Unit 10: Understanding my school context
The TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support in India) project is working alongside the Indian Government to help India reach its target of free, compulsory and quality education for all children by 2017.

The project is funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development. TESS-India is creating a network of freely available, high quality, distance learning teacher education resources in India, co-written by UK and Indian academic experts.

These materials will be available in multiple formats, used in primary and secondary schools across the country, rolled out in partnership with Indian States and the TESS-India partner education institutions.

These materials are draft and only for the purpose of developmental testing, not for copying or distribution. Final materials will be OER (Open Educational Resources) and as such will be available to all.

If you have any comments or would like to know more please reach out through the following routes:

Email: TESS-India@open.ac.uk
Website: http://bit.ly/12mlTgk
Twitter: @TESS-India

Photography:
CC BY www.flickr.com/photos/gpforeducation • CC BY NC ND www.flickr.com/photos/ulfers
CC BY NC www.flickr.com/photos/anuradhac
## Contents

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>The social context of education in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>The school as a learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Using students’ information to plan school-based activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>Representing and sharing school information with the school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Related units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

The diversity of our country is immense. It is revealed through race, colour, gender, language, religion, caste, creed, community, social group, economic status, literacy level, ability levels, levels of health, professions and geographical terrain, climate and political preference. Traditionally, diversity has been seen as difference and perceived as a ‘problem’: a nuisance rather than a resource. Recognising this, the writers of the constitution and its amendments mandated that ethnic and linguistic ‘minority’ schools was one of the ways of coping with this diversity.

It is only recently, with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and the RTE, that plurality has been explicitly embraced. Teachers, headteachers and principals are expected to ensure diversity within their staff and students as a learning resource for the school and within each classroom. Further, they are expected to gather detailed information on their students and parents, as an essential first step for the development of social capital, infrastructure, curricular inputs and facilities.

In this LDU you will explore the local social context of your school and use it in your work. As a leader, it is your mandate to ensure that you, your teachers, parents, students and staff are equipped to meet the requirement of equity in high quality learning outcomes for all students.
2 Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

• create, along with other stakeholders, a representation of your school’s context
• communicate your knowledge and understanding of the influence of your school’s context and social dynamics on the learning outcomes of your students
• infuse this understanding in teaching and learning, and building a school culture that enables equity of learning outcomes for all students.

During your work on this unit you will be asked to make notes in your Learning Diary. If you have not already started one, this is a book or folder where you collect together your thoughts and plans in one place.

You may be working through this unit alone but you will learn much more if you are able to discuss your learning with another school leader. This could be a colleague with whom you already collaborate or a new relationship; it could be through an organised activity or on a more informal basis. Notes you make in your Learning Diary will be useful for this, as well as mapping your longer term learning and development.
3 The social context of education in India

Schools and education systems have a huge role to play in society as we strive to achieve a very inclusive country. The school should not be seen as a separate entity but rather an integral part of the society and the country as a whole. As a school leader you should be aware of issues of caste, economic status, gender, language and cultural diversity, and how these factors influence your school.

Successive governments, regardless of political persuasion, have recognised the central role of education in creating an inclusive society that celebrates diversity. Let us first explore the scope of this diversity and its influence on the participation in learning as well as in the learning outcomes of our students.

Activity 1: Diversity in my school

Watch this video and check if your definition of diversity is as broad as the one in the film. Make notes in your Learning Diary about any similarities and differences that your school shares with the educational contexts in the video. What particular new idea(s) has struck you and is worth investigating?

Video: Diversity in Indian schools

A series of film clips in the classroom and school setting to demonstrate various ways diversity is manifested in the classroom and welcomed as a resource (for example: religion, caste, economic background, talent, intelligence, social class, language, gender, food, ability, first- or second-generation school-goers). The clips will also include indicators of culture in display, seating arrangements, language, type of activity, learner interaction and use of resources.

Discussion

What images stayed in your mind when watching this clip? You would have instinctively identified some of the diversity in the video that is reflected in your school. You may have been aware of the entire gamut of diversity and the video would have helped you bring all its issues to the foreground.
The video clip was a good introduction to some of the issues we will look at throughout this unit. Recognising the diversity of the school population helps you understand the school more fully and, as a leader, helps your thinking about appropriate interventions that will ensure you serve everyone equally. Now read the text in the box below, taken from the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) to illustrate a rationale for the necessity of inclusion and its link with equity:

The education system does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of caste, economic status and gender relations, cultural diversity as well as the uneven economic development that characterise Indian society also deeply influence access to education and participation of children in school. This is reflected in the sharp disparities between different social and economic groups, which are seen in school enrolment and completion rates. Thus, girls belonging to SC and ST communities among the rural and urban poor and the disadvantaged sections of religious and other ethnic minorities are educationally most vulnerable. In urban locations and many villages, the school system itself is stratified and provides children with strikingly different educational experiences. Unequal gender relations not only perpetuate domination but also create anxieties and stunt the freedom of both boys and girls to develop their human capacities to their fullest. It is in the interest of all to liberate human beings from the existing inequalities of gender.

Source: NCF, 2005, p. 9

The video and the text will have spelt out to you the scope of our current challenge as educators.
Activity 2

Think about how you see the diversity of your students’ social context influencing the enrolment and completion rates of your school. What sort of trends and patterns have you been noticing? Note down your answers to the following questions in your learning diary.

• Do most of your students opt for higher education? How many go to a college of their choice?
• Do many go into the world of work directly from school? How well do they do in their work?
• How many girls, if any in your school, think of a career or profession?
• What aspirations do the students from economically backward sections allow themselves?

Discussion

Thinking of the answers to these questions helps you assess the level of confidence that you feel students have got from the school, for themselves and in their abilities as learners.

Activity 3

Now estimate your own level of confidence in your school. How confident are you that your school meets the challenge of developing the capacities of every boy and girl in your school to the fullest? Write a number between 1 and 10 that represents your current level of confidence that your school is able to meet the learning needs of all the students as expected of you by the NCF and Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE), with 1 representing a complete lack of confidence and a 10 representing absolute confidence. This number represents your current level of confidence in your school’s performance, and is based on what you know your school is doing well to meet the learning needs of each of the students.
Reflect on how keen you are that your school should develop the capacities of every boy and girl in your school to the fullest. In your leadership log, write a number between 1 and 10 that represents your current level of ambition that your school must meet the challenge in all the classrooms for all the students, with 1 representing a complete lack of ambition in this regard and a 10 representing absolute certainty that it must. Remember while doing this activity to keep interfering thoughts away – this number has no relation with your worry about whether or not this is possible. Just focus on your aspiration: the number you have just written represents your ambition or aspiration for your school.

Look at both numbers you have written – the first representing your school’s current level of achievement and the second representing your level of ambition/aspiration. Is there a relationship between the two numbers? Is your school’s current level of achievement linked with your level of ambition/aspiration?

• If both your numbers are closer to 10, chances are that your school takes every child’s achievement into consideration and your ambition is to run a school that aims for high achievement for every single child.

• If the numbers are centered around the middle, chances are that some children do well and you are not convinced that your school can enable high achievement for every child.

• If they are both low, you may feel inadequately prepared to run a school that can enable achievement of students.

• If the number for current achievement is significantly lower than the number for your ambition, you are likely to be looking for ways to improve your students’ achievement.

• If the number for your ambition is significantly lower than the school’s performance, it is possible that the school’s performance will begin to dip over time. As a leader, you are the most significant influence on student achievement in your school.

What will you need to find out and what actions will you have to take as a leader for both numbers to move up by one digit towards 10? In your leadership log, list the actions you will need to take, the information you must collect and the skills and knowledge you will need to have in order to move both the numbers to the next digit up. Since you have thought carefully of what your school is doing to take different students into account, think of how that can be leveraged by you, and intensified, to reach more students.
Discussion

Congratulations! You are now ready to learn how to take on the challenge of diversity. You have begun to understand the issue, estimated your school’s current response and estimated what knowledge and actions you need to meet your aspiration for your school. One of the things on your ‘need to find out’ list should have been ‘gathering data about the diversity of my school’. This is an obvious first step before any action and we will address this now. At the end of the unit you will be able to assess if all the knowledge you just listed as your requirement has been addressed. If there is something left out, remember to look at the other Leadership Development Units in order to complete your requirements.

Activity 4: Mapping diversity within the school

Now that you have a better appreciation of the scope of diversity and its ability to influence students’ learning outcomes, the actual diversity within your school needs to be mapped. To begin, use the template below. On the left-hand column, you will find a list of factors that influence the participation of your students in their learning. Think about how well you know each of these factors for your school and fill in the columns for students, teachers, support staff and others. Do look at the information easily available to you on your bulletin board, but don’t call for it from your office register!

Write down in your Learning Diary what data in this table surprised you, what worried you and the questions that arose in your mind.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Mapping diversity within the school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors supporting/hindering participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male/female ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/middle/high income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages spoken at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number for whom the medium of instruction is a first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum distance travelled to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents', professions, spouse's/children's professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who meet health norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to markets and other public spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource institutions near the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

• **Male/female ratio:** An even ratio supports student learning, while an uneven ratio may lead to one set of students in the class feeling inadequate – often reducing their chances of getting into a social group and can result in the students losing interest in studying. Some research has suggested that single-sex classrooms are better than those with uneven ratios of males and females.

• **Socio-economic group:** The idea of a ‘uniformity’ has developed from the aspiration that socio-economic factors should get obliterated as far as learning outcomes go. However, it is clear that unless the school has a policy on socio-economic sensitivity, either end of the spectrum could feel diminished and disregarded due to their textbooks and what they contain, or by the attitude of the teachers as well as the parents.

• **Language spoken at home and the dominant linguistic group in school:** Children are often included by homogeneous linguistic groups. Those who remain excluded and on the fringes could have a very different school experience.

• **Language spoken at home and the school’s medium of instruction:** There are chances of these being different, which needs different responses by the school inside and outside the classroom, and in parent communication.

• **Distance travelled to school:** Students that go to schools in their neighbourhood do not have the same difficulties as those travelling a long distance.

• **Parents’ professions, spouse’s/children’s professions:** Can become an immense resource for children to begin dreaming their own future.

• **Religious affiliation:** Can have a definite impact if there are majority and minority groups in the same school, as well as due to associated lifestyles, food habits and cultural norms.

• **Health data and numbers meeting health norms:** Can have a positive effect on the ability of children to concentrate on their studying.

• **Political parties and their influence:** The manner in which children grow into an understanding and appreciation of different political ideologies depends on the number and variety of political parties and their activities in and around the block, district and State.
• **Proximity to markets**: Markets, including weekly bazaars, become learning spaces for students and can be included in projects as well as in utilising their waste for display purposes.

• **Resource institutions near the school (libraries, science centres, farms, heritage monuments, exhibition grounds, theatres, etc.):** Schools that have such institutions at close proximity are able to take advantage of them for field visits, as well as inviting their staff to converse with students and as resource persons for concepts to be taught.

• **Learning environment**: To ensure a good learning environment, the RTE specifies the number of rooms, availability of teaching learning materials, library, toilets, safe drinking water, playground, kitchen for midday meals, pupil/teacher ratio, subject teachers in Classes VI to VIII, part-time art, work and physical instructors and so on without discrimination, to all its pupils. The prescribed norms are minimum, and schools with higher norms are encouraged.

**Discussion**

This activity should have raised your awareness of how aware you are of the context of your school and, we hope, would have made you curious to find out the rest. You may feel a little apprehensive about what you perceive as a big challenge. This is natural, especially if you are finding all this very new and are worried about your ability to use the information. As you go along you will find your confidence rising. Keep your focus on your intention: to make a difference to the life chances of every one of your students.
Every headteacher and/or principal plays a very important role in the community by ensuring that the provision of education for children is fit for purpose and meet the needs of the community. The NCF and RTE require headteachers and principals to have a good knowledge and understanding of the social context of the school. The NCF and the RTE describe the school as a learning community. The relationships between teachers, students, headteacher or principal, non-teaching staff, parents, visitors, and officials also becomes a ‘lesson’ for the student.

As a school leader, you serve a societal and national need for children and adolescents to learn about the culture described by the constitution. The school’s cultural practices may mirror the culture in which the student is living or differ from it in pursuance of the aims of the RTE; see the three illustrative examples below.

Example 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family culture</th>
<th>School culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The families of the students may discourage children’s questioning of adults</td>
<td><strong>Option A:</strong> The school may do the same and discourage student questioning in the classroom <strong>Option B:</strong> The school would consciously decide to encourage and support children’s questioning of adults (teachers) in the classroom as a strategy that enables students’ active learning, a requirement of the NCF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family culture</th>
<th>School culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ families may not consider girls education to be of much importance, or even see it as a drain on family resources</td>
<td><strong>Option A:</strong> This attitude may be mirrored in the classrooms in which boys are encouraged to learn while girls are ignored <strong>Option B:</strong> Conscious of what girl students face at home, the teachers may collectively double their efforts to ensure that girls get equal importance in class activities and their learning is both encouraged and celebrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family culture</th>
<th>School culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The neighbourhood around the school may be segregated into ‘areas’ that are caste or class dominated</td>
<td><strong>Option A:</strong> The school teachers may unconsciously pay better attention to children from higher caste and/or better resourced families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Option B:</strong> The school’s teachers and leaders may consciously track and be attentive to the needs of the students from economically and socially deprived communities to ensure that their learning is equally encouraged and celebrated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all the examples, option B shows the crucial, thoughtful departures from the family and neighbourhood culture that may have been consciously brought in by enlightened leaders and their teachers, based on a vision-building exercise (see LDU 11). They reflect an understanding of how schools can model for their students to thrive in a just and equitable society.

Either way, your visioning exercise or your own reading would have considered the knowledge, skills and attitudes advocated by the NCF, and a perspective on how these should be built into the school culture. You and your teachers will recognise the extent to which the NCF promotes a curriculum based on diversity and the local context of your school.

Communicating this thoughtful building of school culture – led by yourself, your teachers, non-teaching staff and even the students and their parents – is a part of your leadership role. It motivates all these stakeholders to join in your effort to gather the information you need, giving a goal or purpose for the data collection.

The information you are about to gather must enable you and your teachers to ensure that the capacity of every boy and girl in your school develops to the fullest.

Here is a case study for you to read and reflect on. It is that of a headteacher of a school situated in a community of crafts people, who know and is keenly interested in the lives and learning of all her students. Read it with special attention to how this headteacher used the information she had gathered about her school’s context to make a difference to the achievement of the girls in her school.
**Case Study 1: A school’s context**

The education officer wrote to his colleague: ‘We need to rescind the transfer order. Get her back. The school lane is full of her students on strike since the day of the transfer. In all my years of service, this has been the first time that students have refused to walk into a school without their headmistress.’

Of the 1200 girls in the girls’ senior secondary school, almost 500 sat adamant on the steps of the school, refusing to enter for three whole days. Then the unbelievable news, followed by a jubilant shout, got them up on their feet and back to class: the girls had won back their headmistress from the Education Department – the transfer order was revoked by student demand!

Their school’s small courtyard, framed by young trees planted among the paving and defined by a centrepiece of potted greenery, tells her tale of passionate leadership. She served a number of crafts communities that need all hands to service the tourist’s haven that their city had become. Yet they willingly sent their daughters to school and their girls spoke with fearless ambition of a future as doctors and teachers.

Mrs Kumar knew every student in her school and knew who she needs to support and how. She has convinced her parent body to support the education of her economically backward students instead of spending money on birthday celebrations. She has influenced her staff to provide five sweaters every winter to the girls whose families are unable to afford warm clothes for their daughters. She has convinced teachers’ families to invite her high school girls to their family functions in which they decorate their hands with henna, as they are naturally talented and it provides them with much needed pocket money. Her teachers recently convinced education officers to place a satellite dish on the rooftop of their school, as their students are not allowed by their families to travel into the city’s satellite transmission centre. They did not want the cultural norms to come in the way of the audio-visual instruction their students now receive in school.

Today, her student alumni are in colleges of the city – some co-educational too. Her sparkling staff track their impact on every class they teach and she ensures they are supported to reach every child and know the unique talents they possess. Absenteeism is low, drop-out is virtually nil, the place of pride is a science demonstration room and the working science laboratories, and the use of technology in classes is higher than most government schools.
She knows the family of each student and extends a helping hand where necessary, but demands their partnership in her endeavour to raise the standards of personal and family health and hygiene. Medical camps are extended to the mothers of the girls.

The poems she writes on the school notice board are original and impassioned, exhorting her teachers that they are change agents. She earns every bit of the adoration she receives from her ‘school family’.

Having read Case Study 1, what are your initial thoughts about Mrs Kumar’s understanding of her school context? What do you identify as the most important information that enabled her to make a positive shift in her students? Read through the case study again. Note the involvement of the teachers in creating the culture, with Mrs Kumar indicating that she had infected them with her enthusiasm.

**Discussion**

It is probable that Mrs Kumar had involved her staff in gathering information on the students’ background from the very beginning. They must have discussed, as a team, how all the staff could work with her to make a difference to the students. Some information could be easily obtained from the students and staff within the school itself; other information would require the data collectors to go out of the school.

**Activity 5: Gathering data**

Now look again at the information you need to obtain and how you could use it. In the next 15 minutes, identify the data that should be gathered by: (a) you, entirely by yourself, (b) by yourself and your teachers, and (c) by your teachers and your students.

Assess the capacity of your staff and students in the same manner that you did your self-assessment. In your Learning Diary, write the names of the teachers, students and non-teaching staff that you would like involved in this exercise and for what data-gathering. Then:

- Write a number between 1 and 10 that represents your current level of confidence that your **teachers** will be able to gather data, with 1 representing a complete lack of confidence and a 10 representing absolute confidence.
• Write a number between 1 and 10 that represents your current level of confidence that your non-teaching staff will be able to gather data, with 1 representing a complete lack of confidence and a 10 representing absolute confidence.

• Write a number between 1 and 10 that represents your current level of confidence that your students will be able to gather the data, with 1 representing a complete lack of confidence and a 10 representing absolute confidence.

• Look at all three numbers you have written. For the numbers to move up by one digit towards 10 what will you need to do as a leader? List the information, skills and knowledge you will need to provide your staff and students in order to move both the numbers upwards.

Remember you will first need to motivate the students and staff so that they, guided by you, willingly gather information, think deeply about its implications and apply their knowledge to suggest how the information can be used.

**Discussion**

The purpose of gathering data is to understand the context of your school and use the information to build a culture in which all your students learn. You now also know that you would be able to use all the information gathered and that involving others leads to a more inclusive and sustainable culture.

Having made a decision on who is going to be involved in the information-gathering exercise, it would be best to now share your idea and how you arrived at these decisions. This is also a good time to sit down with the relevant staff to compare information required by government regulations that your school has already collected.
Activity 6: Sharing your plan

So write your plan in your learning diary as to how and when you would share:

- the NCF and RTE perspective
- the manner in which this perspective would influence the way the school functions
- the conscious culture building that it will enable
- the list of factors from Table 1 (Ask yourself if you can defend the inclusion of all the factors in the table. If you are unclear about why that factor is in the list, refresh your memory by reading and reflecting on the footnotes on Table 1.)
- information already available at the school that can be included.

Discussion

You could address the staff during a staff meeting or invite the staff to an assembly that includes the students. This may be a new perspective for staff and students. You probably do not expect the staff to immediately accept what you are proposing as a data-gathering exercise, especially if your school has a culture of debate and discussion. If this is not an established culture, you may want to develop active learning by encouraging staff to ask questions, raise doubts and state fears.

Remember to let your audience know that while communicating your project, you are also open to their thoughts and ideas. They may have more factors for which they wish to collect information, which can be added to your list. Ask if they would want to reject any of the factors. Announce the team you have identified that will lead this project, or ask for nominations.

At the end of the meeting do remember to thank everyone for their willingness to work with you on this project.

By the end of your meeting your staff and students would know the reason for the project on gathering data. They would have been able to discuss their queries and fears as well as add their own ideas to your list. There would be a buzz in the school about the project and your team would be identified.
Activity 7: video activity

You can now watch a video recording to reinforce the previous activity and demonstrate collaborative working to gather student data. Before you hold a planning meeting to decide which team member would be allocated a specific area for data-gathering and how they would do the same, read this discussion between a headteacher and her team, talking about how she intends to divide the work between team members and create a format to monitor the plan they put together. Make a note of what you felt had helped the meeting to move forward till the planning was complete. This is a transcript of the video.

Mrs Kazi: I want to thank all of you for putting your heads together to make the final list of information we need to gather about our school. I am looking forward to the process of gathering the data, especially as we are involving the students in this process and the data will be used in class by us. Also, it will finally enable us to track our 1500 students to ensure they all get the most out of being in our school.

Today we have 20 minutes to decide which of us if going to be responsible for one or two areas so that the data can be gathered simultaneously but without burdening any one person. We should all be able to identify one person who we can use as a reminder – a sort of alarm system to remind us to stay on the job, as well as someone to discuss things with when we are stuck or surprised by what we find out.

Mrs Mehta: Yes, thank you, Mrs Kazi, I am happy with the areas that have been allocated to me. I have noticed that you have kept my interests in mind. I would be happy if Neeta agrees to be my reminder.

Ms Neeta: Of course, Mrs Mehta. I would be happy to. Regarding the allocation to me, Mrs Kazi, I am fine with gathering data on languages, but I am not sure I can survey the neighbourhood since my father-in-law has recently been hospitalised and we all have to take turns to look after him. I know we will get the students into the survey, but I would like to look personally at some of the places they talk about just to be sure … and I’m not sure I can.
Mrs Kazi: Oh dear! I wasn’t aware of that! I thought it should be given to you since you come to school on your scooter and could use that to do the survey.

Mr Behram: Well, I could do that on my cycle, Mrs Kazi. Why don’t I take on the neighbourhood survey? I find the idea quite fascinating. And I would like to give Neeta in return the job allocated to me to find out the religions of each of the students and the staff. I’d also like Neeta to be my reminder, since that way she could tell me about places she has seen and I don’t know about.

Ms Neeta: Thank you Mr Behram – I would be happy to make the exchange and be your reminder! Mrs Kazi, would you like to be mine?

Mrs Kazi: Well, that was quickly sorted – what a relief! Yes, Neeta, I can be your reminder. Is there anyone else here who has any difficulty with their area of enquiry?

Ms Naseem: I’m not too sure how to get real data on socio-economic status. Do you think students and teachers will really know? I’m not sure about my husband’s income and how to assess it, since he is a professional who earns on a project basis.

Mr Sharma: Don’t worry, Naseem, we are not doing an exact survey. Look at it in terms of the impact it would have on learning outcomes of our students. So if we make three broad bands which indicate a student is well off and able to afford more than the basics of food, clothing and shelter, we could put her into band A.

Mrs Kazi: And I suppose the students who are sent to school by their parents just for the midday meal would be band C. It’s them I’m more concerned about and feel we may miss paying enough attention to. We are really good at looking after the children who come to us and ask for books and pencils – could it be that many students do not? Maybe they are too embarrassed or shy. Let’s find out.

Ms Naseem: Mr Sharma, if you become my reminder I could come to you for help when I’m stuck!

Mr Sharma: Of course, Naseem! And Mrs Mehta, I’m counting on you to be my reminder.
Mrs Mehta: Sure!

Mrs Kazi: Well, now that everyone is sorted, can I check if we all remember that each area of responsibility is allocated, each of you has a buddy, each of you also has to rope in the students and non-teaching staff, and parents if possible. In our next meeting, we will discuss how the information gathered can become a part of our class work. Thank you, everyone.

All: Thank you, Mrs Kazi.

You heard Mrs Kazi recount how she planned her data collection and how she offered support to the teachers who felt unsure that they would be able to map the area for resources. You also heard teachers choosing areas for themselves that suited their interests. By the end of her planning meeting, there was no confusion in her team about accountability, since everyone knew who was responsible for the work and it had been divided to everyone’s satisfaction.
Using students’ information to plan school-based activities

School leaders who help their teams understand why and how to interpret and use data are more likely to succeed in developing an equitable learning environment. Use every opportunity to pass on your knowledge to the members of your team. Find out what the members of your team are thinking and feeling, and then be clear in what you communicate to them regarding the goals and the process for accomplishment. It is always a good idea to ask members of your team to summarise a discussion or go over its key points. Let your team know that you are always available to them and that the earlier they approach you, the more you appreciate it. Follow up on the ones who are not in regular contact with you.

The interest you show, the questions you ask, the way you approach it in assembly, will be important signals for your staff and students. This is especially significant when collecting data. Collection of data in itself, without any interest in emerging trends during the early days of collection, may appear to be an administrative task alone. Support your staff, students and parents through this task by demonstrating your interest in it.

Once data is collected, interpreting and then deciding a course of action is a leadership activity. For instance, either finding out that your students are from varied ethnic backgrounds or that they are from a homogenous background is pure information. The challenge for you and your team is to make this information a learning resource for the school – should you provide a homogenous group more exposure to a range of backgrounds? If it is very heterogenous, how would you ensure that there is an environment of mutual respect? Since this may be a new approach, your team will need a fair amount of support from you. This does not mean hand-holding every member of staff and every student, but it does mean inspiring and encouraging them along with developing the knowledge and skills of your staff (see LDU07 and LDU08).

The next case study and activity will help you firm up your ideas on how to proceed with making data meaningful.
Activity 8: Using information

Read the case study below and notice how students learned to use the information that they gathered in their coursework for maths, science, social studies and language learning.

Reflect on the possibilities offered by the case study for your students. Could you do the same with your school’s compilation of information? Which subject areas can you link? Discuss this with your team, especially the students.

In your Learning Diary, list the important information and explanations that you want to use to communicate your exciting plan to students, parents and teachers in the assembly.
Case Study 2

As data began to come in through field visits, interviews, surveys and nature trails, each group in charge of the data began to collate it and put up charts on the corridors to demonstrate what they found. Teachers and students of different disciplines then used the data to discuss concepts in their classes.

Teachers and students in social science classes spoke of the reasons for different family systems that had been found. Language teachers used the same data to have students describe how their family system was facilitative or problematic, after which the benefits of joint and nuclear families were debated by the students.

The names of trees, flowers and plants in the neighbourhood became a cause for science teachers to categorise them into medicinal and non-medicinal plants, also linking the presence of some of the trees to the reducing water table due to the impact of the proliferation of these trees.

The list of religious places led to the discussion on myths and legends that grandmothers related, as well as cooking practices in the home science class and how different communities had a preference for some spices and how that changed the taste of the lentils that were brought to class to taste. Clothing and subtle differences in the tying of turbans or the choice of clothing and how that categorised people was also discussed, with a view to understanding stereotypes.

Government offices and institutions in the neighbourhood were explored in the civics class, to understand their function and how they could be of use to the students and their families. Different schools and who went to those schools and why was also discussed. The discussion led to occupations that were high paying versus those that were dependent on seasons or government schemes was a space for the discussion of the senior class with the principal on ‘what I want to be when I leave school’.

The data collection exercise seemed to have changed the conversations across the school. ‘We have started asking “what”, “how” and “when”’, said the beaming principal. ‘We have got the whole school wondering!’

Discussion
Representing and sharing school information with the school community

Data can be filed away and used when required. It can also be used by you to create a learning environment in your school. Some part of your office, classrooms or even your corridors could become the holder of the information you are collecting, which can be used right through the year, to inform your work.

Raw data can be difficult to display. Displaying data visually in charts, lists, tables, maps, diagrams, pictograms, bar charts, pie charts, models or posters, can make it easier to understand and interpret.

Some of the display can hold true for the entire year, such as the socio-economic composition of your students and teachers background. Other kinds of data could change or be added to over time: for instance, the health profile of the students, especially if you decide to have a health camp regularly at school. (Have you learned how to make a dashboard for changing data? Take a look at LDU14.)

Now read the case study below and then do Activity 9.

Case Study 3: The class discussion

Mrs Padam looked at the data collated by the sixth graders. Thirty students sat in class silently, studying the information they had collected on the professions of their parents and the parents of their schoolmates. Five children had collected the professions of the teachers’ spouses and those of the non-teaching and support staff. Another five had collected the professions of the children of teachers, support staff and others.

Their class teacher, Khanna Sir, had shown the class different methods by which data could be represented and had said ‘So what do you want the students in the school to know about your data, and how do you want to present it?’ A hand snaked its way into the air and Khanna Sir asked its owner to speak up. ‘I can see that there are many fathers who are farmers and some fathers have shops, some are in the army, and a few are in different professions like electrician and cycle mechanic and tractor mechanic. Only one father is quite different – he is a laboratory assistant in the agriculture university.’ Mr Khanna wanted to know why this information was interesting to Gayatri. ‘Because,’ said Gayatri, ‘that is why so many students go to the fields with their parents during harvesting season.’
‘We are noting fathers’ professions’, said Mrs Padam. ‘This is good and Gayatri has made a good point. Now let’s look at the mothers’ professions.’ Gayatri was interrupted by Trupti, who couldn’t wait for her turn. ‘Many of them said they look after the house and the children. But ma’am, I know that my mother goes to the field with my father, and she also grows the vegetable patch outside my house. So why can’t we say that she too is a farmer?’

Mrs Padam grew visibly brighter. ‘What does the rest of the class feel?’ she asked.

Mr Khanna was already shaking his head – ‘How is it possible,’ he said. ‘She doesn’t own the land’.

Mrs Padam, gently indicating the children who now looked like they would burst if they couldn’t speak, said ‘Let them decide.’

‘I think we should call them by their professions’ said Ramesh, remembering his mother worked hard at the field as well as walked miles to ensure they had drinking water at home.

‘We can show the work both do’ was the unanimous decision. Mr Khanna wanted to know how they would show it. The list was written on the blackboard – a pie chart showing different professions of both parents so that the parent profiles of each class could be accompanied by some interesting questions such as ‘which parents should be invited to assembly so that the students could hear about their work’. 
Activity 9

Having read Case Study 3, reflect on what sort of planning is taking place and how the decision is being taken on what is to be displayed and how. Why was it important to discuss the data collected? Who else (apart from the students) will you share such data with and why? Where in the school will you recommend as an appropriate area to display the graphical representation of the data discussed?

Discussion

It was important to discuss the data because it gave everyone an understanding of the constraints that some students faced. The teachers and headteacher would be in a better position to work with parents during harvest seasons to ensure that children are not taken away to the fields all the time but get the opportunity to attend school.

You will have noticed the detailed planning by the headteacher to decide material required for the charts, graphs or models that will be created by students. Such a list could be useful for planning a budget around this project.

You will have noted the need to identify what needs to be purchased for representing the data you have gathered (files, stationery, chart paper, etc.) based on your budget, and decide which of these students need to bring from home.

The most appropriate location for such data is in the classroom and the corridor where that class is located (where appropriate). You could do the same for each year group and display it in a designated area.

Activity 10

Get feedback from the students, teachers and parents about (a) the impact of the data gathering exercise and (b) the impact on them during assembly etc.

Write down in your Learning Diary how the exercise has helped you, your staff and your students to become more aware of student information and its influence on their learning.
7 Summary

In this unit you have considered the importance of student information and how that influences everyday school activities. You have spent time to gather student information and we hope you have used the information in planning curricular and extra-curricular activities. It is important that the information gathered is analysed, presented and (where appropriate) shared with all relevant stakeholders, as you all work together to provide an effective learning environment for your students. All students – irrespective of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, caste, creed, community, social group, economic status, literacy level, ability levels, levels of health, professions and geographical terrain – should feel welcomed and happy in your school. Therefore, understanding your school context is an essential part of a school leader’s job.

The following extract from the NCF is worth reading:

_The guiding principles discussed earlier provide the landscape of social values within which we locate our educational aims. The first is a commitment to democracy and the values of equality, justice, freedom, concern for others’ well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights. Education should aim to build a commitment to these values, which are based on reason and understanding. The curriculum, therefore, should provide adequate experience and space for dialogue and discourse in the school to build such a commitment in children. Independence of thought and action points to a capacity of carefully considered, value-based decision making, both independently and collectively. A sensitivity to others’ well-being and feelings, together with knowledge and understanding of the world, should form the basis of a rational commitment to values._

_**Learning to learn and the willingness to unlearn and relearn are important as means of responding to new situations in a flexible and creative manner. The curriculum needs to emphasise the processes of constructing knowledge.**_

_**Choices in life and the ability to participate in democratic processes depend on the ability to contribute to society in various ways. This is why education must develop the ability to work and participate in economic processes and social change. This necessitates the integration of work with education. We must ensure that work-related experiences are sufficient and broad-based in terms of skills and attitudes, that they foster an understanding of socio-economic processes, and help inculcate a mental frame that encourages working with others in a spirit of cooperation. Work alone can create a social temper.**_
8 References

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005
Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009
9 Related units

- LDU01 (Being a school leader)
- LDU03 (Leading change)
- LDU07 (Supporting teachers to raise performance)
- LDU12 (Developing the culture of your school)
- LDU13 (Promote equality, diversity and inclusion in your school)
- LDU17 (Working with change)
If you have any comments or would like to know more please reach out through the following routes:

Email: TESS-India@open.ac.uk
Website: http://bit.ly/12m1Tgk
Twitter: @TESS-India

Photography:
CC BY www.flickr.com/photos/gpforeducation • CC BY NC ND www.flickr.com/photos/ulfers
CC BY NC www.flickr.com/photos/anuradha