning (the 'what' and the 'why').' He further added: 'the incident becomes a critical incident when it is viewed on terms of something that has significance in a wider context.'

Moreover, the critical incident reports which are periodically prepared can be shared in collaboration with other teachers to receive more valid information. On the project, the teachers who shared some of the incidents with a few other teachers felt that the mutual sharing gave
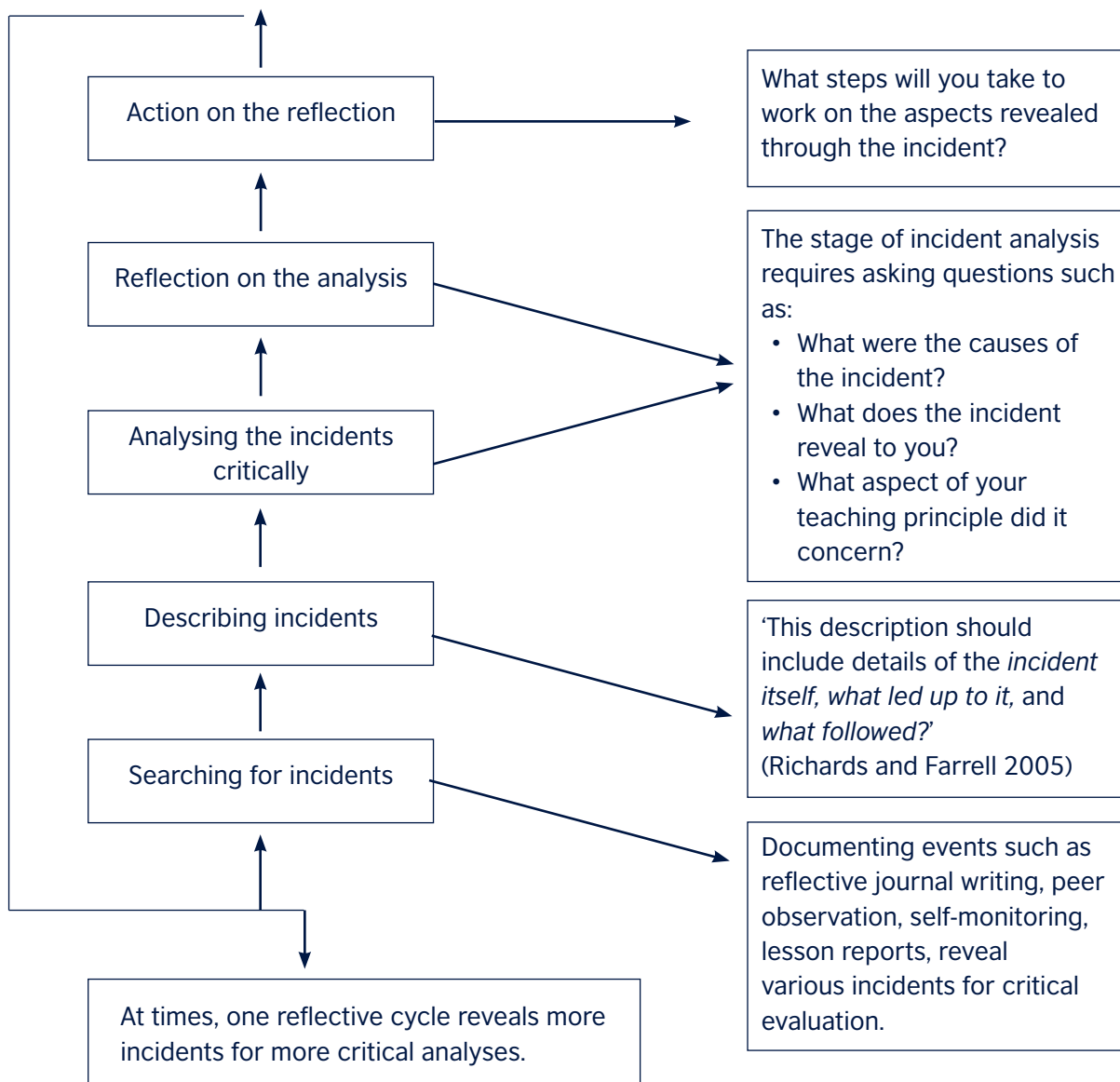
Figure 1: Steps involved in critically analysing an incident

them ample room for reflection. There are in fact many more steps involved in critically analysing an incident. The following chart can be used to describe the other important stages involved.

A critical incident need not necessarily happen in one's classroom. An incident or an inspiration in one's life can also act as an opportunity for professional development. In one of the mid-term discussions I had with the volunteering teachers on the project, a questionnaire was administered to understand how both in-class and personal incidents can turn out to be critical incidents see Appendix 3 for the questionnaire.

One of the teachers who was teaching in a school in the Gudlavalleru region of Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, responded to a question: 'Can you remember any incident that brought a flip-about in your teaching principles?':

I once read an article on the Internet. The article was about Robert K Merton's concept, 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. That article was truly an inspiring one. Till then, I was making fun of students' mistakes. I learnt from the article that constant humiliation and criticism can in fact slow down the process of development. The article brought a change in my behaviour. From then, I started encouraging my students without embarrassing or humiliating them. I feel so good about myself from then.

This instance depicts that a teacher's personal out-of-class incident has the potential for bringing about a change in her classroom behaviour.

One of my senior colleagues, who was also one of the volunteering teachers on the project, shared his experience with me regarding an incident he encountered in one of his first-year Mechanical Engineering class. He said (reformulated):

One of my students failed the Professional Communication paper. When I asked him for the reason, he said, 'I don't know how to speak in English. I can't read and write because I am from Telugu-medium background.' Then, I asked him if he read the question paper carefully before answering. To this, he said a blunt no. Then, I

reflected on the incident. The student never read the paper carefully with an intention that he wouldn't understand even if he reads. I reflected on the incident and wanted to work on developing ways to engage him by creating a learning environment. I could see many such students around. I also hope to read a lot of literature on how to deal with such incidents.

3.5. Collaborative action research

Initially, on the project, around 10 teams volunteered to carry out collaborative action research projects. However, owing to a few reasons which will be discussed later in the report, two teams from a school have merged and conducted an AR project entitled, 'Building confidence in speaking English in the students from rural areas of Grade 8'.

Given below is a brief report of the project from the principal researcher:

We have initially received a lot of guidance from a CPD expert. We could clearly identify a problem of great concern in our class. Later, we felt to confine the research to a few students of Grade 8. We found that a set of students in Grade 8 lack confidence in speaking English, which stood a huge block in their communication. Though it was difficult for us to manage time besides our regular teaching schedules, later, we could manage it. We brought about many engaging activities to the students. Our motto on the project was simple: we wanted every student on the AR project to taste success, as the English saying goes: 'Nothing can succeed like success.' Most of the engaging speaking activities such as 'pictionary', 'hot-seat', etc., motivated students and soon they shed their inhibitions. We could also see a ray of change in the way our students were responding. However, we don't wish to cease the project here; we want to still take it forward.

Throughout their research, the teachers told me that they have learnt a great deal about the teaching-learning process which made them better teachers.

4. Challenges and reflections

A teacher who was the part of the project, in the end, responded:

I am very happy for being a part of this project. I could see an enormous change in the way I perceived about myself. Self-reflection was very helpful. Now, I feel my professional development is in my hands and in my classrooms.

Precisely, this is what the project aimed to arrive at. One of the important research questions raised initially was 'What was the alternative model that could place the teacher at the centre of their professional development process?' As the project evolved progressively, I found that a Reflective Model could be a viable alternative. However, I have faced a few important challenges throughout. One of the important challenges was to retain the sense of ownership of the project. Initially, many teachers volunteered to be a part of the project. However, as days passed by, amidst exacting academic and personal chores, teachers could not find time to actively participate on the project; hence, I had to meet them regularly to motivate and engage them. The second important challenge was, as the research used a case-study approach, at times it became very difficult to collect data from the teachers. But, thanks to the presence of the Internet and technology, I was able to keep myself connected to the teachers on my project. The third and the last challenge I had to contend with was how to manage my academic and personal chores. As the teachers who worked on the projects were from various districts in Andhra Pradesh, I had to travel extensively to meet them. In spite of being technologically connected, the human presence was necessary as the teachers felt more confident and supportive when I met them in person.

Further, in addition to being the principal researcher, I was also one of the teachers who worked on the project. Through this CPD project, I was able to identify and reflect critically on my long-held teaching perceptions. Moreover, a great deal of knowledge-sharing took place during the period of the project as many teachers were involved. This resulted in making me a better teacher and a reflective practitioner.

5. Recommendations

The following would be some of the recommendations for teacher-educators and teachers who want to ensure experience of continuing professional development:

- teachers should be given enough awareness through workshops and hands-on sessions about RA practices in general and classroom-based research in particular

- though a complete institutionalisation of CPD is impossible, some kind of institutional mechanism in the form of establishing CPD centres at colleges and universities might bring a change in teachers' perceptions about professional development

- a mentoring system could also be developed in academic institutions where veteran teachers may encourage novice teachers to use RA practices.

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BRITISH COUNCIL

Appendix 1: Questionnaire to identify learning preferences

Tick (✓) your responses.

1.	In English class, I only speak in English.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
2.	I like the teacher to explain everything to us.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
3.	I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
4.	I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
5.	I like to study English all by myself.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
6.	I like to learn English by talking in pairs.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
7.	I like to learn English in a small group.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
8.	I like to learn English with the whole class.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
9.	I like to study grammar.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
10.	I like to learn many new words.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
11.	At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
12.	At home, I like to learn by watching English channels.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
13.	At home, I like to learn by studying English books.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
14.	When I don't understand something in English, I ask someone to explain it.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
15.	I watch people's faces and hands to help me understand what they say.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
16.	When I am reading – if I don't understand a word, I try to understand it by looking at the other words.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
17.	I find ways to use my English even outside the class.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
18.	I am happy to use English even if I make mistakes.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
19.	I think in my mother tongue before I speak out in English.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often
20.	When I speak in English, I am conscious about my pronunciation.	☐ No	☐ Sometimes	☐ Often

BRITISH COUNCIL

Appendix 2: Checklist for peer observation on classroom management

Tick (✓) the option that you feel best represents the teacher's classroom management.

1. The teacher's voice is clear and audible to the whole class. ☐ No ☐ A little ☐ Good ☐ Best

2. The way the teacher began the lesson was attention-seeking. ☐ No ☐ A little ☐ Good ☐ Best

3. The teacher mildly admonished the students who are continuously distracting the classroom. ☐ No ☐ A little ☐ Often

4. The teacher penalised the students who are continuously distracting the classroom. ☐ No ☐ A little ☐ Often

5. What was the teacher's approach towards: (a) the students with lower levels of attention and concentration; and (b) the students who are continuously distracting?

   a. He was dictatorial in his approach and immediately penalised the students.
   b. He was considerate in his approach and admonished the students gently.
   c. He was unmoved and never cared to bring order and continued with his teaching.

6. Throughout the session, the teacher has: (You may tick more than one response)

   d. excessively looked at only one student or one group of students ☐
   e. maintained a general eye contact ☐
   f. not been stationary in his posture and moved around ☐
   g. used his body language effectively ☐
   h. used pauses at strategic points in his speech ☐
   i. had a good control over the class ☐

7. The teacher has: (You may tick more than one response)

   j. occasionally posed questions to the class ☐
   k. specifically pointed out a student or two to answer ☐
   l. never posed any question and continued with his teaching ☐
   m. never bothered if none answered any question and moved on ☐
   n. assisted the student in answering the question ☐

Appendix 3: Questionnaire on the importance of both in-class and personal incidents in professional development

Write your responses to the questions.

1. Do you think experiences form an important
   part of learning in one's life?   ☐ No   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Often

2. Can you recall a few important experiences that were helpful in taking an important decision in your life? (Try to talk at least about two)

3. Can you reflect on any specific experiences or incidents that formed an important part of your learning the language? You need not necessarily talk about learning the English language.

4. How did you reflect on such incidents?

5. How were such incidents contributive to your learning?

6. Has any incident or experience inspired you to become a teacher?

7. Can you remember any incident that brought a flip-about in your teaching principles?

3

Developing new schools in Assam

Krishna Dutta Deka

1. Background

I have been actively associated with schools with disadvantaged students in one of the Blocks in Jorhat District for the last five years and have faced the current challenges of ensuring democratic practices in the classroom to improve the learning environment. This study exercise is related to how an adopted school has contributed to reshaping many other schools in a phased manner. Some of these adopted schools where teachers received training by the British Council and other organisations such as Sarba Siksha Abhiya (SSA) and the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Assam had the opportunity to initiate new practices of teaching English. This helped to examine the efficacy of the broad strategies underscored in the training courses developed by the British Council. The challenge before me was to link small successes already achieved and the fresh inputs currently introduced. This building on success acts as a catalyst to the process of teacher preparation in those schools. As I get involved in school based support mechanisms, I find that sustaining good practices promoted by the Aim Higher in Assam (AHA) Project is an especially difficult task as the traditional practices dominant use of a single textbook, fixed timetable, fixed seating arrangement, a memory based evaluation system – are still an integral part of the school culture

and despite the clear direction laid down in the National Curriculum Framework 2005 to modify these practices, very little is done at the policy level. Thus the research questions initially raised at the time of starting this study were modified in the middle of the action plan due to a shift in focus. Initially it was assumed that an in-depth study of the evaluation mechanism for recording the trend of performance in Language 2 (English) learning would provide me a clear picture about the professional success of the training package. However, as I started to observe the impact of traditional practices more closely, I had to revisit the core training strategies incorporated in the British Council package and to reflect on the hidden obstacles.

The country is now ready for the transformation of age-old traditional practices and norms associated with education and training. During the British era, learning was a mechanical exercise and education was not designed to develop human resources to adequately face the challenges of new centuries. Even after Indian Independence, the culture of dependency still prevails in most of the schools. The classrooms are not shaping the future of this country as expected by the reformers. At this moment, we all are eager to change the classroom environment. However, this is a complex task and needs effective implementation plans.

At ground level, the teachers have to meet the demands and expectations of the authorities without being able to understand the rationale and intent of what they are doing. This is one area that needs close reflection and intervention. Another area that may contribute to teacher frustration is the inclination to import pedagogical practices without revising them for the local context.

The training programmes launched by government agencies are designed without adequate preparation and without taking into account the need to follow up with a long term implementation plan. The short-term cascade in-service teacher training programmes which depend on layers of trainers oriented at state and district levels and where transmission loss in each layer is evident are not popular among the teachers. This is evident in our discussion with the Masters Trainers who received training at the state level and imparted training to teachers at the district level. In fact the teacher preparation exercise is not anchored to research backup and the link between training inputs and the improvement of the learning process is ignored. In such a situation, the training serves a limited goal of providing some fresh ideas to the teachers. The present status of developing English language proficiency in schools is far from satisfactory. The success or failure of language proficiency in English cannot be an isolated event. If the language environment for teaching the first language is conducive in a school; the same environment can easily be used to facilitate a second language.

The teaching of English in our schools with all these hurdles is quite challenging and important. A comprehensive understanding of the present nature of teaching English in the schools and also the in-service training conducted by the Teacher Training Institutes for practising teachers may help by adopting selected schools where new practices are monitored adequately. This study intends to make an in-depth analysis of the nature of short-term in-service English training in the last three years in Assam and also to analyse the training materials, time schedule, duration etc. as a part of a process analysis. In addition it aims to discover to what extent the training inputs are used in practice. It will further study the nature of strategies employed to administer formative evaluation as a tool to augment learning.

2. Statement of topic

An exploratory study to understand the nature of the training package developed by the British Council and to assess its impact on improving the classroom environment for teaching a second language in elementary schools with special reference to Sibsagar and Golaghat districts of Assam.

Objectives

The study proposes to understand the nature of the present in-service teacher training format designed in the training package developed by the British Council for improving teachers' abilities to ensure a better language learning environment through a formative assessment mechanism.

Specific objectives

The study intends:
- to understand the efficacy of formative evaluation measures used in schools as guided in the training package

- to assess the extent of the shift from the present procedure of assessment of information and concepts only to assessment for skills

- to explore the language teaching abilities identified in the training package for the development of professional teachers.

This study will also help the District Institute of Education and Training, Jorhat to strengthen/ design new in-service teacher training programmes as well as to recommend changes in the teaching-learning processes followed in schools.

Initial research questions

- What are the basic differences between the British Council module and other modules developed by SSA-SCERT Assam?

- What is the current nature of formative evaluation in schools?

- What language teaching abilities are being identified for making a teacher professional?

- What are the opportunities available in the schools for the kind of learning environment projected by the training package?

- What strategies are incorporated in the training package for classroom research by teachers?

Emerging research questions in the process

Research question 1: How has formative evaluation been dealt with in the training programmes to help the teachers?
The issue of formative evaluation in the school system is very confusing as both teachers and parents expressed their concern about the two different systems in place related to evaluation as a whole. In private schools, the students may be retained if the school standard is not reached. In government schools, retention is not allowed. There is no accepted broad policy. However, if sufficient measures are taken to use formative evaluation as a tool to identify learning gaps and to support children by providing feedback, this pass-fail situation will not arise. Now we want to review and assess the measures adopted in the training package by the British Council.

Research question 2: How far are the teachers able to relate concepts to the new practices?
While looking into the teachers' ability it was found that the teachers carry out most of the activities mechanically without knowing the logic or rationale behind them.This was found while we observed the classroom transaction. The teachers could not relate an activity to the objectives.

Research question 3: To what extent can the permanent resource institutions under government control help the system to sustain good practices?
We observed that the teachers are isolated and dejected as they are accountable for the success of the new practices. The interview with the teachers is a real eye opener as we observed that each monitoring officer used the word 'you' and not 'we' when assessing the impact of a good practice in the school. There are different types of Inspecting Officers in the system, each one advocating fresh ideas. The Inspection book kept in the schools amply explains this situation. So we decided to see to what extent the other stakeholders are accountable and what strategies may be adopted to develop common understanding of core objectives of a programme among Inspecting Officers. This has forced us to redesign our research questions putting more emphasis on the support system. We have observed that there are many institutions such as teacher training institutes, higher education institutions, colleges, which could decidedly help the primary schools.

3. Research methods

Methodology: In order to explore the efficacy of recently introduced teaching practices in the schools of Assam by the British Council, we initially intended to collect data from four districts. However, when we decided to use both qualitative and quantitative methods for this study and therefore to explore the situation from all possible sources, we saved time without prejudicing the quality of our research by restricting ourselves to two districts. However, these two districts represent all the aspects we want to research. As the study was more qualitative in nature, the data did not allow us to go for extensive parametric analysis. The qualitative data yielded by this study was subjected to clustering and coding of data in specific domains that emerged from the data and that represented more or less the range of responses elicited. The study adopts a triangulated approach. This included:

1. Desk analysis of the training modules developed under the British Council and the modules developed by SCERT, Assam.

1a Activity assessment of the training modules.
The analysis involved:

(i) the nature of activities that links content with pedagogy

(ii) the nature of activities that help in formative assessment.

1b Content analysis of the training materials with regards to theoretical principles.
The research facilitators who conducted this analysis were selected from those Master Trainers who participated in the actual training programme.

2. Field study

The field study included:

2a Classroom observation: this was conducted in all the sample schools to observe the use of the training module by teachers and children and to assess if the teachers have worked in the classroom as intended. This exercise was directed towards understanding the change in the children's learning processes. The sample for the field study covered 20 schools. Each school was visited for two days. The field study was expected to verify the observations made by the desk analysis. The study also judged the nature of the present formative assessment in the sample schools.

2b Focus group discussion: These were carried out with Master Trainers, coordinators, teachers and parents to understand their perceptions, concerns and attitudes to the new training strategies. A cluster level teacher meeting was also attended as this gave us more scope to discuss with a large group of actual practitioners about their experience with the training.

Sampling scheme for field study: Sample size 20 state government schools,10 schools each in one district.

Criteria for sampling: teacher pupil ratio is within 1: 30.

In India, we still have a large proportion of the population that require support in different aspects, including health, education and livelihood. It is expected that gradually these people will develop economically and join the mainstream. They are categorised as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Tea Garden community who are wage earners in thousands of tea gardens in the state are claiming recognition as a Scheduled Tribe. The Tea Garden community

form a major part of the student population in these schools. The members of these communities mostly remain under the poverty line. We included some schools which represented these communities.

Sampling process:
- As each district is divided into several educational Blocks and each Block is in control of lower primary schools within their jurisdiction, it was always easy to identify the names of schools that received training
- Two lists containing names of teachers who received training were prepared for two districts
- From the above two lists the schools where the pupil teacher ratio is less than 1:30 were identified
- Selection of 20 schools on a random basis
- 10 extra schools for attrition.
- Analysis of the training modules developed under the British Council and the modules developed by SCERT Assam:

a) Desk analysis focused on how far measures are taken to link the contents of a module and its implied pedagogy. Content analysis of the modules focused on the coverage of objectives, their sequencing and the extent to which the activities included in the modules allowed for adequate practice and collaborative learning. It was also observed how all these are linked to the assessment for learning.

Analysis of in-service teacher training modules designed in the last five years with special reference to formative evaluation was conducted. The English textbooks developed in the last five years were also brought to desk analysis to ascertain the shift from a linear listening, speaking, reading and writing approach to a natural integrated holistic approach.

b) Content analysis of the training material developed by the British Council with regards to theoretical principles, learners' scope to identify competencies of their own, comprehension of concepts and opportunity for children to extend / apply new learning.

2. Field study

School observation included:

a) Classroom observations

b) Focus group discussion: These were undertaken with Master Trainers, coordinators, teachers and parents to understand their perceptions, concerns and attitudes to the new training strategies. We attended a teacher meeting as this gave us more scope to discuss with a large group of actual practitioners.

4. Findings

The findings are related to two broad areas:
- comparison between training materials developed by the British Council and others
- effectiveness of the training modules developed by the British Council in transforming age old practices.

In what way is the SCERT module different from the package introduced by the British Council?
- The British Council presented a comprehensive package covering basic knowledge and skills. The 18 day package covers all required strategies for classroom teaching which a teacher needs to adapt to suit their learners and situation where they work.
- On the other hand, the training design of SCERT/SSA only lasts three to five days and basically focuses on the use of textbooks. The short time frame and one time training does not provide adequate input to teachers. The training design is not need based. Training is organised whenever a new textbook is introduced in the state. Training modules are developed with a fair knowledge of the target group but trialling was not a part of the exercise.
- Field trialling of the British Council training package was carried out but the teachers who attended the trial training had little experience of teaching in the targeted schools. It was also observed that the Karnataka model and Assam model had structural similarity. It was also not clear

whether the target population for whom the training was intended was looked into.
- It seems the training design is not based on the actual classroom situation. This is evident from the desk analysis that one single all-purpose package/module is developed with the assumption that a good trainer can use it equally well in all situations. This is also true for the SCERT Assam and the British Council packages to a greater or lesser extent.
- A trained teacher understands the concepts well but often fails to impart new practices within the limited opportunity that the school offers. The common barriers lie in the teacher appointment system, engagement of teachers as per PTR, teacher assessment mechanism, infra structure support etc.
- It is worthwhile noting why the teachers are not able to use the training inputs in the actual classroom situation. They can perform well in the training venue but once they enter the classroom, the old format of classroom transaction becomes dominant. We have seen that the classroom setting with the traditional seating pattern, size of the classroom, one teacher teaching many subjects, official pressure, etc. deters a promising teacher from taking bold steps.
- The cascade mode of transmission of skills/ knowledge such as SCERT, SSA and the British Council follow the same delivery mode and share equally the strengths and weaknesses of the cascade approach. SSA and SCERT followed a module based intervention and the British Council focused on a comprehensive package.

Selection criteria of Master Trainers: The British Council selected a mixed group with an emphasis on English speaking ability. The Master Trainers were expected to use interactive teaching methodology by the end of the project. SSA and SCERT do not specify clearly the trainers' skills. In all the cases, it is observed that a clear strategy is not pursued to help the trainers assess their improvement over a set of Master Trainer Standards.

Training a teacher is dependent on human relationships. However most of the Master Trainers failed to do justice to this area as the modules are silent about it. In all cases, the trainers and the teachers stand for two distinctly different entities. The trainers are responsible for imparting training only and teachers are responsible for implementing the training inputs almost alone. The trainers are not associated with ultimate transformation in schools. They are not accountable and in many cases they do not grasp the actual classroom situation.

A rich variety of activities is seen in all the modules. However, developing and using an activity in a new situation requires lots of practice. The use of an activity in the classroom depends on many factors and the teachers like to perform those activities that require less time and material. Classification of activities according to the specific demands of the field situation is not done adequately.

Formative assessment: teachers are required to work with some loosely framed indicators to assess their development as a trainer or a performing teacher. The moment a teacher is more involved in assessing the abilities of a student, she is required to harness some special abilities to perform this task. Abilities include creating a meaningful learning environment, managing different school environments, identifying, using and modifying different pedagogical tools, and observing, documenting and providing feedback to learners, which demand a continuous and involved participation in the teaching process. Ability to assess their own performance in conducting formative assessment plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher abilities as a whole. This area is handled by the British Council but needs more attention.

Our field study reveals that:
- the teachers are not clear about the purpose of learning tasks introduced in the classroom
- teachers are not able to redesign/customise a learning activity according to the level of their learners

- teachers are not aware of the stages of learning involved to explain the impact of new inputs
- teachers have not understood the mechanism of recording a child's performance which was introduced in the British Council training.
- absence of teachers' reflective journal. The British Council training has dealt with the use of reflective journals, but journals were not kept by teachers in the schools we researched. The teachers appreciate the need for teacher journals but are not clear about the objectives
- the teachers religiously stick to the four summative evaluations in a year held after every three months. These are mostly pen and paper tests and record the performance of a child in the knowledge area and maintain a report to be submitted to parents and authority. Teachers do not have personal recordings of learners' behaviour
- teachers' realisation that reflection on their own teaching and evaluation of their children contributes to professional development is missing.

School observation: those Master Trainers drawn from the schools and who had the opportunity to work in their own schools are able to bring about some changes in the classrooms. The intervention initiated by the British Council to improve the present training modalities was an eye opener in several ways. It was an attempt to break the impasse and transform a culture that is resistant to change.

As the study reveals, continuation of inputs for a considerable period of time can only lead to a perceptible change in the quality of education in the field. The schools still carry with them a strong bond with the age old traditional beliefs, attitudes and convictions which do not suit the present switch over to democracy as a way of life.

A print-rich environment is missing in most of the classrooms. The blackboard is used extensively. Using the classroom as a resource and use of

learning materials which have been dealt with in training is not seen in actual classroom teaching.

Follow up transactional plan: the British Council provided all the necessary techniques for improving language skills but back home the trainers were compelled to stick to textbooks only. The old practice of course completion continues. The teachers are aware of the mechanism that certifies the completion of a course. The present nature of assessment with four summative assessment(s) in a year is self-defeating in the sense that course completion means how many lessons are covered by the teacher and not what children have learnt over four months.

Classroom observation

- Understanding the changes required for modification of the classroom: teachers need to develop a print-rich environment in the classroom. If there are adequate classrooms, one room can specially be spared for a language resource room.

- Use of the training modules in classes by teachers and children: adaptation according to need is rarely seen. This gap is still there in most of the schools. The teachers use activities mechanically and without a vision.

- Matching of actual textbook use and techniques learnt in the training: surprisingly this is not seen except in a few schools.

- Innovation in the design of activities: none was observed.

- Sustainability of good practices triggered by the strategies employed by the British Council: in some schools where the Master Trainer acts as the principal or the class teacher, serious effort to sustain good practices is observed.

A headmaster's voice:
Brojen Borah Headmaster Lakhiminagar, Middle English School, Sibsagar.
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Aim higher in Assam (AHA) is the main motto of British Council India who trained almost 500 Master Trainers with active support from Sarba

Siksha Abhijan Project. This training showed different techniques of teaching English to the teachers. I tried my best to implement what I learnt from the Training–Principles of teaching English to young learners, learner centred teaching, giving clear instruction, asking questions, eliciting, developing confidence, general classroom management, exploring text for speaking activities, presenting new vocabularies, action planning, monitoring live listening, storytelling, dealing with pronunciation, teaching rhymes, poems and chants, etc.

My goal was to provide pupils opportunity to do and think. Though I belong to an upper primary school, I attempted to apply the methods, approaches and techniques taught in the training programme with the help of my English co-teachers in the classrooms. I have provided Greenboards, set up a child friendly sitting arrangement and introduced learning through activities. My co-teachers find very good results using 'Honeycomb', 'Honeysuckle', 'Honeydew' as the textbook in different classes. Kinaesthetic short and sweet activities are introduced.
Both the facilitators and the learners talk only in English while they are in English classes. Learners can now write English letters, frame stories, tell stories, communicate perfectly with classmates and community. Even they can prepare models and posters in English.

Teacher questionnaire

Analysis of the questionnaires helps us to understand the present functioning of the assessment mechanism. Entire assessment strategies now require a more practical and doable structure that can help both the Master Trainers and the teachers acquire the required standards.

The questionnaire further reveals the teachers' understanding of the various techniques initiated in the training programme such as use of mind mapping, concept checking questions, analysing instructional processes, adopting strategies for conducting various activities, etc, but the application of these in the actual learning process is absent.

The following broad outcomes envisaged by the British Council at the time of launching the Aim Higher in Assam Project were not satisfactorily evident during our visit to schools:

- to be able to use their skills and knowledge to use appropriate interactive teaching methodology to teach English

- to be more confident in using English in the training room and in the English classroom

- to be more confident in helping the students acquire the four skills.

5. Discussion and final reflections

The following two challenges emerged from the study in the field with regards to school based support:

- identification of training needs in view of the complex and diverse learning environment in schools

- how does a child acquire a language in a multi-lingual set up?

So far as the first challenge is concerned, my understanding is that a practitioner can easily identify training needs related to the fresh inputs introduced. But if she happens to realise that she alone is responsible for the success of the exercise, and there is no positive interdependence whatsoever, when the experts only provide suggestions after a long interval, the practising teacher starts losing interest in the task. If a training institute is made accountable along with the school where new inputs are introduced, the practising teacher can act as a team member in an atmosphere of collaboration and success.

The second challenge calls for close inspection of the multilingual situations so widely prevalent in the state of Assam. The teacher training institutes should work from the pre-primary stage to take positive advantage of this situation.

6. My own learning as a researcher

When I go through each training material developed by different organisations, I perceive the amount of effort and money put in the process of developing it. When I observe little change or no change occurs after the training is completed, I feel it is the proper time to revisit the strategies on which the package or the module was designed. My understanding is that in government run institutions, the end result is not always important. In fact, the training materials once found to be inactive have been again used for training purposes. Thus training impact stops at the teachers' level and never reaches the learners. The pathetic learning condition of those schools where we see overcrowded classrooms with poor infrastructure and inadequate facilities, where the parents completely depend on teachers for quality learning, have remained unchanged for years.

If actual classroom teaching was a strategic part of a teacher training package where the experts personally take the challenge to deliver training inputs to learners keeping in mind the diverse school situations, the picture would be different. The teachers need motivation in their own teaching situation. Thus, so long as teacher training selects a cascade model where one party is relieved of the responsibility of bringing about change in the teaching learning process, the teachers also ultimately play the same role exhibited by experts.

Now the challenge is to ensure continuous support to a practising institution for a long time, say four to five years and to develop a professional learning community in a teacher training institute so that it can develop practical strategies to support school teachers.

The absence of a good monitoring system delays the process of registering results. Unless we tie our practising schools with the TTIs/NGOs with participatory accountability and treat the intervention as a developmental programme instead of a training programme, the teachers will remain less proactive. We cannot and should not allow our teachers to shoulder the entire challenge. The present situation permits only the teachers to prove the efficiency of a training programme – the resource persons adhere to all other roles except this. The school is important

and each one in the institute must be aware of their role in augmenting the process of change. That way change is more vital and rewarding in the long run. If the head of the institution does not share her feelings of pride over each small success gradually achieved, the teacher might become demotivated.

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