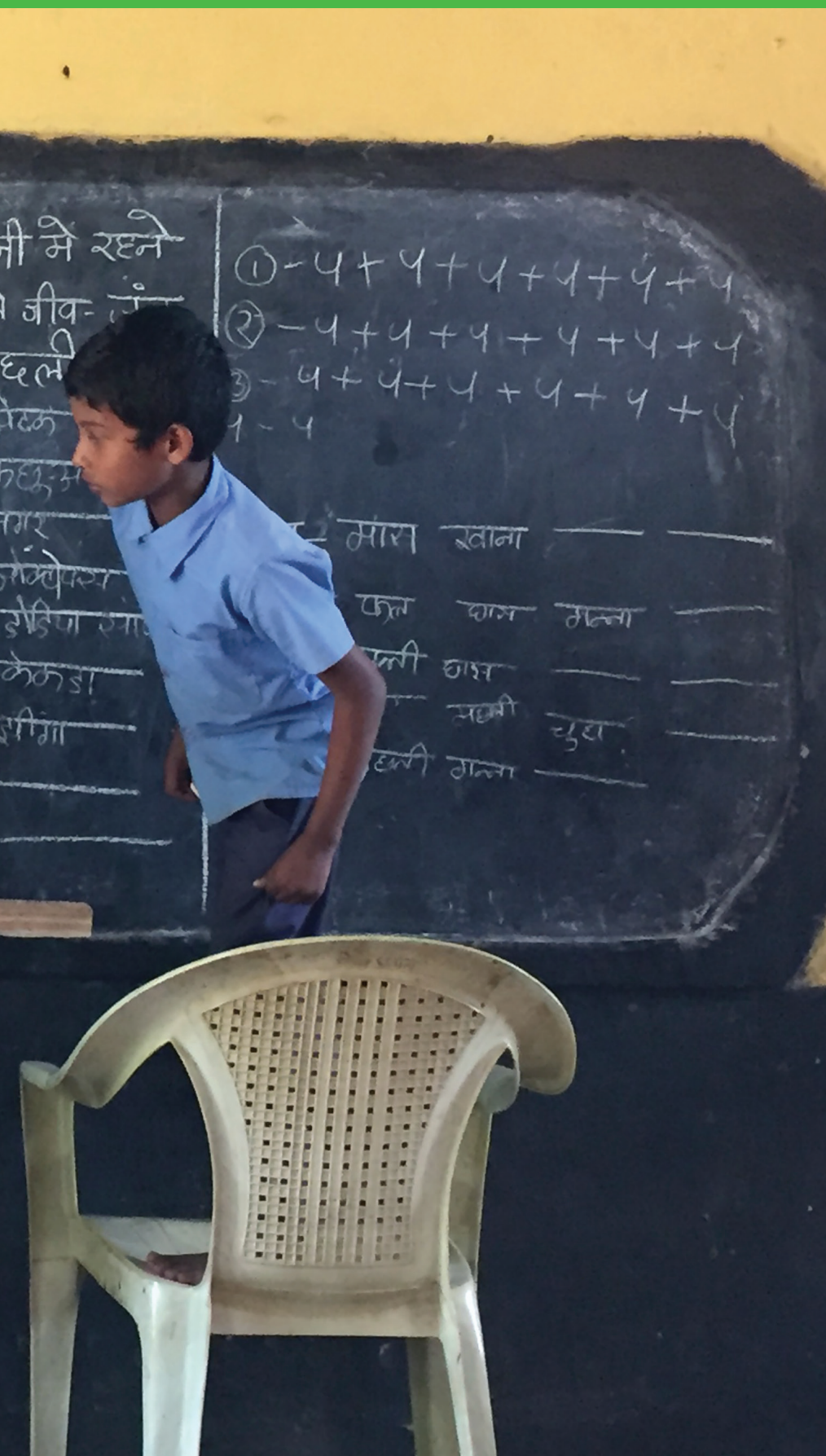




THE PROMISE OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

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India Education Collective

By exploring multiple perspectives through collective leadership opportunities, teachers are more willing and better equipped to bring change to the classroom.



Most leadership programs in the education sector have spotlighted the role of school administrators and principals to improve student outcomes by influencing teachers. Collective leadership creates an opportunity to rethink that focus. Collaborative learning structures can create a strong and effective network of influence among teachers themselves to improve their classroom impact.

Collective leadership employs a sociological lens to locate leadership in the context and relationships from which it emerges. It has been defined as a process of collective meaning making, developmental capacity building, and collaborative action. Its focus is directed toward developing groups of people empowered to act together to bring about change.¹

This goal is what lies at the core of teacher collectives, which are teacher-led peer learning communities designed to create democratic and reflective learning spaces for teachers. Teachers are empowered as structures are initiated within the education system for them to deliberate about how learning happens, share their challenges with each other, and execute solutions that are within their reach. The critical factor for these deliberations to be effective is that they are based on student learning data and evidence collected from classrooms.

Teacher Collectives: Perspectives and Solutions

India Education Collective has been implementing teacher collectives across eight states of India. They are facilitated monthly as teachers from a cluster (an administrative unit of 15-20 schools devised by the education department in India) come together to review, plan, and share their classroom experiences.

Since the teacher collective meetings are held at the cluster level, interaction occurs among teachers with varying beliefs and motivation. They offer multiple perspectives to help each other look at similar problems within their respective contexts. Since the solutions do not come from

any external source and rather stem from similar classroom experiences, they receive ready acceptance from other teachers. Best practices are identified from within their classroom context and thus strengthen the collective self-esteem of teachers as professionals.

One of the struggles faced by teachers is the high risk associated with experimentation with their classroom processes. They do not have access to labs where they can prototype and refine; every new idea has to be tested in real time with their students. Teacher collectives offer safe ways for teachers to practice and improve upon their practices. When teachers' efforts over a sustained period of



time are translated into visible changes in student responses, those new practices of teaching-learning are more easily adopted by others.

Teacher collectives are unique spaces that offer opportunities for teachers to deliberate on the challenges faced in their classrooms and find solutions among themselves. This process empowers them and strengthens their self-esteem. It further develops ownership among teachers as key stakeholders of the education system who have agency to innovate and problem solve. The process slowly shifts their mindset away from being dependent and accountable only to the principal and administrators, and builds a peer accountability mechanism that rests on mutual respect and learning.

How It Works

The teacher collective process is structured into four parts:

1. Sharing of the previous month's classroom experiences
2. Analysis and planning of monthly syllabus
3. Development of learning tools
4. Enrichment through new learning.



Open dialogues about how learning happens prompt teachers to reflect on their beliefs about learning and their role as a teacher. The sharing of classroom experiences builds trust and motivates growth by showing evidence of change through effort.

In the planning process for the month, the teachers identify learning outcomes and map them to concepts given in school textbooks. As teachers analyze the learning content, they are

able to break the learning outcomes into abilities and concepts. This becomes the input for the teachers' monthly planning. Teachers develop concept-based learning plans that help them work with students at varying learning levels.

As teachers evaluate the learning processes in their classrooms, the focus shifts toward abilities that lay at the foundation of learning—abilities to interpret, question, observe, comprehend, communicate,

and analyze. Through reflection and experience, teachers reach the understanding that multiple abilities require multiple learning environments. Thus, they transition from a formal approach of teaching, where they deliver information, to one in which they become facilitators who enable children to learn and discover. They design experiences to give children opportunities to discuss among themselves, ask questions, experiment, go outside their classrooms, and





connect their textbook learning with their real lives. Children's existing knowledge is valued and discussed in the classroom.

At the start of the teacher collective process, only a few teachers begin this journey of transformation. As they share their experiences and success stories from their classrooms with their peers, however, other teachers become motivated to initiate small changes in their own teaching practices. Then, the enthusiastic response from children and their improved engagement in learning activities provide a strong impetus for teachers to bring a sustained shift in their classroom processes.

As teachers review their planning in detail every month, they require data on students' learning needs. Initiating formative assessment practices becomes important and teachers are introduced to observation diaries, student portfolios, and a qualitative rubric that enables them to capture the learning level of every student across multiple abilities. With this information, the teachers are able to plan more effectively and provide the necessary support to every child in their

classrooms. Furthermore, they are able to create an environment in which they can reflect on different learning styles and understand each student in a more holistic manner. In the resulting inclusive learning environments, each child is supported to learn at her own pace. Identifying every child's learning level and including that in the learning plan then provides teachers with data points to further their own learning. Thus, a continuous loop of ongoing learning is created for both teachers and their students.

In contrast to traditional professional development approaches in which the teacher is entirely dependent on the trainer for information, activities, and plans, teachers in the initiative build their capacities to manage and facilitate their own learning environments. Based on teacher-identified needs, they determine materials required to further develop the approach in their classrooms. Teacher collectives enable teachers to develop a sense of ownership in their learning environments.

Implementation and Growth

Teacher collectives in India were first implemented in 2005, in two clusters of Mysore District, Karnataka. Now, they are currently in practice in 1,700 clusters in 26 districts across eight states. The focus has been to initiate teacher collectives in two-three clusters in a district and, after a period of three years in which collectives reach maturity, and through advocacy of the impact in the chosen clusters, enable Block and District Education Departments to scale and institutionalize the process across blocks and districts.

To date, teacher collectives have been scaled by education departments at block, district, and state levels in Meghalaya, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. In 2020, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, 113,249 primary government


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schools initiated cluster level monthly teacher meetings as part of an in-service teacher professional development program across the state. Teacher collectives have been implemented in 28 clusters across 12 districts in Uttar Pradesh for the last five years by India Education Collective and efforts have been made to advocate for teacher collaboration with the Education Department functionaries. These efforts have achieved fruition in the recent state policy being implemented by the Uttar Pradesh Education Department, with support from the organization in defining the structure and agenda of the monthly teacher meetings at the cluster level. This is a critical scale-up of teacher collectives, which can provide a successful example of teacher collaboration for professional development across the country.

In the state of Telangana, teacher collectives are supported by the district collectorates in three districts, reaching out to 740 primary government schools. Cluster Resource Coordinators facilitate the monthly meetings with teachers and support them in their classrooms through



regular visits. An external impact evaluation of the teacher collectives was conducted in two districts of the state. The results show that 61% more children in Grade 5 graduated with grade-level competencies in schools where teachers participate in teacher collectives. The evaluation study brings forth clear evidence that the teacher collective approach was successful in building students' basic and advanced skills of understanding local language, reading, writing, and interpretation. The intervention was also very effective in building students' application skills in mathematics.



A TOP-DOWN APPROACH WITH IMPOSED STRUCTURES FOR COLLABORATION DOES NOT LEAD TO IMPROVEMENT.

Cluster-level teacher meetings have been recommended in several teacher education policies in India; however, implementation at scale has been a challenge. Through support from organizations in other states, it has been possible to take the framework and principles of teacher collectives and contextualize them to the needs of teachers in different geographical areas of India.

Teacher collaboration is important for developing a continuously evolving learning system; at the same time, the introduction of formative assessments through this approach is equally relevant. Previous research studies have highlighted the challenges in introducing formative assessments at scale in education systems in different parts of the world. Such assessments require a shift in teaching-learning practices, as well as changes in teachers' belief systems.

The Power of Collaboration

Interaction and the exchange of experiences, ideas, and feelings are essential for learning and growth. When individuals are engaged in a common task, they are interdependent and accountable to each other. Divergence in a group leads to innovation, through sharing of multiple perspectives and building on each other's ideas by connecting different points. When a group of people connect with each other on a shared vision, they feel supported and motivated to reach their vision, knowing that they are not alone.

Collaboration among teachers as professionals has been gaining recognition as an

effective practice for improving student outcomes for many decades. In several countries, programs have been designed and implemented with a focus on deepening such collaboration. The collaboration becomes an effective medium through which teachers can build a shared vision for education and feel empowered to work toward it. The leadership that emerges in the teacher collective is not dependent on one individual, but rather gives rise to shared decision-making. Each member of the group builds belief in their own capabilities while appreciating the inter-dependence among themselves for a stronger impact.

Since the nature of a teacher's work within a classroom isolates them from other teachers, creating collaborative structures by design becomes imperative. Yet, there is evidence that a top-down approach with imposed structures for collaboration does not lead to improvement either in teacher effectiveness or student learning outcomes. On the other hand, an approach where the collaboration is teacher-led, with teachers having the autonomy to decide upon their shared goal, builds trust within the group to initiate change.²

Therefore, in the design of teacher collectives, a democratic

culture of ensuring participation from all teachers is given paramount importance. At the monthly meetings, teachers start the process by sharing both their challenges and their expectations. They themselves identify the gaps in their current practices and then problem solve together as a group. Until the teachers recognize their own agency in initiating change, the change cannot be sustained.

The guiding principle of the collective process is to bring teachers together to inquire into how children learn and the purpose of education itself. The goal is not limited to making improvements in literacy and math scores, but rather goes beyond to define a vision for education that is meaningful and relevant for all students as well as teachers. The larger goal of equity and social justice forms a broader framework within which teachers discuss the issues faced by first-generation learners and their families.

The context of the students, the teachers, and their classrooms remains at the center while designing and planning for changes in teaching-learning practices. This further compels teachers to connect learning outcomes with the real lives of students and the manner in which learning empowers a student to think, observe, and respond to any given situation.

All these aspects are essential for creating a collaborative network that allows teachers to break out of their isolation, sharing and initiating change that they collectively desire. This builds acceptance for change, which is essential for any new learning to take place.

Leadership emerges when people are willing to learn and unlearn, reflecting on their mindsets and beliefs. Within the education sector, we need to create spaces for decentralized and collective leadership to emerge to enable teachers and school administrators to work as a team to improve their impact.

About India Education Collective

India Education Collective (IEC) is a non-profit organization working across eight states in India with a focus on bringing about

systemic change in the public education system and thereby impacting the quality of learning in government schools. The idea emerged from the need to connect with and unify the voice of development organizations that seek to revisit current assumptions of education and steer the structural transformation process.

IEC envisions a qualitative public education system that is equitable, inclusive, and accountable to its primary stakeholders. It seeks to bring about a paradigm shift in learning by focusing

on developing a comprehensive range of abilities rather than only emphasizing recall of information and facts. IEC has adopted a systemic approach with a focus on redefining assessment practices, enabling teacher-led professional learning communities, and decentralizing education governance.

Notes:

¹ Ospina, S. M., & Hittleman, M. (2011). Thinking sociologically about leadership. In M. Harvey & R. E. Riggio (Eds.), *Leadership studies: The dialogue of disciplines* (pp. 89-100). Edward Elgar Publishing.

² Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Leading collaborative professionalism*. Centre for Strategic Education.

Education Reimagined: Leadership for a New Era



This latest publication from WISE ALL-IN - Agile Leaders of Learning Innovation Network is a collection of articles from a highly experienced group of education professionals, from across multiple geographies. It reveals the centrality of education leadership in the life of communities, for individual and collective well-being, and for a sustainable future, both locally and globally.

The first part of this special publication consists of three key themes, focusing on the work of the ALL-IN thematic working groups throughout 2021:

- **The New Leadership Landscape**, by Jenny Lewis, Global Director of Policy and Leadership at Forever Learn & Dr Nadine Trépanier-Bisson, Director of Professional Learning at Ontario Principals Council
- **The Art of With: Teachers as Lifelong Leaders**, by Joe Hallgarten, Chief Executive of the Centre for Education and Youth
- **The Power of Leadership Networks**, by Jean-Pierre Mugiraneza, Lead of Leadership for Learning at Education Development Trust & Susan Douglas, CEO of the Eden Academy and Senior Education Advisor at the British Council

The second part is a selection of articles designed to stimulate further thought and discussion on "leadership for a new era," including:

- Well-being for Teacher Leadership
- Supporting School Leaders in Post-Pandemic Recovery
- Leadership Ecosystems: A Whole-School Approach to Collaborative Leadership
- Escuela Nueva and Leadership for Learning

<https://www.wise-qatar.org/app/uploads/2022/03/cse-wise-education-reimagined-leadership-for-a-new-era-final.pdf>

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