Participant Voice: the critical link to a Responsive Online PD Course

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Abstract

Teacher capacity building is crucial to facilitate teachers in generating meaningful learning experiences for their children. The states plan the TPD programmes keeping teacher's contexts and classroom diversity in view. A year earlier, the state involved resource persons to conduct TPD programmes through face-to-face workshops but this year it was compelled to conduct it online due to the COVID pandemic. This paper explores the online TPD organised by two state systems and one NGO. With four stories from the three contexts, this paper presents the framework used to design the responsive online TPD for these three organisations. It argues for the criticality of 'participant voice' to make the online teacher professional development programmes responsive to their needs during the period of the training. The paper presents insights from qualitative and quantitative data that informed modification of the online course for improving teacher performance during the period of the course.

This paper has four sections. The first section gives a background. The second section discusses training for 'teacher effectiveness' and comprises stories curated from qualitative data. The third section unpacks how experiences are generated by design. The fourth section details how participants' voices informed building a responsive design and the fifth section gives key learnings and insights for developing a responsive online TPD programme.

1. Introduction

The COVID pandemic led to the closure of schools across India affecting all children enrolled therein. With schools closed, the state had to adjust to the new normal of uncertainty. With no immediate answers to reopening schools, they directed the teachers to conduct online classes, connect with their students regularly and support their learning! The state wanted the teachers to engage meaningfully before schools could reopen. This led them to focus on teacher

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capacity building resulting in an immediacy to use digital technology, access online open sources of learning and digital platforms offering online courses. This had to be in line with their priorities as per the AWP&B.

The priorities of three states under consideration were - Rajasthan introduced NCERT textbooks and initiated a 90 hours capacity building programme for teaching Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Science to teachers of classes 6-8, Uttar Pradesh initiated a 45 hours capacity building programme for the State Resource Group in 75 districts to prepare its schools for NAS 2021 and the NGO partner in Maharashtra wanted to develop meaningful learning programme for the children in disadvantaged communities to address their 'learning gaps'.

2. From Competence to Effectiveness

Teacher professional development courses build 'capacities' of teachers. In order to unpack 'capacities', Medley (1982) uses three concepts - competence, performance and effectiveness as given below.
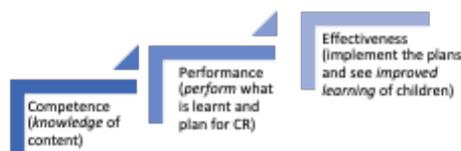
In addition, within the education system, an *improvement in teacher performance requires enabling conditions; further, its conversion into teacher effectiveness requires supportive conditions.*
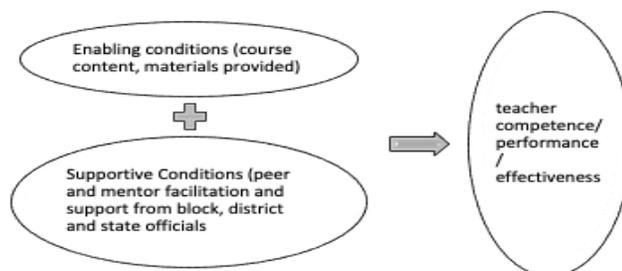
This is possible by design! We will explore the elements of design (in sections 3 and 4 of the paper) but first we highlight the most important condition i.e. **engagement and participation**.

2.1 Stories from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra[5]

The four stories below are curated to describe the 'engagement and participation' of the participants[6] enrolled in TPD courses in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

2.1.1 District Level Mentor (Rajasthan)

As a DLM, Khemji (name changed) tells his teachers on the teachers' chat group to organise the offline tasks done during the training and undertake this training keeping the post-COVID situation in mind. "I am the medium between the state mentor and the teachers who can 'endure' from both the ends", he says, referring to the push for enrolments and completions by the SLMs (state level mentor) to the pulls of teachers who grapple with applying the content it in their own diverse contexts.

Khemji contacted his teacher group from the list drawn from the state teacher's portal in the meeting led by the BEO. Initially, he resolved their login and access related issues.

After about a week of doing so, he led the teachers to academic discussion taking cues from the '*vaicharik vistar*' and 'segment for mentors'.

Initially he checked his teacher's course progress by looking at the block report[7] once in 2 weeks but now he doesn't do it often as he can sense it from the group discussion.

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[5] Stories except Maharashtra are generated from data collected as a part of case study research in the state programmes. The state permission and participant consent for the same was duly taken. The story from Maharashtra is based on trainer's experience with the group.

[6] The online TPD courses in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were supported by RSCERT and SCERT respectively, with support from UNICEF in both states. The online TPD in Maharashtra was supported by STCI and Pratham. Participants in Rajasthan included 1.2 lakh state and district level mentors and teachers; Uttar Pradesh included 225 State Resource Group members and Maharashtra comprised leaders and resource persons of Pratham and STCI working for 21 schools in Pune and Velhe.

[7] This near real-time report was available on the training portal

He reported to the SLM that two teachers in his group discontinued the course (one retired and the other's name was listed on the portal by mistake) thereafter their name was removed from the state teachers' portal.

Teachers in his group completed the course as the language of the course was accessible, the content was sequenced 'like a ladder' and it had links to relevant documents it referred to (like the NCERT LOs 2017, NCF2005, NPE2019). These 'links', he said, 'aroused a feeling' of looking at them for the course content, textbooks and these references are interconnected to each other.

2.1.2 Teacher - Rajasthan

Bhupendraji (name changed) teaches up to 40 children in a monograde classroom in a rural school. He maintains a time-table for doing the course where he lists course segments to be done each day. He does this course after the school hours as during school hours during the pandemic he has to visit children's homes to assign homework, check it, keep a record and upload it for a state programme.

He says the course is 'hectic' as one has to think and type answers. The other course he is attending requires him to see a video and 'click through' content to get a certificate. This makes many of his colleagues happy as they don't have to think and it gets done. With this course however, he says, one is able to answer only if one is teaching sincerely in the classroom.

He had problems with starting the course as 'initially there was a load on the server.'

They have set timing for discussion on this group (10 am-4 pm). These discussions and maths activities given in the course helped him connect content to children's context. He keeps printouts of course segments that he finds useful as 'we do not get such material easily'. More so, as he is preparing for exams and the material covers his syllabus.

2.1.3 State Resource Group - Uttar Pradesh

Gaurav (name changed) is one of the 3 SRG's selected from his district. He undertook two workshops before the pandemic. Then, he could not understand the concepts but now he knows what it means as he has applied it to his work. During the training he did not like it when the trainer said 'मन से लिखिए की टीचरस को कैसे प्रभावित करेंगे'. He referred to that letter to draft a letter and designed specific activities (connected to learning outcomes) and shared with the teacher's group. To his surprise, the teachers' shared activities they used to teach the children and this kept going on for several days. All this without issuing a government order! He says.

He particularly liked the training for it taught him 'सोचने के आयाम विकसित करने के लिए बताया गया और कार्य करने का तरीक़ा। कार्य तो सभी करते हैं मैं भी करता था लेकिन जो सोचने कि विधा और सोचने के आयाम मैं आप लोगों के द्वारा सीख पाया'' वह काम आ रहा है।

2.1.3 Maharashtra Story

The two field teams participated in meetings, training and various discussions with IE (technical and academic partner) using online meeting platforms, document sharing utilities and apps to collaboratively create an Emergency Education Kit (EEK). The goal was to address the imperative of connecting with children who were inadvertently being left out from the state efforts to continue education during the lockdown.

ICT knowledge, skills and tools were explored and applied to produce EEK booklets, which is a print package containing a variety of learning activities and was reached to children. Initially all members were overwhelmed with the idea of creating an education kit for children. As work progressed team members learnt new skills. One member shared that the process of kit preparation taught her to think from the perspective of the third person who would actually be doing the activity. Another member said that he learnt the importance of developing an understanding of the material being created…making it amenable for multiple creative actions, …prompting children to think…

Team members shared that the online training sessions taught them how to speak and express their opinions. They said they learnt approaches and strategies that could be used to engage

participants in an online mode. Practice sessions which were part of the training, helped increase the team's confidence on designing and conducting training of their own.

3. Generating Experience by Design

These stories of engagement and participation in the course bring out nuances of each participant's experiences doing an online course developed by the state.

The system is responsible for building teacher's capacities by 'giving opportunities for self-improvement and to learn the latest advances in their professions...Platforms will be developed so that the teachers share ideas and best practices…Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities will...cover the latest pedagogies...' (NPE 2019, p.17).

For the adult learners, relevance and application to immediate needs makes the learning engaging. If the learning opportunities do not meet their needs or do not address their immediate problems, they are unlikely to take initiatives for that learning, however important it may be.

Considering so, the learning designs of these three courses did the following,

3.1 Setting Goals – Connecting to Needs and Relevance

The challenge during the lockdown was how to engage the learners, whether children or adults (i.e. teachers, block, district and state level resource persons). Given their diverse backgrounds, contexts and needs, it was important that they,

- continue to learn at their own pace
- engage with other learners
- addresses the diversity of learner capabilities
- needs and
- the availability of resources (device and data considering these are online courses)

These aspects informed design and development of the course to generate an 'equitous experience'.

3.2 Ways of learning – Course Design and Training

Learning is a process of transforming experience into new learning by reflecting upon it and applying it to a new situation thereby consolidating what is learnt. Therefore, moving forward in a stepwise manner is most important to transforming what is learnt to practising it. These aspects are important components and are included as part of the logical design of courses offered in the three states.[8]

The table below lists ways of learning (derived from constructivism) on the left and devices to generate experiences of these ways of learning on the right. The principle of learning being constructivist (Vygotsky), the design remains responsive to learner context and needs.

This is depicted by colour-coded sections for the three courses developed for participants in the states (R-Rajasthan, UP-Uttar Pradesh and M-Maharashtra).

Ways of Learning	Design of Course and Training	R	U P	M
Linking with prior experiences				
- Able to connect with local conditions	• Introductory video			
- Able to visualize different contexts	• Teachers' stories			
- Able to merge/link with prior knowledge	• Examples of actual classrooms			
Reflection and Analysis				
- Think about the various aspects in empirical examples.	• Questions asked after teacher stories			

- To be able to connect past practical experiences with relevant principles.	• Questions to facilitate understanding of principles			
- **Reading**				
Based on needs identified during thinking- reflection process	In parts – major principles in brief			
- Immediate implementation after reading and understanding	• Links to documents, Pdfs			
- **Writing**	•			
Implement thinking and understanding gained from reading	Suggestions to write / describe examples of classroom practice based on theory or principles of interest.			
- Convert theory/ principles to practice	• Plan implementation of understanding gained from reading • Describe relevance of reading to context			
- **Conversations and Discussions**				
Verbalize to elaborate on acquired understanding	Questions for discussions on Whatsapp groups			
- To be able to visualize from different perspectives	Questions to facilitate various aspects of planning for implementation			
- **Consolidation and Making Inferences**				
Preparation guidelines for future work	Suggestions after every session.			

Compilation of suggestions and activities for learning	Questions to facilitate writing of inferences			

3.3 Technology to assist Instructional Design

Designing the course based on learning principles was one aspect of the course, the other, an important aspect being, technology to assist constructivist design. Data from participants' usage and performance in tests as well as case studies, in the courses validated the otherwise common-sense insights -

1. Videos and texts are often not sufficient in terms of generating internalisation, contextualisation, or application and need to be supported through interaction. (Refer to story 2.1.2)

2. Connecting with classroom situations and actions naturally gets immediate involvement, even on complex theoretical issues – hence case studies / situations / exemplars are often more helpful than theoretical explanations. (Refer to story 2.1.1)

3. Creating teacher groups supported by trained local mentors adds tremendous value, but only where mentors support more and monitor less. (Refer to story 2.1.1)

4. Open ended questions (with no clear answers given) generate discussion and thinking, more than 'complete' information. (Refer to story 2.1.3 and 2.1.4)

4. Participant's Voice for building a Responsive Design

In all the three courses developed, 'participants' voices' were critical to adapting the course to learners' needs. These 'voices' were captured through,

Voices captured through	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	Maharashtra
Online Webinars	SLM and DLM	--------	Leaders and Resource Persons
Interviews	SLM, DLM and Teachers	SRG	Resource Persons

Online Chats	-do-	-do-	-do-
Backend Data	-do-	-do-	------------

4.1.1 Voices from the Webinars

During the period of the online training, the participants have webinars to share their feedback and to build their capacities. This is a sample from a webinar hosted after piloting the online course. The insights from this webinar were used to refine the course before releasing it for 1.2 lakh elementary school teachers in Rajasthan.

Participants were asked to share their 'overall experience' of the course. Teachers were asked to share first followed by SLMs and DLMs.	
Participant Feedback	**Implication for Scaling Up**
Participants shared that the, ● The course is better than the online course as it can be done at your own pace and time. ● Each part has to be understood before proceeding to next. ● Use of *shuddh* Hindi should be avoided. *Bolchal ki bhasha* will be preferred. ● Including PPT in AV will help.	● Use of *bolchal ki bhasha* rather than *shuddh* Hindi that can be easily understood. ● Include PPT in AV for making it more useful.

4.1.2 Voices from The Interviews

Interviews conducted with the participants informed the instructional design. Two examples (from Rajasthan) are given to clarify this.

Finding 1: The SLMs express the need for course to be released before teachers so they can address issues arising better.

Implication: The course should be released a week in advance.

Finding 2: *Since DLMs are teachers, they might have not dealt with using data in the past to take decisions so it is important that the teachers use data to take strategic decisions.*

Implication: The capacity building workshop should address this.

4.1.3 Voices from the Data

4.3.1.1 *Finding 1: There is a significant difference between scores of districts where SLMs completed the module and districts where SLMs did not complete the module.*

Results from Independent Samples T-Test on Scores from Districts where SLMs completed the course and Districts where SLMs did not complete the module showed value of .042 (less than the significance level alpha at .05)

4.3.1.2 Finding 2: There is a significant relationship between DLM login status and Teacher Performance [ANOVA 'F value' = 9.804]

DLM Login Status	
1	85% and Above
2	60%-84%
3	Below 60%
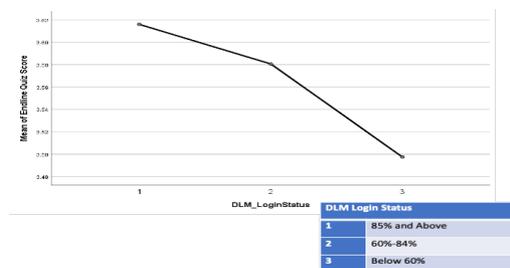
5. Learnings and Insights for a Responsive Online TPD

The key learnings and insights from the online TPD in the three states is summed up as,

5.1 Instructional Design with a focus on Equity

Given the diverse backgrounds, contexts and needs of the teachers it is crucial to design a course where teachers can continue to learn at their own pace and engage with other learners as learning is facilitated when we engage in dialogue with our peers and more experienced learners. For doing so, the availability of resources (device and data) should also be taken into consideration.

5.2 Technology to assist the Learning process

Technology should be utilized not only to increase access but also generate effective learning experiences for teachers to strengthen planning and preparation, classroom organization and assessment of learning within the classroom, within the school (by the supportive supervisors at block, district and state levels). (NEP 2016)

5.3 Data to inform a Responsive Design

The major shift from face-to-face to an online platform is access the kind of data that can assist in making the instructional design responsive to teacher needs.

In each of the above, the role of State is crucial in realigning existing structures and resources to decentralise the learning process. While the state sets priorities for teacher trainings, decides the sequence in which they should be organised taking into account the teachers backgrounds, how teachers learn, when is technology assistive and which modes can be utilised for dialogue with their peers and more experienced teachers, it should also engage with participant voices to make the online TPD contextual to teachers needs.

References:

- Medley, D.M. (1982). Teacher Competency Testing and the Teacher Educator. Charlottesville: Association of Teacher Educators and the Bureau of Educational Research, University of Virginia.
- MHRD (2019). National Education Policy 2019. GoI.