

SETTING UP TEACHER LEARNING CENTRES

Experiences from some districts of Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Rajasthan

Research Group | Azim Premji Foundation



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Azim Premji
University

These papers present findings from Azim Premji Foundation's field engagements in trying to improve the quality and equity of school education in India. Our aim is to disseminate our studies to practitioners, academics and policy makers who wish to understand some of the key issues facing school education as observed by educators in the field. The findings of the paper are those of the Research Group and may not reflect the view of the Azim Premji Foundation including Azim Premji University.

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Executive Summary

Teacher professional development has occupied centre stage in the discourse on school improvement for the past many years, both in India and globally. Though there is broad agreement on what constitutes effective teacher professional development processes, there is little consensus on how to operationalise them within the Indian context, especially given the characteristic features of the country's vast government school system.

Azim Premji Foundation has been working towards improving equity and quality in the government school system for over fifteen years. Facilitating teacher professional development has been at the core of this work. Working with teachers over these many years, one of the many lessons for the Foundation has been that teachers need conducive autonomous spaces—in the physical and symbolic sense—to engage with each other, with other experts, and with professionally relevant materials and resources, to be able to learn and develop professionally.

With this in mind, the Foundation has set up resource centres called Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs) in the geographies that it works in. TLCs are increasingly becoming a key element of the Foundation's strategy of working with teachers. This paper, the first among a series of papers on understanding the working of TLCs, documents the insights gathered from the Foundation's experience in setting up and starting TLCs in some selected districts. In particular, it focuses on the groundwork and efforts required to set up a TLC.

Key Insights

- It is important to set up TLCs in **locations that are convenient for teachers to access**—in this particular context, it amounts to setting up TLCs close to where large number of teachers reside.
- The facilities should also be conducive for the kind of engagements that are envisaged within the centre; these should be **spaces where teachers like to come and spend time**.
- Having **appropriate resources and materials** in the TLC is important; these include curricular resources that are directly relevant to the teachers' practice, as well as others.
- It is not sufficient for the TLC to be a resource centre; it needs to be a platform where teachers can access a **range of high-quality, relevant professional development opportunities**.
- This requires that **competent 'resource persons'** are available at the TLC to facilitate such opportunities
- Whether it be in the case of location, facility, resources or professional development opportunities, it is important to consider **contextual considerations** while visualising such a centre.
- As TLCs are envisaged as platforms where teachers can choose professional development opportunities that suit them in terms of content and process, **encouraging voluntary participation** is fundamental.
- Such a concept is working against the existing cultural currents of top-down, one-size-fits-all teacher professional development processes; this means that awareness creation as well as **continuous mobilisation of teachers** is very important, even past the early stages of a TLC.
- Creating and sustaining an **environment of equality and respect** makes teachers feel valued and respected and helps to build ownership; this needs to be purposively built into all processes in the TLC.

1. Background

It is widely agreed that ‘teachers and teacher capacity’ is the single most important factor contributing towards quality educational outcomes. In the last few decades, teacher professional development has occupied considerable mind space in the discourse on improving the quality of education globally, including India. Right from the Indian Education (Kothari) Commission 1964, which recommended two to three months in-service training every five years for every teacher, to an explicit mention of the need for emphasis on in-service education in every successive National Policy of Education (NPE), there has been an increasing stress on the importance of improving teacher preparation and continuing teacher professional development¹.

However, professional development opportunities for teachers continue to be limited. Most training programs are very top-down and hierarchical in their approach, not always relevant to teacher needs; teachers have little say in their own professional development. There are few spaces for teachers to share experiences, collaborate with, and learn from each other. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, 2009 (NCFTE 2009, pg. 64) notes pertinently that *‘The whole approach to teachers’ professional needs, continues to be determined, planned, implemented and monitored extrinsically, compromising on the concept of the teacher as a professional and with little or no basis for the design of the interventions.’* The NCFTE 2009 also lays down several fundamental principles such as continuity, voluntarism, interactivity, teacher autonomy, and relevance to the classroom for designing effective professional development engagements with teachers.

While a vast body of knowledge and research is available and there is a consensus on the broad principles of what constitutes effective professional development for teachers, there is no considered understanding on how these principles can be operationalised, especially in the context of the Indian government school system. A plethora of single-teacher schools, geographically dispersed schools, lack of a substantial peer group within schools due to a limited number of teachers in schools, a paucity of resources for teaching and teacher development, and overworked teachers are some of the defining conditions of this context.

There have been several attempts to address such contextual characteristics. For example, teacher resource centres that could cater to teachers distributed across schools, in the form of Cluster and Block Resource Centres (CRCs and BRCs), were set up under the aegis of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Indian government programme aimed at universalisation of elementary education. The two major aims of these centres were to provide (a) in-service teacher training opportunities and (b) academic support for schools. However, for a variety of reasons, such as lack of resources, inadequate preparation of resource coordinators and a very top-down approach among others, CRCs and BRCs have not been very successful in achieving their objectives so far.

Outside India, teacher resource centres emerged as one of the strategies for school improvement in the 1960s, out of a similar attempt to address problems of isolation, access to, and lack of resources and support faced by isolated rural schools. The rationale was that clustering of schools and the creation of teacher resource centres would enable sharing and pooling of resources, allow schools and teachers to network and collaborate, and thereby improve classroom practice. Teacher resource centres were envisaged as having a teacher network facilitating exchange and sharing, a facilitator or resource person to provide support for classroom practice and professional

¹“A large-scale and coordinated programme of in-service education for teachers should be organized by universities, training institutions and teachers organizations for teachers at all levels. The target should be that every teacher receives at least two or three months’ in-service education in every five years of his service.” – Kothari Commission 1964

“Teacher education particularly in-service education should receive due emphasis” – NPE 1968

“Teacher Education is a continuous process, and its pre-service and in-service components are inseparable. As the first step, the system of teacher education will be overhauled. The new programmes of teacher-education will emphasise continuing education and the need for teachers to meet the thrusts envisaged in this Policy”. – NPE 1986

development and a physical structure that houses books resources and relevant materials. However, depending upon the context and needs in different situations, such centres have been conceptualised differently in terms of their objectives and implementation. The issues and challenges associated with these different implementations have varied. There is little consensus in the literature on the various aspects of teacher resource centres and their effectiveness.²

Azim Premji Foundation (Foundation) has been working towards improving equity and quality of the government school system in India, with particular emphasis on building teacher capacity, because at the core of its work is a belief in the centrality of the teacher and teacher capacity in providing quality education. The Foundation has been working in this space for over 15 years and has a presence in 5 states and almost 50 districts. Enabling platforms and processes that are true to fundamental principles of effective teacher professional development and simultaneously address the specific contextual characteristics of the Indian government school system is key to such work. This includes setting up teacher resource centres called Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs). TLCs are an important element within the Foundation's overall, integrated approach to teacher professional development.

Because of the variety, depth, and scale of the Foundation's work, it is uniquely placed to be able to add to a contextual body of knowledge and understanding, focussing on the 'how' of teacher professional development. To this end, the research group at the Foundation seeks to critically analyse and document the experiences with various forms and methods of teacher professional development and make them available to other practitioners working in similar complex contexts. This paper focusses on the Foundation's experience of setting up and sustaining TLCs. This is the first among a series of papers planned around TLCs.

2. Scope of the Paper

As the Foundation sets up and nurtures an increasing number of TLCs, it provides an opportunity to refine the understanding of different dimensions of TLCs and how they can contribute to teacher professional development. These include aspects such as the kinds of efforts and practices that are required to set up TLCs; teacher motivations to visit the TLCs; the factors that contribute to a vibrant and sustainable TLC; the benefits that teachers derive from TLCs; the impact of their engagement with TLCs on their classroom practice; and collective impact of TLCs on teachers of a certain geography. Seeking answers to these questions is visualised as an ongoing process spanning a period of time and a series of studies.

This study, the first in a proposed series, specifically addresses the following question: What are the kind of efforts, practices, and processes that are required for setting up a sustainable TLC?

A sustainable TLC, in the limited sense in which it is used here, is one that has reached a certain stage of maturity—it has relevant resources and offers a range of teacher professional development opportunities.

The different dimensions of the aforementioned question that are further examined are as follows:

- a. The initial preparation and groundwork required to set up a TLC
- b. Efforts needed to mobilise teachers to visit and use the TLC
- c. Some good practices in ensuring a meaningful experience for teachers

The study draws upon the experiences of select districts in three states, namely Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka, where the Foundation has done substantial work with TLCs—longer

²School Clusters and Teacher Resource Centres – Elizabeth A.Giordano. UNESCO: International Institute of Education Planning. Paris 2008. Fundamentals of Educational Planning Series - 86

in some states than others. The experiences examined for the purpose of this study include the TLCs in the districts of Tonk in Rajasthan (7 TLCs), Yadgir in Karnataka (10 TLCs) and Raigarh, Janjgir-Champa and Raipur in Chhattisgarh (4 TLCs); these are chosen because each of the TLCs has its own peculiar context and a different stage of maturity. While the TLCs in Yadgir and Tonk are fairly ahead in their journey, the ones included in this study from Chhattisgarh are much more nascent.

The research that this paper is based on involved multiple methods, primarily qualitative. Significant time was spent in the TLCs by conducting observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus-group discussions with teachers, education functionaries, TLC coordinators, and senior members of the Foundation involved in the crucial stages of the TLC work in the different locations. Seventy respondents were directly involved in the research. In addition, concept and process documents related to the intervention and its precursors, such as early concept notes for the TLCs in Yadgir and Tonk, stakeholder perspectives on earlier initiatives such as Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) in Yadgir, TLC activity trackers, and monthly reports of the TLCs, were examined and analysed. In this paper, we provide illustrative examples from these more richly detailed interviews, observations, and process documents. Though the evolution of TLCs in each state and location has had its own unique journey and growth trajectory, some common insights emerge across these locations.

3. The TLC Journey

3.1 The Beginnings

The genesis of TLCs is inextricably linked with the Foundation's own journey of working on the ground and learning from it. The Foundation's work began in the early 2000s, with the implementation of multiple programmes to improve educational quality across several states. The scope of these programs included assessment, curriculum reform, material development, policy and capacity development of teachers and education functionaries, etc. However, by around 2010, it became clear that working in a programmatic mode was inadequate and it would take continuous efforts across multiple dimensions for any deep-rooted or sustained change to take place.

Therefore, to be able to work in a sustained, continuous fashion as mentioned above, responding to the needs and requirements on the ground requires a local institutional presence. This led to the establishment of field institutions, which are embedded in the local context; thus, 'District Institutes' across field locations (districts) that the Foundation chose to work in came into being. The purpose of each District Institute is to improve the government school education system at the district level. The ultimate aim is to improve the learning levels of children by focusing on building professional capacities of key stakeholders, namely teachers, head teachers, and functionaries. Towards this, the Foundation has built in each of the districts, teams with expertise in various aspects of school education, including perspectives underlying it (aims of education, how children learn etc.), content areas of subjects such as language, science, mathematics and their pedagogy.

Since the establishment of these District Institutes, the Foundation has engaged continuously and in a sustained fashion with teachers, striving to build teacher capacity in a variety of ways, through different forms, structures, and processes of teacher professional development. Guided by a set of common principles, different field institutes have evolved solutions and structures for their particular context. For example, the work in Rajasthan has led to the formation of Voluntary Teacher Forums (VTFs); in Uttarakhand, it led to the use of the education department's Cluster Academic Meetings as a platform for professional development, and in Karnataka, to the formation of TLCs, to name a few. As structures evolve and mature in a particular location, they are assimilated, fine-tuned, and adapted across different sites of the Foundation. For example, TLCs and VTFs are now accepted Foundation strategies across locations for engaging with teachers.

There are some significant insights that the Foundation has gained in this process of engaging with teachers for their capacity building, intensely, over the years. This has led to a strong belief that the teacher as a professional needs to be able to exercise choice and have a say in her own professional development and that if provided with access to a variety of learning opportunities and the freedom to choose those that are most relevant to her needs, she will engage with her own professional development voluntarily. Further, the Foundation understands from its experiences on the ground that peer learning and collaboration can be very powerful modes of teacher professional development, and that professional development engagements with teachers need to be sustained, continuous, and situated squarely in the context of their work—that is, the school and the classroom. Many of these insights and realisations resonate with the current thinking and research on teacher professional development across the world³, and they are echoed in the Indian policy documents, including NCFTE 2009.

Given this understanding, increasingly, the Foundation's engagement with teachers is multi-modal, long term, and continuous, building in opportunities for peer learning. Besides workshops of short and long durations, seminars, melas, engagements in school, participation in cluster academic meetings, and so on, increasing emphasis is being laid on the creation of spaces, referred to as TLCs, which allow the teachers to engage with each other, with experts, and with professionally relevant resources in a conducive environment. This engagement facilitates their learning and professional development.

These TLCs are emerging as one of the central pillars of the Foundation's strategy of working with teachers. In particular, this is because TLCs allow the Foundation's engagement with teachers to be structured in alignment with the above-mentioned understanding of teacher professional development needs.

Though the current conceptualisation of TLCs can be seen as a culmination of the Foundation's learning over the years, in particular, the germ of the idea of TLCs was born out of a combination of experiences and circumstances of the Foundation's work in Yadgir, Karnataka. The Foundation commenced its work in Yadgir district through a joint intervention with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), namely the CFSI in 2005. The intervention was aimed at making the system of schooling more democratic and quality based. CFSI reached out to 336 schools, 1500 teachers, and 63,000 students from Surpur block of Yadgir district. In the implementation phase of the CFSI initiative, while the Foundation was working with teachers to build capacity, members working on the project realised that the existing efforts at capacity development of teachers were centrally designed and executed, thus divorced from actual teacher needs. The in-service trainings and teacher meetings organised by the government were very top-down and bound by hierarchy and protocol. No spaces were available for teachers to engage in any sort of academic discussions. In the course of their efforts to design need-based workshops for teachers, members of the Foundation observed that teachers attending these workshops voluntarily gathered in different schools in the block after the completion of the workshop to discuss their challenges as well as possible solutions. Upon observing this, the team working with these teachers felt that the availability of similar informal spaces would encourage the teachers to engage in academic discussions and to share and thereby learn from each other's experiences and improve their understanding. Simultaneously, the team came across a teacher resource centre established in the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) at Chamarajanagar, Karnataka. This also gave them a concrete vision of the scope and potential of TLCs and made them think about the possibility of introducing similar resource centres in Surpur block of the district. Thus, the first TLCs in their present avatar were set up.

³For example: Linda Darling Hammond & Nikole Richardson – Teacher Learning: What matters?; How Teachers Learn Pages 46-53, February 2009 | Volume 66| Number 5

In Tonk, Rajasthan, where the Foundation has been present since 2005, the Block Activity Centres (BACs) were in a sense precursors to the TLCs. With the shift from programmatic to institutional mode around 2010, District Institutes were set up in Tonk as well. However, the team in Rajasthan felt that presence only at the district headquarters was limiting and looked for ways to reach out to those teachers and schools located in the interior of the district, away from the district headquarters. The solution was thought to be the BAC, which is a physical space established in the block headquarters that could function as a base for block-level activities such as meetings, discussions, and workshops for teachers and head teachers. Towards the latter half of 2011, BACs were set up simultaneously along with the District Institute. The plan was to open one BAC per block, which would lend support to the government structures (such as BRCs) in the planning and execution of teacher training programs, as well as afford a space to organize Foundation-led formal and informal activities⁴. Another intention was that the BAC would provide support to the District Institute in its teacher professional development initiatives and reach out to maximum number of teachers in an effective and efficient way. By December 2012, such centres were functional in six blocks of Tonk, namely Deoli, Malpura, Niwai, Toda, Tonk, and Uniara. Since 2015, these BACs in Tonk and other districts in Rajasthan have evolved into full-fledged TLCs, which, as mentioned earlier, have a much more central place within the Foundation's teacher professional development strategy.

3.2 Current Scenario

The journey of TLCs, beginning with their establishment and gradually moving towards consolidation and proliferation, has been different for each of the locations in this study. In Yadgir, Karnataka, four TLCs were set up in 2008. Subsequently, three more were opened in 2011, another three in 2014, and one in 2017. Today, after some consolidation, there are a total of 10 TLCs across three blocks of the district—at Kembhavi, Narayanpur, Surpur, Kakkera, Rajankolur, Hunasagi, Shahpur, Gurmitkal, Saidapur, and Chamanal. In Tonk, Rajasthan, the six BACs set up in 2011 subsequently evolved into TLCs. An additional centre was established in Peeplu block in Tonk in 2015, after greater clarity and stronger direction emerged with respect to conceptualisation of TLCs in the Foundation.

The early experience of the Foundation with selected TLCs has been largely encouraging. This has led to TLCs becoming accepted wisdom within the Foundation and to the establishment of TLCs across multiple locations, since around 2015. Based on experiences across different sites, the activities and operations of TLCs have been undergoing review and revisions over the years. The newer districts have had the benefit of hindsight. For example, in the three districts of Chhattisgarh covered under this study, where the Foundation's work and presence is relatively nascent, TLCs were established early, thus without having to go through a process of experimentation and learning. In the first phase, two TLCs were opened in Raipur district (at Dharsiwa and Abhanpur), while one each in Raigarh (at Pussore) and Janjgir-Champa (at Sheorinarayan) districts were initiated. While each TLC has had a different trajectory and has responded to the local context, there are common threads aligning TLCs across these locations today. The current conceptualisation has evolved over the years with the experience of setting up and running TLCs and understanding and responding to teacher needs on the ground.

In the current avatar, the TLCs are uniformly visualised as physical spaces, open to all teachers that allow them to engage formally and informally with their subject and a variety of educational issues and perspectives. Some TLCs are housed in government schools, whereas some are in private, leased spaces. However, there are some basic common guidelines and norms followed across TLCs

⁴ Formal activities are those that require a mandate from the government to enable teachers to attend; informal activities refers to those where teachers attend voluntarily expending their own time and resources.

regarding infrastructure and resources, even while they are constrained by and responding to contexts. It is imagined as a space for teachers to gather, in both large and small groups, with a well-stocked library consisting of books, journals, newspapers, subject-based resources such as science laboratory apparatus, mathematics kits, computers with an internet connection, and teaching learning materials (TLMs). Besides academic materials, there are often some recreational facilities such as board games and provisions for indoor games. Basic facilities such as drinking water and clean toilets are ensured in each centre.

The TLCs are conceptualised as a space for engagement with teachers through multiple modes and activities. While common sets of activities are conducted with teachers across locations, the emphasis and focus and sometimes the nomenclature may vary, with many TLCs structuring their engagements with teachers based on local contextual specificities and teacher needs. This includes formal and informal engagements. A brief description of the main activities conducted in the TLCs that were studied is provided below:

- **Voluntary Teacher Forums (VTFs)** are platforms for teachers to come together voluntarily at periodic intervals for experience sharing, academic discussion, and reflection. The interaction amongst teachers is facilitated by either a peer or a resource person from the Foundation. Typically, VTFs are subject specific, where 10–15 teachers meet periodically, at least once a month at the TLC, after school hours, for approximately two to three hours. While VTFs are often characterised by a homogenous group of teachers interested in a specific subject, discussions may also be centred on different perspectives of education and broader academic issues, rather than just the subjects.
- **Workshops** are another common mode of professional development across locations. TLCs provide a conducive and convenient space for workshops. The workshops typically focus on building capacity in subject content, pedagogical content, educational perspectives, and other administrative skills for teachers and educational functionaries. These workshops are typically conducted for a smaller group of teachers and functionaries with whom the Foundation works in a fairly intensive manner. Typically, 30 to 40 teachers participate in the event. Workshops, when conducted during school working days, as is often the case, need endorsement through formal departmental orders for teachers to be able to attend. At times, they are also offered during holidays, with teachers attending them voluntarily.
- **Evening Discussions** are informal discussions held at the TLCs, often once a week in the evening hours. The discussions focus on academic issues of interest to a large cross-section of teachers. For example, sometimes, an article may be circulated ahead of time and teachers would read it and come prepared for discussion; sometimes, a short film may be shown, followed by a discussion. The participation is voluntary and involves teachers from different subject areas with diverse interests.
- **Large-scale events** such as **seminars & conferences** are conducted with the primary aim of reaching out to and mobilising large numbers of teachers to engage with the TLCs. Common themes related to schools and the schooling system are chosen as topics for these seminars or conferences across the different states. Examples of topics that have been focussed on in the past are 'Children's Literature', 'Morning Assembly', and 'Teachers – a continuous learning community?'. Such seminars and conferences are usually conducted by external resource persons. Given the large number of participants, they are held in the grounds of the school, if the TLC is situated in a school with sufficient ground space, or such a nearby venue. Large-scale events like this generate a momentum and energy among teachers.

- **Occasional Large-scale Events** such as celebrations of special days, depending upon the location and context of the TLC, are also a regular feature on the TLC calendars. A common example would be Teachers' Day.
- **Melas and Baal Melas** are largely school-based events that encourage the use of a certain pedagogy and teaching learning process, engage the community in the learning activities of the school, and simultaneously, create a platform for students and teachers to display their classroom projects. However, in many locations, events such as this are intricately linked to the TLCs as teachers visit the TLCs for resources to develop projects, as well as to avail of academic support.

Teacher professional development activities within the TLCs are today aligned to a broad common Teacher Curriculum Framework developed within the Foundation. The Teacher Curriculum Framework guides and provides direction, consistency, and coherence in the Foundation's teacher professional development work. Developed internally within the Foundation, it articulates clearly the fundamental assumptions and principles behind the Foundation's work with teachers. In particular, it outlines the context, curriculum, principles, and modes of teacher professional development that guides such work. It explicitly articulates certain objectives, content areas or themes, and facilitation principles and then suggests how the content can be transacted in different modes through illustrative examples. Hence, the activities within any TLC, which are part of the broader teacher professional development efforts in that location, are also guided by this framework.

Besides participating in structured professional development events, another expectation from teachers is that they will visit these TLCs to browse through books and magazines, borrow materials, read, use the internet, or just catch up with each other. This, over time, would build a momentum of continuous academic engagement amongst groups of teachers in various ways and foster a culture of self-learning and reflection. The TLC is therefore seen as a mode that can facilitate mobilisation of teachers as well as offer a platform for their professional development through a multitude of self and peer-development opportunities in a continuous manner; the TLCs facilitate the creation of opportunities for the Foundation to engage continuously and seamlessly with teachers.

From the teachers' perspective, TLCs provide an opportunity for the teachers to engage continuously with their own professional development. A TLC enables continuity for teachers in the process of their own professional development, as well as the autonomy in the matters of intensity, frequency, and mode of engagement. Teachers may attend or participate in organised events or simply visit the centre to access materials or both, depending upon their perceived relevance, and their own need, motivation, interest, and convenience. Most of the teacher professional development engagements in the TLC call for voluntary participation. The hope is that these TLCs in the long run will engender a sense of a professional identity and community amongst teachers.

4. Lessons Learnt

Besides understanding the journey and the current conceptualisation of TLCs with the Foundation, the main focus of this study was to understand the efforts that are needed to start and sustain a TLC. This section attempts to lay out such lessons learnt from examining the early experiences with the TLCs that were studied.

4.1 Identifying the Optimal Location for TLCs

The locations of the earlier TLCs in Yadgir and Tonk were decided primarily on the basis of expediency. In Tonk, when the first centre was established, it was located in the block headquarters

because, on the basis of their previous experience, the team assumed that most teachers would logically be residents of the most important town in the block. Additionally, the then objective behind the centres to support the BRCs, which are invariably located in the block headquarters, required that TLCs be close to them to be able to liaise with them. Therefore, it was felt that the block headquarters would be the most suitable location for TLCs. However, as in other locations, in Tonk too, it was realised that one TLC may not be adequate to reach all the teachers in an optimal manner.

The Foundation's understanding over the last nine years with TLCs has been that the maximum number of footfalls is of those teachers residing within a radius of 2–3 kilometres of the TLC. This insight was articulated by a member of the Rajasthan team: *'The centre should be at a location that is easy to access, near large number of teachers' homes and generally in areas where people come to spend their leisure time.'*

Therefore, to ensure the success and sustenance of the TLC, it is best located in places that have come to be called, within the Foundation, as 'teacher towns'. Teacher towns refer to the sites with the highest concentration of teacher residences within a larger administrative area such as the block. They can be identified through a process of systematic mapping of teacher residences. Since 2015, with the thrust on setting up TLCs across different locations in which the Foundation is present, this exercise of 'teacher town mapping' has become almost a standard practice within the organisation, and was conducted in the locations studied here as well.

The ease with which a teacher town mapping exercise can be facilitated depends on several factors. Prior ground-level work with the local education department is an advantage, and strong professional relationships with government functionaries in such locations often facilitate the entire process. In terms of gathering basic data for the exercise, forums with a large gathering of teachers in a single venue afford access to the target group; in addition, a standard data-collection template on basic parameters for the teacher town mapping exercise helps avoid ambiguity. Methods such as visits to individual schools as well as cluster and block resource centres by the team members have also been pursued to ensure as complete a mapping as possible of teachers and their residences.

The experience in Chhattisgarh exemplifies this. For example, in Raigarh district, where the Foundation had started work earlier than the opening of the TLCs and team members had a good rapport with the Cluster Academic Coordinators (CACs), the team members decided to enlist the help of the CACs in gathering teacher residence information. A template for data collection was developed. This process worked well in blocks where the cluster academic meetings were regular. However, where the cluster academic meetings were not regular, visits were made to individual clusters and schools to collect teacher residence data. In many of these cases, data was also collected through phone calls.

In Janjgir-Champa, the teachers' residence data was collected by visiting each of the 18 clusters of the Nawagarh and Pamgarh blocks, the two major blocks in the district. The data collected revealed that most teacher residences were concentrated in Sheorinarayan and Kharod and not Janjgir, the district headquarter, or Nawagarh, the block headquarter, as had been assumed by the team. After examining the data, the decision was taken to locate the TLC in Sheorinarayan, which had the highest concentration of teachers in a 5-km radius.

As with any process, often a systematic and methodical approach such as 'teacher town mapping' has to be finally balanced with other considerations, including the understanding of local conditions and challenges. This is particularly useful when there are competing contenders (teacher towns) for establishing a TLC in a specific geography. For example, the presence of a supportive, core group of teachers or functionaries and the availability of suitable infrastructure often end up becoming deciding factors in such situations.

The Chhattisgarh experience also demonstrates that the teacher town mapping approach is not without its own practical challenges. In the absence of a well-designed standard tool for collecting data, information captured can often be difficult to make sense of and could possibly be incomplete. For example, teachers would mention only the town of residence and not the complete address; even the address was often hard to decipher with references to unfamiliar landmarks. In addition, officially, teacher residences are recorded within the vicinity of their schools, as it is mandated by the government rule in some cases. However, in reality, the official address and the actual address could at times be different. Teachers' hesitance to share their actual address due to such a situation required persistent efforts to convey to them the purpose of the data collection and also win their trust in terms of confidentiality of the data they shared. Finally, the mapping process was geographically bounded by some administrative unit for practical convenience—generally, a particular block of the district. Therefore, it was not possible to adequately capture the data of teachers who were residing in a particular town but were posted in administrative units (blocks or districts) different from the one in which the particular town was situated.

4.2 Identification of TLC Facility

Besides the location, the venue and building of the TLC can be critical to its success. They should be easily accessible and be of a quality that makes teachers want to come and spend time in the centre.

The TLCs typically need to be located in a centrally accessible place, with proximity to public transport and availability of parking. Other considerations such as safety, especially for the women teachers returning late after an event in the evening, are also important considerations. Proximity to a market place or similar strategic locations add value in the sense that teachers find it more convenient to access places where completing household chores (e.g. purchase of regular household provisions) can be accomplished in the evening or weekends before or after attending TLC activities. In addition, given the purpose of the TLC, the facility needs to have adequate space to create a library of materials and resources as well as a large enough space to accommodate a gathering of at least 25–30 teachers for processes such as evening discussions, VTF sessions, or workshops.

Finding a specific venue and building that satisfy all the above criteria can often present a challenge, especially in small towns such as those the Foundation works in. Enlisting teacher support has been found to be helpful for this. In Dharsiwa and Abhanpur of Raipur, Chhattisgarh, a few teachers were involved in inspecting potential venues and deciding their suitability; opinion of these teachers was also sought before finalization.

According to a TLC Coordinator, the experience in Yadgir has been that, *'active partnership of the education department helps in sustaining the TLCs, where buildings are provided by schools and the cluster resource persons are closely involved. This gives them the feeling of ownership of the TLC. Many of the government trainings are being conducted in TLCs, because they find the ambience of the TLC is very good to organize their program. If the government sees the value add, they provide many things for the development of the TLC.'*

Therefore, in Karnataka, the team decided to establish most TLCs in government school premises, with the belief that it would help cultivate a sense of ownership by the teachers and department functionaries. Additionally, there was the thought that the teachers of the school that housed the TLC would also benefit additionally from the access to materials and activities. Though this approach has its benefits, these TLCs located within government facilities sometimes have space limitations, as it often becomes difficult to accommodate more than 30 teachers in the TLC. Facilities such as clean toilets and separate toilets for men and women, which are important considerations, may not be available and may affect attendance and participation. In such cases, the

Foundation makes appropriate improvements to the facility, with permission from the school authorities.

There are also cases of specific venues not working out. A case in point is that of a TLC originally located in Yadgir, which had to be relocated to Saidapur due to problems with the venue. Though housed in a BRC, it was in an extremely insalubrious neighbourhood and quite inaccessible, especially for women. Besides harbouring undesirable elements, it did not meet the standards of cleanliness. Therefore, the TLC was shifted to another location, namely Saidapur, where there was also a sizeable population of teachers present.

In other locations, TLCs have also been set up in private, leased premises that have presented the team with the optimal venue, among what is available. In some cases, the teams have felt that such spaces give them more flexibility compared to TLCs within government school premises. However, getting a private premise that meets the criteria mentioned earlier is also often not easy in the smaller locations.

4.3 Mobilisation of Teachers

Setting up well-equipped resource centres is only a small part of the job. As one of the TLC coordinators in Yadgir, describing his early experiences, articulated, *'We assumed that teachers would come to the centre if a TLC is established with resources such as books, equipment, and kits. But few teachers regularly came to the TLC for months.'*

In retrospect, this experience is understandable and possibly should have been anticipated. The fundamental principle behind TLCs is that teachers must visit, participate in activities, and utilise the TLC of their own volition. In a culture where teacher autonomy is limited and they are accustomed to 'orders from the department', this calls for a continuous, though slow process, of cultural transformation over a period. Experience has shown that the process of establishing and actualising the vision of the TLC as a vibrant space for teacher professional development will necessarily take time, effort, and energy and cannot be fast forwarded. It is somewhat unrealistic to expect teachers to start visiting TLCs voluntarily without any efforts at mobilisation in a climate where participatory spaces for teachers are inadequate and they are generally deemed powerless in a rigid and hierarchical bureaucratic system of education administration. Team members working towards socialising the concept of a TLC amongst teachers have very soon understood this and scaled efforts and expectations accordingly.

4.3.1 Teachers' experience of the Foundation's work

The task of mobilisation becomes slightly easier in the contexts where teachers have had previous, direct academic experience with the Foundation—for example, in government in-service trainings, where Foundation members may have facilitated or provided academic support. For example, in Tonk, by the time BACs (the earlier avatar of the TLCs) were set up, the Foundation had around 6 years of accumulated goodwill at the level of the system, while individual members had built a good rapport and relationship with individual teachers and functionaries. The teachers had seen the work of the Foundation and had a certain faith in it, in terms of purpose and quality. Even in relatively newer locations such as the districts of Chhattisgarh, participation in official platforms such as cluster academic meetings allowed the Foundation members to engage teachers academically, thus giving the teachers a sense of what to expect if they choose to engage voluntarily with the TLC.

These opportunities are used not only to implicitly convey the potential relevance and quality of teacher professional development engagements of the Foundation but also, more directly, to create awareness about the TLC. Such platforms that bring together large number of teachers provide

opportunities for personal and group interactions, where Foundation members convey to teachers the idea and presence of a TLC that is accessible to them and that can be used by the teachers voluntarily towards their professional development. In these interactions, besides basic information about the TLC closest to them, efforts are made to simulate the nature of resources and professional development experience that they can expect to access and experience in and through the TLCs.

Large-scale academic events that were organised—for example, a research seminar or talk by educationists with teachers—were also used as an opportunity for teachers to experience the Foundation’s work and to spread the word about the TLC. For example, in Yadgir, such conferences around various common themes related to education and schools attract as many as 150–400 teachers, giving an opportunity to reach across to a large number of teachers and encourage them to engage in TLC activities. Similarly, in Chhattisgarh, a play by a prominent social activist and theatre artist attracted 250–350 teachers at each staging.

Once the TLC is up and running, the professional development engagements, especially in the early stages, also act as catalysts for more teachers to engage. While this is true for any engagement, certain types of engagements have a broader appeal and hence have a greater influence on teacher mobilisation. A case in point is the evening discussions in the Yadgir TLCs, which focus on issues of education that may interest most teachers and thus are able to attract a wide teacher audience. These are also more frequent because there are many people who are able to conduct these discussions; unlike subject-specific discussion and events that require appropriate subject experts. These evening discussions have therefore been helpful in attracting first-time participants, and an enriching experience has encouraged teachers to continue engaging in such discussions as well as try out other TLC engagements. The experiences of participant teachers in the TLC itself are understood in more detail later in this paper.

4.3.2 Personal connect and persuasion

It is not sufficient to impart information and create awareness about the TLC. In particular, in the early stages, teachers need to be persuaded to visit the TLC, through school-based and even one-to-one interactions with team members from the Foundation. As expressed by a TLC coordinator, *‘When we went to schools with TLC materials such as books, educational articles, and science equipment, displayed and explained them in the school, then the teachers started coming to the TLC in the evening hours. Simply opening a resource centre will not accomplish the purpose; we will have to go to teachers and support them.’*

Even with the head start they had, the team members in Tonk met with block functionaries, around 10 in every block, to communicate the concept of the centres. In the words of a team member, *‘we organised different types of activities in and across the block to reach out to all the teachers in the block at different places, such as in schools, block resource centres, and Panchayati Samiti meeting halls. Such events support increasing the footfall at the TLCs.’* Approximately, 400–500 teachers and 35 nodal headmasters per block were reached through these meetings and trainings over a year. VTFs facilitated by the Foundation, where groups of teachers gathered for discussions at periodic intervals, were also used for this purpose, and so were school visits.

In Yadgir, Karnataka, when the first three TLCs, namely Kembhavi, Shorapur, and Narayanpur were established, the initial response was not very encouraging. To encourage teachers to visit the respective TLC, the TLC coordinators started to visit the schools to familiarise teachers with the concept of TLCs and to keep them updated on its activities; during school visits, they would carry sample resources and teaching learning materials and teach students to be able to demonstrate to teachers the use of these resources. At some locations such as Kembhavi, the members also carried

leaflets about the TLC to distribute to teachers. In Saidapur, where the TLC was established in the year 2014, the TLC coordinator identified the 'hotspots' where teachers met frequently, and visited those areas to interact with teachers. Several informal meetings with teachers were held in public spaces such as the railway station and restaurants. There were instances where teachers who became aware of the TLC came on an exploratory visit, bringing their peers with them. Some other teachers came because of word of mouth.

In Chhattisgarh TLCs, with the benefit of experience from other states, efforts were made to involve teachers and create awareness even before the TLCs opened. Besides the cluster academic meetings and events mentioned earlier, during the school visits, team members carried resource materials and tried to initiate conversations with teachers on pedagogical issues, inviting them to the TLCs for further in-depth discussions. A *WhatsApp* group was set up consisting of those functionaries and members who had been contacted and for whom contact numbers were available. Similarly, flyers were printed and circulated amongst teachers.

4.3.3 *More 'motivated' teachers as early adopters*

While an attempt was made to mobilise as many teachers as possible, in Yadgir, a set of criteria were also used to focus on what the team thought would be the most receptive teachers. These teachers were identified during regular interactions in the course of school visits, cluster meetings, and workshops. Attributes such as alignment with the values of the Foundation, capability in terms of subject knowledge and understanding, pro-activeness and potential to learn and take the learning to the classroom, and the ability to influence their peers were sought. However, the teachers reserved the right to use their judgment to participate in a particular event or not.

In Tonk, school visits were made, in the course of which, 20–25 like-minded teachers were identified in each block, through whom other teachers could be reached. As in Karnataka, the team had the idea to work with the most receptive teachers, and to create a further momentum and enthusiasm among other teachers through these early adopters.

In Dharsiwa and Abhanpur TLCs of Chhattisgarh, a similar group of teachers, commonly referred to as the 'core group', have been closely involved with the TLCs since the conceptual stage. They have been consulted before decisions pertaining to the functioning of the TLC have been finalised. These teachers, along with some other regulars, seem vested in the success of the TLC and have been providing suggestions and making efforts to mobilise more teachers.

4.3.4 *Continuous efforts needed*

As some of these efforts bore fruit and the teachers became more comfortable with the idea of the TLC, the footfalls increased. However, even with the passage of time, TLCs need to continue to mobilise teachers for various specific events. The pattern of mobilisation varies for each of these events. For example, certain TLCs use messaging services such as *WhatsApp* and SMS for VTF sessions and other recurring activities. Flyers and newsletters are also used to communicate information about events. In certain TLCs, like in Surpur, the practice is to routinely remind teachers on the day of the event despite sending them an SMS few days before.

Currently, to ensure that teachers know about the activities of the TLC, in some locations, a monthly calendar of events listing all the forthcoming events, including some detail on content, facilitator, and date, is prepared by each team and displayed on the noticeboard outside the centre and other locations such as the block-level offices. Moreover, other mediums such as *WhatsApp* groups, school visits, and participation in govt. trainings are used to communicate with the maximum number of teachers at the beginning of the month.

Though participation is voluntary in nature, the implicit endorsement of the government functionaries exerts a positive pressure to attend. Therefore, soliciting the support of the functionaries, consulting them and taking their feedback, and ensuring their presence at special events at the TLC are all implicit ways to encourage teachers to attend.

4.4 Curation of Teacher Experiences in the TLCs

To attract teachers, to sustain their interest and excitement around the TLCs, and for their visits to the TLC to be genuinely productive and additive to their professional development, teachers' experiences at the TLC play a significant role. Some broad principles emerge from the experience of the three states.

4.4.1 Resources and materials

TLCs need to ensure a good mix of resources and materials spanning a range of subjects and of adequate depth so that there is something for all subject teachers at different levels. The mix of resources should include both academic and non-academic resources. Sharing her experience, a primary school teacher from Tonk talks about the library in the TLC she visits and how it has enabled both her and her students. *'The library in the TLC has very useful books for teachers and children. I frequently come and read books here, especially those of Gijubhai, who directly worked with children and shared his experiences. He used stories in teaching predominantly. I wanted to do a similar experiment in my school. I am a primary school teacher and we do not have a library in school. I could do it through the TLC. The Foundation issues us a bunch of story books for a certain time. Children's books in the TLC are colourful, have small stories, poems, and rhymes with big pictures. Thus, a small library is running in my school.'*

Having a variety of resources of general interest has also helped generate footfalls. For example, in Yadgir, initially, a few teachers came, read newspapers and magazines, and used the internet; some came because they were attracted by recreational facilities such as carom and other games and only with time, they got involved in academic activities. In the TLCs set up earlier, academic activities were introduced only gradually. In Rajasthan, the TLCs have activities and materials for children too. Therefore, TLCs would need to include some resources of general interest (newspapers, local literature and well-known fictional works, computers, and a few recreational facilities); this would appeal to a wider base of the intended audience for the TLCs, facilitate footfalls, encourage socialisation in the TLC space, and generate momentum for more structured professional developmental activities.

A constant upgradation and expansion of resources is important to build and sustain teacher interest and engagement as well as respond to teacher requirements that may not be present in the TLCs. For example, in Yadgir, an internal study on resource utilisation in the TLCs found that certain TLCs demonstrated a sharp drop in utilisation after the majority of the teachers had used the resources available in the TLC. Therefore, registers are maintained to track resource usage patterns amongst teachers, and materials and resources are replenished and upgraded through a continuous monitoring of the usage and requirements data captured from teachers.

4.4.2 Professional development activities

It has been observed across sites that especially in the early stages of their engagement with the TLCs, teachers visit mainly to attend specific events. Therefore, one way to ensure healthy participation of teachers in the TLC is to ensure that activities are frequent, relevant, and varied, that these appeal to a large base of teachers.

The mix of teacher professional development activities in Yadgir and Tonk TLCs is given in the tables below.

Table 1: Mix of activities in Yadgir TLCs, 2016

	Formal workshops	Conferences and seminars	Evening discussions	Voluntary forums	Mela	Other events
Number of events	107	21	142	206	29	2
Hours of engagement	1357	105	282	647	150	9
Teachers' attendance	657	534	214	702	435	224

Table 2 : Mix of activities in Tonk TLCs, 2016–17

	Formal workshops	Conferences and seminars	Evening discussions	Voluntary forums	Mela	Other events*
Number of events	13	11	142	95	3	188
Hours of engagement	220	41	282	277	18	365
Teachers' attendance	335	800	214	1222	1000	188

**Also includes events targeted primarily at children, community members etc.*

Even in the Chhattisgarh TLCs, which are in a relatively nascent stage, one can see such a good mix of activities, including workshops, informal discussions, VTFs, and other events. The number of hours of engagement and number of teachers reached are of course significantly lesser in the early stages.

Building a long-term perspective and engagement on teacher professional development amongst teachers requires a sustained process of interaction with teachers over a period on a variety of issues, including various perspectives on education as well as subject-specific content and pedagogy. Subject-specific discussions, workshops, and VTFs seem to be of the greatest interest and value to teachers, probably since they have direct applicability to their classroom. Therefore, besides a good mix of activities, it is important to simultaneously ensure an adequate number of workshops, activities, and discussions that are subject-specific, directly connected to classroom teaching-learning processes, and addressing different levels of the school system, especially as groups of teachers start congregating into voluntary peer forums to pursue specific areas of interest in the TLCs. This is also reflected in the growth of such professional development activities over the years, as can be seen below.

Table 3: Workshops at Yadgir TLCs over the years

	Number of events	Hours of engagement	Teachers' attendance
2013	14	112	134
2014	38	304	286
2015	60	496	342
2016	107	1357	657

Table 4: VTFs at Tonk TLCs over the years

	Number of events	Hours of engagement	Teachers' attendance
2012–13	54	138	475
2013–14	59	157	590
2014–15	81	223	756
2015–16	93	265	992
2016–17	95	277	1222

Teachers seem to find value in the variety of experiences offered by the TLCs. A teacher from Tonk remarked, *'There are many things that we came to know for the first time after coming here. In the past, I used to think that textbooks are the only means of teaching children. This is because we experienced the same in our school; moreover, nobody talks about this during pre-service training at all. But participation in activities and reading books suggested by members give me a totally different experience on teaching learning issues, which I adopt in my daily practices in school. Now, I sit with children and use worksheets, videos, and other relevant resources for teaching.'*

Efforts are being made to ensure that these stand-alone activities do not remain stand-alone and there is a sense of continuity and coherence among the activities to the extent possible, orienting teachers to the more long-term professional development processes. A TLC coordinator in Yadgir mentioned, *'An integrated approach is crucial for the sustainability of TLCs. One activity feeds in to other, for example, during the mela, usage of the TLC will be very high. TLC is space for many such events'*. The Teacher Curriculum Framework largely helps in enabling this.

4.4.3 Responding to contextual considerations

While there is a certain common shared understanding across locations on the content and modes of teacher professional development activities—including a Teacher Curriculum Framework—there are always contextual considerations that need to be considered. These responses to contexts sometimes subsequently become part of the common shared understanding and are adapted and assimilated across locations.

For example, while VTFs were started as platforms for teachers to come together, these have been expanded in different locations to address other stakeholders. In Yadgir TLCs, the Voluntary Head Teachers Forum (VHTF) is a space similar to the VTFs, but dedicated to head teachers. Such a forum consists of 10–15 head teachers each, who meet once a month after school hours for a few hours. School-related challenges and experiences are discussed with a view to improving learning outcomes; the emphasis is on reflection, sharing, and learning from each other. Similarly, in Tonk, a voluntary functionaries meeting is held at the TLCs once a quarter. It is attended by Resource Persons, Block Elementary Education Officers, and the Additional Block Elementary Education Officers. Topics of discussion have covered quality education, school culture, rationale for creating nodal meetings, and their role in the capacity building of teachers, the mechanisms to identify competent master trainers, and so on.

Similarly, to encourage participation of women teachers in the TLC activities—which was a significant challenge the team faced—a Voluntary Lady Teacher Forum (VLTF) was initiated in Yadgir in 2015. It is an informal activity conducted at the TLCs after school hours, mostly during Saturday afternoons. The participation is voluntary and the teacher group is non-homogenous in terms of subjects. To begin with, the discussions have been on general academic issues, challenges, and perspectives of education. In the last year, there has been a shift towards more subject-specific aspects. From 12 VLTF meetings attended by 46 teachers in 2015, the numbers had increased to 31 meetings and 100 participant teachers in all.

In Tonk, some of the TLC activities include children, as the team feels, that this contributes to a sense of vibrancy in the centre. There is also a general sense in the team that the TLC activities should go beyond teachers and be a learning resource centre for the entire community. Currently, the children's activities include drawing, painting, collage making, and some library-related activities. Typically, 20–25 children participate in these activities.

Similarly, while there is a common minimum set of resources that are available in all TLCs, a lot of it needs to be contextually decided and made available. As a member of the Tonk team stated, *'While there is a requirement for books and teaching learning materials in all the centres, for the materials to be really useful, these need to be prepared by us or the teachers as per our interactions with them'*.

Contextual considerations happen at the level of individual activity design as well. For example, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, where the engagements had started recently, it was noticed that it takes a lot of persuasion to get teachers to engage with reading material. Since the teachers are not in the habit of engaging in reading and reflecting, they are best able to engage with shorter and simpler readings and those readings related to a recent workshop or discussion. Therefore, reading material and workshops need to be designed for them accordingly.

Ensuring convenience and ease of access contributes to the teacher's experience of the TLC. Further, operational aspects like such as timings of the TLC and specific activities need to keep the local context in mind. Initially, the TLCs in Tonk were open only during weekdays, unless there was an event or an activity, in which case it would be open on the weekend. However, with the realisation that taking time out during the workday was a struggle for teachers given the other demands on their time, the hours were changed to suit the convenience of the teachers. The TLCs are now kept open until late evenings during weekdays as well as on weekends to give teachers the largest possible window.

4.4.4 Availability of competent resource persons

It is imperative that a minimum standard of quality is met in all teacher professional development activities, so that teachers find the engagements meaningful and substantive. This is of course always important, but even more so when teachers are participating on their own volition, in their own time. The sheer range of professional development activities and the focus needed on quality means that TLCs should have competent resource persons. Besides academic competence, pulling together a coherent set of continuous professional development activities for teachers needs rigorous planning as well as coordination.

Since 2015, TLCs have become a key element of organisational strategy for the Foundation and a significant number of people have been assigned to the TLCs. Besides a TLC coordinator, other members in the District Institute team who are subject resource persons also share the TLC responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, each district team in the Foundation has resource persons who are competent in various school subjects, including its perspective, content, and pedagogy, as well as in broader areas of education. In addition to their subject-related responsibilities, they are expected to mobilise teachers working near the TLCs they were assigned to. When they are not engaged in specific professional development activities with teachers, they are present in the TLC to support and interact with teachers. Availability of subject resource persons has helped draw teachers to the TLC, as they benefit from such proximate expertise. There is considerable amount of planning involved—for example, regarding the planning of the academic calendar of the TLC well in advance—to ensure that as much academic expertise is available at each TLC.

To enable all of the above, the TLC coordinator and the team associated with managing and coordinating the TLC need to be locally based so that they are steeped in the context, can understand the teacher requirements, and are able to easily facilitate the day-to-day operational aspects of the TLC.

4.5 Participatory Processes and Ownership

4.5.1 In the early stages

Any new initiative has a better chance of success if it is able to capitalise on accumulated trust and goodwill. Therefore, in those locations where the Foundation has been present over a period of time, and teachers, head teachers, and government functionaries are acquainted with the work ethic, the quality of work, and intentions of the Foundation, it made sense to involve local teachers and functionaries at the very initial stages of setting up the TLC. This has been a lesson well learnt across sites and many initiatives.

Involving the key stakeholders in the process of visualisation and consulting them to better understand their needs helps to build buy-in and ownership by the teachers; teachers, head teachers, and functionaries are invested in the success of the TLC, and this engagement mitigates the challenges of teacher mobilisation at a later stage. Thus, a prior relationship and involvement of teachers at an early stage facilitates the success of the TLC.

According to a team member from Tonk, *'Involvement of all the key stakeholders is essential in the processes concerned with setting up the centre. This is possible when we have some level of interaction with all the key stakeholders (teachers, functionaries, youth, other community members, etc.) and build trust among each other towards our work and further course of actions before we proceed to open a centre in any particular geography. We have been working in Tonk since long and the Foundation members were regularly in touch with teachers and functionaries of the block through different engagements, and hence, there was a prepared ground to open the centres.'*

This can be seen clearly in the Karnataka experience as well. At the time of setting up the initial TLCs, after an initial conceptualisation exercise by members of the Foundation, preliminary discussions with the functionaries and teachers were held and a vision-building exercise for the TLCs was conducted in the block covering around 90 teachers in three batches. This exercise helped the team and the teachers to co-evolve the concept of TLCs. In addition, several teaching learning materials and academic resources were produced in workshops conducted with teachers, which were later placed in the TLC and used by visiting teachers. Another practice consistently followed in Yadgir that has facilitated this ownership and involvement is an initial 'exposure visit' wherever a new TLC is set up. A group of teachers and functionaries from the location of the TLC are taken on an exposure and orientation visit to another operational TLC. They interact with the TLC coordinator and teachers in the established TLC about TLC activities, materials, their experiences, and so on. This allows them a glimpse of the possibilities and motivates them to take some interest in the TLC in the newer locations.

A more recent example can be seen in Chhattisgarh too, in Dharsiwa. The Foundation had been working with a group of head teachers in Dharsiwa who supported the idea of TLCs and were willing to take the initiative to help establish the TLC. These head teachers drew up lists of teachers residing in and around Dharsiwa and communicated information about the TLC to teachers who were doing exemplary work in their respective schools. A meeting of 50 such identified teachers was called and the concept of TLC was put forward. This gave the team a head start in familiarising teachers with the concept of TLCs. As described earlier, teachers were also involved in early micro-processes such as identification of a suitable venue for the TLC.

4.5.2 In everyday operations

Co-opting teachers and building conviction and trust amongst the teacher community has played a significant role in developing a core teacher community at the TLCs and building ownership with teachers. One of the significant ways of winning this trust has been to ensure that all transactions and interactions with teachers are based on principles of respect and equality. As one of the regular participant school teachers in Tonk eloquently expresses, *'Since childhood, I am a person with reserved nature and do not speak much in trainings and meetings. Here also, initially, I did not participate much in discussions. But the open, conducive, and democratic atmosphere in the meetings and respect for everyone improved my confidence and made me expressive. This is also because the discussion here is very close to my work and I feel that I have much to say or add to the interactions.'*

In Chhattisgarh, during the inauguration of one of the TLCs, despite teacher expectations to the contrary, all teachers, rather than functionaries, were given centre stage at the opening. This has been a common thread running through experiences across all the locations. A supportive, non-threatening and non-hierarchical environment at the TLCs is created so that teachers feel valued

and respected. Their experiences are valued and their opinions and suggestions are sought on both the broader long-term activities of the TLCs and the more immediate quotidian operations. In Yadgir, feedback from teachers on the activities of the centre is taken periodically and a sincere effort is made to make changes accordingly in the forthcoming activities. Teachers notice this and appreciate the fact that their opinion is heard and acted upon.

4.5.3 More operational ownership by teachers

Across TLCs, efforts have to be made to encourage teachers to take greater ownership of the TLCs. In Yadgir, depending on the levels of teacher engagement and ownership, teachers in the TLCs facilitate sessions, assume responsibility of conducting programmes such as seminars where they take care of the arrangements such as seating, catering, mobilising teachers, and managing the guests and where they assume the responsibility of keeping the centre open even in the absence of the TLC coordinator. In one of the TLCs, at Narayanpur, Yadgir, a core committee has been formed to develop the TLC plan and execute activities throughout the year. The core committee comprises teachers, education functionaries, and the Foundation members. The committee meets once in three months and reviews the previous quarter's activities and plans for the next quarter.

It is felt that taking this further and giving more operational ownership of the TLCs to the teachers will make it more sustainable. This is understandably a gradual process. However, even at this stage, there are two instances of TLCs among the locations that were studied, where more operational ownership has been taken by the teachers: both in Yadgir district. The first instance is in Kakkera, where the TLC was initiated by a group of teachers who were meeting regularly and had expressed a desire to voluntarily manage the TLC. The second instance is in Rajankolur, where the initiative was taken up by the cluster resource coordinator. Based on these experiences, the Foundation members feel that trust and personal relationships help develop ownership. *'Personal relationship contributes a lot towards involving stakeholders in TLCs. If teachers feel worthy, they start owning the TLC; in a few places, teachers run the TLC even on holidays'*, remarked a TLC coordinator in Yadgir. The Foundation team has, nonetheless, been actively involved in a consultative capacity in terms of coordination, maintenance, mobilisation of teachers, and implementation of activities. Understandably, the momentum and rhythm in these TLCs are influenced by the teachers' work-related challenges and are different from the other TLCs which are primarily managed and driven by the Foundation team members.

5. Conclusion

A teacher resource centre as a strategy for teacher professional development is not new. As mentioned earlier, in the Indian context, such resource centres were first conceptualised as BRCs and CRCs under SSA. However, for a variety of reasons, so far, they have failed to accomplish the purpose that they were set up for. The Foundation's experience with the TLCs has however been heartening so far.

A viable and thriving TLC as conceptualised by the Foundation hinges upon the very fundamental recognition of teachers as professionals, who will in turn take their professional development into their own hands. In a culture where teachers rarely exercise their autonomy in matters of their professional development, this requires a paradigmatic change in deep-seated beliefs and attitudes. The ultimate vision for the TLC is to be a centre abuzz with activity, where teachers drop in of their own accord to browse through materials or resources or to look for materials while planning a lesson; where they look forward to conversations with their colleagues about their practice or consult with resource persons; where teachers gather in groups and get into passionate discussions about pedagogy and their work; where they take the lead in organising discussion forums and seminars and workshops and frequently facilitate the same; and where experience is shared, valued and learnt from. Actualisation of this vision will need building of capacities of

stakeholders, at scale, along with the creation of a culture and environment that is supportive and conducive for changed practices. TLCs seem to offer an opportunity and potential to be able to do both, that is, build capacity and culture.


At an individual level, there are teachers across locations who seem to be finding value in the TLC experience, though they may have initially required some persuasion to visit. Teachers' articulation of their experiences at the TLCs seems to indicate that the TLC has opened up new avenues of learning and access to resources as well as resource persons, both of which have direct relevance to their classroom. They believe that they have been exposed to new ways of thinking about education, children, teaching, and learning. They say that they have learnt to look beyond the textbook and to experiment with other teaching methods. A teacher who visits the TLC at Janjgir-Champa, Chhattisgarh described such an experience: *'One day, some videos on science models were being shown in the TLC—science models made by Shri Arvind Gupta; I found them very interesting. Reaching home, I couldn't resist making a model I had seen on 'balance'. I took a pipe and two bottles and kept trying until I successfully made the model. I was very happy and showed it to my wife and daughter. I took the model to school next day and demonstrated it to children. They were very happy seeing this. I have made 25 models until now. I feel that these models are helping me to generate curiosity among children in my class for learning science.'*

Besides access to resources and direct learning of tools and techniques that can be used in the classrooms, teachers believe that being part of TLC activities has boosted their confidence and motivation. *'I participated in few of the activities held in the TLC. The discussions here seem very positive and relevant to our work with children. Besides this, being here and participating in discussion has been a great source of motivation for us, which inspires us to work continuously and keep trying to do something creative and innovative',* said a teacher from Tonk. Similar thoughts were expressed by a teacher from Chhattisgarh who said, *'...as I started coming to the TLC regularly, especially in the English forum, I got confident to express myself. This is the place where I learned not only English but also how a child learns, the role of teacher, and the preparation needed to develop a child in a comprehensive manner. These led me to become a master trainer of language at the district level, a role that I performed with more confidence and zeal.'*

The collaborative spaces in the TLC have given them opportunities to share and learn from each other's experiences. *'My association with the TLC offered me opportunities to discuss many challenges that surfaced during classroom teaching. Discussion on language teaching has opened multiple dimensions of teaching-learning processes, which I have tried to implement in the classroom',* said a teacher from Chhattisgarh. The sharing of experiences and coming together also gives them a feeling of being part of a community and possibly enhances their identity as professionals. *'With the establishment of the TLC, the teaching fraternity has got a platform that promote and nurture shared learning',* said another teacher from Chhattisgarh.

Besides being able to address individual teachers' professional development needs in a variety of ways, TLCs have the potential to transform culture within the school education system. They have the potential to catalyse the building of a culture of learning and professionalism among teachers. However, getting there will clearly require sustained effort, persistence, and academic depth, as is visible from the experiences studied in this paper.

In Yadgir, Karnataka, where TLCs have been in existence the longest, we can see glimpses of the possibilities of such a culture beginning to take root. A teacher who is a regular visitor to the Kembhavi TLC in Yadgir talked about how teachers *'...used to hesitate to talk to others—thinking that they may feel bad about questions and doubts—but now, they freely talk with anybody and ask questions to clarify their doubts'*. Emphasising the central role that the TLC has come to play for teachers in this town, another teacher talked about how *'...the TLC is not the Foundation's, it is ours. In Kembhavi, if you want to meet any teacher, you visit the TLC'*. However, this is after almost a decade



of continuous, grounded work with the teachers and local-level structures of the government school system. The hope is that, given time and persistent, systematic efforts, this can be made to happen across other locations as well.

As the Foundation continues to set up TLCs in its various districts across different states, and many more TLCs reach a greater stage of maturity, it accumulates first-hand experience and insights. This will facilitate a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions and their experiences of TLCs: what makes for a vibrant TLC, what is it that makes teachers visit and sustain their interest, what benefits they derive from the TLC, how they connect it to their practice, and so on. This study, which focuses primarily on the Foundation's experience in setting up TLCs, paves the way for further studies that explore some of the above-mentioned aspects in the near future.



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