TESS+
India

Leading partnerships: engaging with parents and the wider school community

Teacher Education
through School-based
Support in India
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This School Leadership OER (Open Educational Resource) is one of a set of 20 units from TESS- India designed to help school leaders develop their understanding and skills so that they can lead improvements in teaching and learning in their school. The units are essentially practical, with activities to be carried out in school with staff, students and others. They are based on research and academic study of effective schools.

There is no prescribed order for studying the units, but 'The school leader as enabler' is the best place to start, as this provides an orientation for the whole set. You might choose to study the units in combinations related to specific themes; these 'families' of units have been aligned with the National College of School Leadership Curriculum Framework (India) key areas: 'Perspective on school leadership' (1); 'Managing and developing self' (2); 'Transforming teaching-learning process' (3); and 'Leading partnerships' (6). Key areas 4 and 5, on leading innovation and leading teams, are addressed in multiple units but not as a specific focus. Some units address more than one key area.

The units can be used by school leaders for self-study or as part of a taught leadership programme. In either scenario, there are benefits in keeping a personal Learning Diary, and in sharing the learning experience with others through discussion of the activities and case studies. The term 'school leader' is used in these units to refer to a headteacher, principal, deputy teacher or any individual taking leadership responsibility in a school.

Video resources

The icon indicates where there are TESS-India School Leadership video resources in which Indian school leaders talk about how they are enacting change in their school to improve teaching and learning. It is hoped that they will inspire you to experiment with similar practices. The video resources are intended to complement and enhance you working through the text-based units, but are not integral to them should you be unable to access them.

TESS-India video resources may be viewed online or downloaded from the TESS-India website, http://www.tess-india.edu.in/. Alternatively, you may have access to these videos on a CD or memory card.

About the TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) project

TESS-India aims to improve the classroom practices of elementary and secondary teachers in India through the provision of OERs to support school leaders and teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The 105 TESS-India subject OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school textbook in the subjects of language, science and maths. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

All TESS-India OERs have been collaboratively written by Indian and international authors to address Indian curriculum and contexts, and are available for online and print use (http://www.tess-india.edu.in/). The OERs are available in several versions, appropriate for each participating Indian state and users are invited to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.

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What this unit is about

Being a school leader is an extremely responsible job, and at times it can be very daunting. There are considerable challenges, and everything you do directly or indirectly affects the students in your school and staff, as well as the wider community. School leaders who recognise the importance of building relationships with different stakeholders stand to benefit in many ways. The numerous benefits of collaborating with other schools and organisations has been highlighted in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 as an integral part of promoting school quality. Collaboration has been emphasised as one of the best ways to access a wide range of material and human resources for promoting inclusion and enhancing activity-based participatory learning.

Thus, both elementary and secondary school leaders need to actively look out for partnerships and ways of building strong, collaborative relationships with the wider community. This includes key state-level institutions, school management committees (SMCs), voluntary organisations, other schools and – in particular – parents and guardians of students enrolled in their schools.

The school is a key contributor to the progress of a community and the school leader must not only know the community it serves, but also be aware of its needs, hopes and expectations. As a school leader you do not need to work alone as you will have your SMC to support you. To do this you need to communicate the ethos and expectations of the school very clearly to all the stakeholders – particularly parents, by welcoming them into school and treating them as partners in their children's education.

The purpose of this unit is to help you to be proactive in engaging and collaborating with different stakeholders so that you can rely on their help, support and encouragement in realising the vision of your school.

Learning Diary

During your work on this unit you will be asked to make notes in your Learning Diary, a book or folder where you collect together your thoughts and plans in one place. Perhaps you have already started one.

You may be working through this unit alone, but you will learn much more if you are able to discuss your learning with another school leader. This could be a colleague with whom you already collaborate, or someone with whom you can build a new relationship. It could be done in an organised way or on a more informal basis. The notes you make in your Learning Diary will be useful for these kinds of meetings, while also mapping your longer-term learning and development.

What the school leader will learn about in this unit

- Building effective relationships with key institutions in your state.
- Building collaborative partnerships with other schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Engaging with community organisations, especially the SMC.
- Engaging and collaborating with parents to improve students' learning.

1 Working collaboratively with your state

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and Right to Education (RtE) Act 2009 changed the landscape of school education in India by promoting decentralisation and clearly articulating the state's role, as well as that of various district and block-level organisations. At the school level, the RtE 2009 clearly mandates the role and responsibilities of the SMC. There are different levels of responsibility, but the state stipulates that schools must have:

- safe access for students with transport if required
- a prescribed student:teacher ratio
- an all-weather building with requisite classrooms and separate and functional toilets
- adequate and safe drinking water
- a boundary wall within which a playground and kitchen shed are provided, along with sports equipment
- a library
- trained teachers that treat all children equally
- special training for late admissions
- provision of all teaching and learning material such as textbooks, workbooks, stationery, uniforms and midday meals.

It is likely that the state will have various initiatives and schemes to address these responsibilities, for example a three-year programme to put perimeter fences around each elementary school, a recruitment drive to fill 50,000 teacher vacancies, mobile vans with specialist services for students with learning disabilities, or a roll-out plan for instituting a technology infrastructure across the state.

Figure 1 As a school leader you need to be aware of the state's schemes and plans so that you can plan how to utilise them for the benefit of your school and students.

Activity 1: Identifying where state-level institutions could help

Look at the list above and identify any areas where your school may not be as well served by the key state-level institutions, including those at the district, block and cluster levels. You might, for example, have poor toilet facilities, or the perimeter fence may be broken, or you may be short of teachers. How would you report this shortfall in a way that is likely to get a favourable response?

Discussion

Notifying, negotiating and working with different state, district and sub-district representatives from a variety of institutions is a tremendous challenge. As a school leader, a first step could be to reflect on the needs or requirements of your school or what has already been stated in your school development plan (jointly formulated with your SMC). You may have already done this.

There is probably a lot to be done in different areas (infrastructure facilities, teaching and learning, attendance, connecting with the community, etc.), and inevitably there would be limited resources available to make the desired improvements .It would be beneficial if you enlist the help of the SMC members or some key people or leaders in the local community who can offer the help and support you require in realising your vision and goals.

Another aspect could be to find out and carefully examine the schemes and projects that are available in and pursued by your state. It is useful to be aware of these, as you can then advocate for them in your school in the allocation of resources and/or opportunities.

So as a school leader you need to inform yourself about how different state institutions can help and support you to improve the quality of education in your school. You need to work directly with your state organisations and build relationships in order to remain informed and have influence.

As you work with your state organisations you will realise that it is not just about getting resources from them for your school, but about influencing provision, solving problems, planning for the implementation of major school activities, monitoring progress and – most importantly – ensuring that all students learn. In the following case study you will see that there is more of a two-way communication and relationship between school and the state institutions, in which, as an active school leader, you are a resource as well as a beneficiary or 'customer'.

Case Study 1: Mrs Mistry works with the DIET

Mrs Mistry, a school leader with more than 12 years of experience, works closely with the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in her area and has established regular communication with the DIET principal, who keeps her updated on new teaching methods and resources for teaching her students.

Mrs Mistry is regularly short of teachers and finds it difficult to release the teachers she does have to attend training sessions organised by the DIET, but she is committed to their continuous professional development nonetheless. So she has conducted a few sessions on her own in the school with support from the DIET. They have helped by providing open education resources and showing her some websites that she could refer to.

The other way that Mrs Mistry engages with the DIET is by influencing their training programmes in a number of ways – essentially through sharing experiences of her school with other schools located in different contexts, and citing the problems and barriers faced by her school and how she resolved them.

Given the increasing shifts and innovations in quality education in the country, she finds it important to support the DIET in the design, implementation and planning of teacher training programmes, and so the relationship with the DIET is very much a two-way street.

Activity 2: Evaluating the type and extent of your engagement with key state-level institutions

For this activity you will need to refer to the blank table in Resource 1. The left-hand column of Table R1.1 includes a list of important state institutions that are relevant to your work as a school leader. Next to each institution, rate how far you are engaged with them by ticking one of the next four columns that best describes your level of contact with them. For example, you may have more contact with the CRC and/or BRC as compared to the DIET or State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT).

Think about whether this contact is two-way, or instead is information coming from them to you or going from you to them through other institutions. You may find that with some you have little or no contact – you may not even be sure of their roles or responsibilities. It will help if you write down the aspect for which you are in contact with them (e.g. midday meal, data collection, providing information, developing materials, training, academic support, etc.) in the sixth column. Then note the name of the main person you connect with in that institution, if you know a name. This may not be the most senior person and sometimes your contact will be a friend or relation, or a person who can connect you with the right person.

Discussion

This activity may have made you realise who you do and do not know, and at what level of the system your network is the strongest. Are there any other institutions that are critical for you to collaborate and network with that may not be in the list above? More importantly, what kind of collaboration and networking do you have presently, and what are the major areas of your work as a school leader that you contact them for or that they contact you for? In building a professional network you can enlist the help of other school leaders if you are not sure where or how to start. Once you have a network, you need to decide and plan how you will keep it live. Possibilities could include developing two-way communications (for example, by phone, email, letter, in person or using online social media sites such as LinkedIn).

2 Partnerships with other schools and NGOs

Other schools in your block or state are important resources for you and sources of advice and support. It is very easy to concentrate on the internal challenges of your school, but important to remember that other schools have similar challenges and may have found solutions that could help you. It might be that you could work with other schools to generate learning opportunities and solutions together. For example, you might partner with three other schools in your cluster to generate funds for a set of science lab equipment that rotates round each school in a termly basis, or you might work together to organise an interschool sports meeting that extends the students' sports curriculum but also provides coaching and organising roles for older students.

Likewise, there will be local voluntary organisations (non-governmental organisations, commonly referred to as NGOs) that you might work with in partnership. These organisations may have alternative ways of doing things to enhance the quality of education in your school and provide access to different teaching and learning resources, methodologies, materials, and sharing of best practices that could benefit your school.
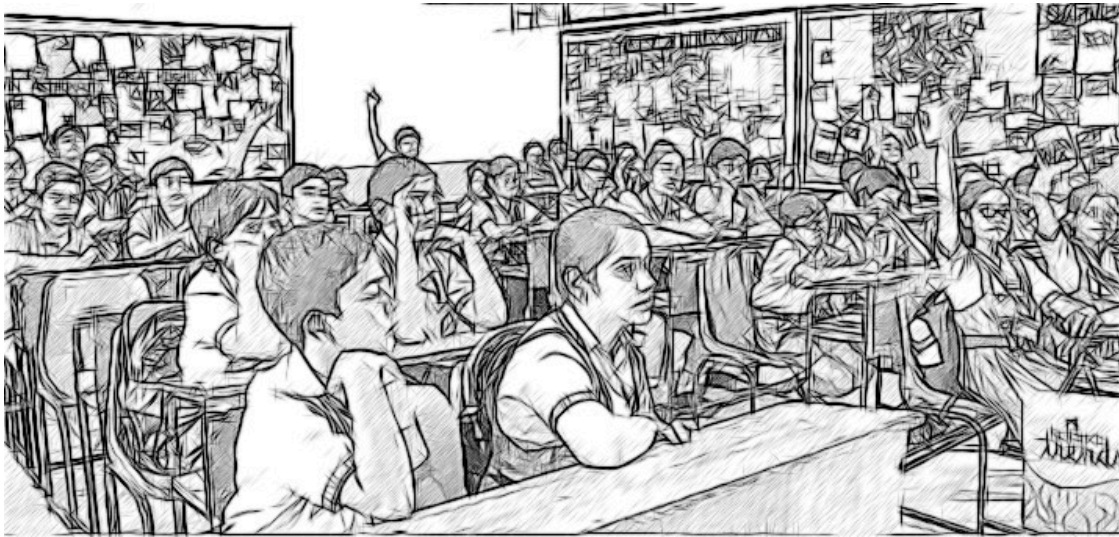
Figure 2 Partnerships with other schools and NGOs will benefit your students.

Case Study 2: Leading and learning through mentoring

In some night schools operating in a metro city in India, successful school leaders visit other night schools as mentors to 'tell their stories'. The purpose is to initiate a quality dialogue among the school leaders so that they begin to share their challenges, successes and strategies with each other. Such an exchange of ideas has been seen as an opportunity to enhance school leadership and improve students' learning. During the visits, the experienced mentors share their experiences and welcome the mentees back into their schools to observe.

Initial visits focus on listening and sharing 'stories', which can be seen as stepping stones to build a positive relationship. The mentor might accompany the mentee for an informal walk around the school, noticing different aspects of the school's functioning simply by listening and seeing everyday events and circumstances. This is sometimes called a 'learning walk', and can provide useful observations for discussion. A shared learning walk might be followed by more formal classroom observations that look at specific teaching and learning practices.

The mentor-mentee visits focus on understanding the practices in the school and helping the mentee to address their challenges. There is no sense of the mentor 'inspecting' the mentee or their school, or of putting on a 'show'. In fact, the mentor also gains from the process, as they are also learning when they visit other schools and through their discussions with their mentee. A good mentorship model is a two-way learning process that leads to improvement of both the schools.

Activity 3: Developing a proposal for a partnership

Case Study 2 offers an example of how a local partnership between schools brings learning and supports the school leaders involved. Now think of your own situation and make a list in your Learning Diary of all the schools and NGOs in your area with whom you might collaborate.

You may want to widen this activity to include others in your school. You could, for example, put up a poster where your staff write the names of other schools and NGOs, and share any connection that they have with those institutions – it can be very helpful if there is already a connection that you can build on.

Once you have your list of possible institutions to partner with, start to think about what your partnership might focus on. Your ideas might well relate to a challenge that you have in your school, such as meeting the needs of low-achieving students, or accessing technology. This challenge might already have been identified – for example, in your school development plan – or may be an opportunity that you have not yet considered. Again, you might want to open this up to your staff team, who could generate some new ideas that may relate to their own skills and interests. For example, a young female teacher may suggest partnering with a school that has a large hall for a dance event where local dance customs are celebrated, opening up the opportunity for the other school to share her skills in exchange for the use of the hall or for getting the students to collaborate across the two schools.

When you have your ideas and possible partners, the next step is to make contact with the other institutions to check their levels of interest in collaborating with your school. They are most likely to want to collaborate if they recognise the gain for themselves and if there is mutual benefit. So you need to present some ideas that will engage their interest and open up the dialogue. Remember, however, that a partnership is two-way, and that you need to agree together how you are going to work together. Presenting your ideas should not preclude the partner coming up with their own ideas and improving your proposal.

Now try to scope one of your possible partnership ideas using the template provided in Resource 2. You will not be able to fill it all in or finalise it on your own, but this process will give you a framework for your discussions when you talk to the potential partner(s), and will also allow you to reflect upon its viability.

Discussion

You may have thought of lots of ideas for possible partners and areas where you might collaborate. Bear in mind that collaboration and partnerships require time and effort to set them going, so be realistic about how many partnerships you can engage in at any one time. It is also important to remember that while developing a proposal for a partnership by yourself is a useful starting point, these collaborations work best when more people are involved in the scoping and when both parties consider the possibilities and benefits. If this is done, your proposal is more likely to succeed. Partnerships can take up a lot of time and may not be that fruitful unless both parties are clear on the potential outcomes as well as risks and threats.

3 Partnering with community organisations and local businesses

Leading a school requires a fair amount of coordination with community organisations and local businesses. There will be a number of community organisations near your school. Some will be informal, such as mothers' associations or self-help groups; others will deliver more structured services and programmes that improve the opportunities available to the students through resources that would otherwise be inaccessible. They may offer programmes ranging from literacy and numeracy skills to performing arts, life skills, popularisation of science and agriculture, communication skills, and vocational guidance. Some help the school with the midday meal, others with scholarships for the students and still others help create some infrastructure in the school. Partnerships between schools and community organisations ensure that these services and programmes are delivered with expertise and complement the teachers' skills.

Video: School Leadership – Establishing school–community partnerships

http://tinyurl.com/video-sl-partnerships

Your leadership role includes in connecting community organisations and local businesses with your school agenda and curriculum and using these partnerships to enhance your students' learning. Field visits by students and school visits by professionals or experts are two examples of how you can enhance learning in this way. Table 1 gives an example of how one class has mapped its partnerships against the curriculum and the school calendar.

Table 1 Example of Class VII establishing community partnerships.

Subject	Topic	Institution/site	Contact person	Purpose	Month
Geography	Soil	Farmers' cooperative	Mrs Gupta	Types of soils and how to identify them	July visitor
Civics	Local self-government	Panchayat	Mrs Charkrabati	Be able to enumerate the responsibilities of the Panchayat	August visitor
Science	Sound	Instrument maker workshop	Mr Javed	Making an instrument using string	September visitor
English	Letter writing	Post office	Mr Chana	Letter writing protocols and pin codes	October visitor
History	Heritage sites	Delhi Sultanate	Mr Thapa	Identifying the material used in the structure, where it would have come from and the style of construction	January visitor

Organising these field visits is not easy, as it involves getting permissions, briefing the relevant people and the safe movement of students to the site and back to school. Your teachers will need support and encouragement from you in order to arrange trips. Remember that the students' parents and the SMC are both resources and will likely be willing to go the extra mile if you need support, including accompanying the students on a field visit to ensure an appropriate adult:student ratio.

As a school leader, you are responsible for:

- engaging community organisations with your school
- setting up appropriate working practices
- monitoring and evaluating impact.

Any partnership needs to be recommended to the SMC and its effectiveness must be reported on a regular basis to ensure that it remains beneficial to the school and operates effectively.

Activity 4: A field visit to a science activity centre

The Class IX students were taken to a science activity centre run by a foundation for several days. One of the students wrote an account for the school blog (Mehta, 2014), which you can read below.

Figure 3 Telling the story of a field visit.

Our destination was Bangarpet. This was our second and last field visit to Kuppam, which we had visited in Class VIII. Surprisingly, everything we did at Kuppam this time was different from our previous experience. All the arrangements were well coordinated and we were comfortable.

The science part of this trip was excellent and we experienced project-based learning and independent exploration in the beautiful world of science. Project-based learning was a new experience that asked the students to pose a driving question and through experiments we would either confirm or add changes to a pre-framed hypothesis. This really changed the way I look at science. Also it was an unforgettable experience to experiment with hi-tech lab apparatus and work like mini scientists within the campus.

The foundation had made excellent arrangements for us. We stayed there for about six days and performed physics, maths, biology and chemistry experiments. We had sessions with highly respected professors, which enhanced and enriched our knowledge of science. The foundation has its own discovery centre and a dome theatre where we saw a short film about space.

The best parts of the trip were the community visits, where we actually stepped into the rural ways of education and visited local schools. The students there were so knowledgeable and talented in ways many could only dream of. It was a proud moment to see them. We did some fun activities with them.

We will always treasure the memories of the visit to the stone quarry, the tiring but satisfying walk to reach the peak of the ancient Kuppam Fort and the special cultural night planned for us in which we danced, sang and tried playing various instruments. I'd like to conclude by saying that fun and learning can come to you in all sorts of ways, and that learning through understanding is the best.

Now write in your Learning Diary what sort of things you think the school leaders and the science teacher had discussed with the foundation before sending the students to the centre to make sure it was a successful trip. Also, note down what you felt was achieved through the field trip in terms of the students' learning.

Discussion

Your list of things the school leader and science teachers would have discussed with the Foundation probably included the following:

- dates
- number of students that could be accommodated
- travel
- stay
- budget
- daily programme
- resource persons
- food and menu
- safety
- extra activities
- medical facilities
- curriculum.

The school leader would also have a similar list of what to discuss with parents, which might include:

- information about the purpose of the field visit
- a proforma for permission granted
- instructions in case of medical care and special dietary requirements
- a list of things for the students to take along
- dropping-off and picking-up day, dates and times.

There would also be a list of information to discuss with any teachers going on the trip.

Activity 5: Evaluating your current partnerships with your community

Now you should examine one of the community partnerships that operates in your school. It may be a very minor relationship that you have with a local business or it may be a more significant partnership with an NGO where you share facilities. Consider the prompts in Figure 4 to evaluate the impact of this partnership on your students' learning and whether you might be able to gain more from working together.

Make notes in your Learning Diary using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) grid as shown in Figure 4. You may want to involve staff, parents and the partner in this evaluation.

Strengths List all the good things about the partnership, taking care to consider the impact on student learning	**Weaknesses** List any downsides of the partnership that make it difficult to run
Opportunities List the things that are not currently happening that might happen – again, think specifically about improving student learning	**Threats** List anything that gets in the way of the partnership working as well as it might

Figure 4 A SWOT grid for evaluating the partnerships that your school has with your community.

Discussion

This simple grid can be very helpful in analysing exactly what is working in a partnership and where improvements could be made. You can find more information on SWOTs in the additional resource section of this unit.

- Has the grid helped you in identifying some areas where you could improve the impact of the partnership on student learning? This could then form the basis of a set of recommendations to your SMC or help you make some decisions about priorities.
- Do you think you could use the grid with the SMC before formulating the school development plan with them? Maybe this would help you to take forward this important work more easily and convince the SMC about the needs and priorities of the school.

4 Engaging with students' parents and guardians

Parents and guardians of students are obvious stakeholders in your school, as the education that is provided there will directly impact their children's life prospects. When schools and parents work in partnership, students benefit and are more likely to be successful. There is no doubt that parents and guardians can be demanding, but if you manage the relationship carefully, they can be very helpful. The role of the school leader is to find ways of engaging parents so that they support their children in every way possible and reinforce the work that is being done in school.

If you are keen to involve parents in your school and engage them in their children's learning and academic success, then they need to feel that the school is a welcoming place and that they are valued and respected.

Video: School Leadership – Involving parents

http://tinyurl.com/video-sl-parents

Video: School Leadership – Understanding students' backgrounds

http://tinyurl.com/video-sl-backgrounds

Activity 6: Making parents feel valued and welcome

Think about the scenario of a shy parent who has had limited education but who is very keen for all five of his children to be more literate and numerate than he is. His wife is timid and has a hearing problem. They are a united family unit and their children always attend school. They all have a positive attitude towards learning, except for the youngest child who does not appear to listen in class and can be disruptive.

- How would you as an individual – but more importantly as a school leader – engage with these parents so that they feel part of the school community?
- What are the challenges you need to address and how would you find out how far these parents feel that they are welcome in school?

Note down your thoughts in your Learning Diary.

Discussion

It is clear that parents take their own experience of their schooling into their adult lives; this can impact on how much priority they give to their children's education and the relationship that they themselves have with the school. It is not uncommon for parents to feel in awe of teachers and that they might find it difficult to challenge or question.

The fact that these parents are both interested in their children's education is a big advantage that you would want to make the most of. You can make sure that you speak to them if they come to school and there may be advantages in making a home visit to meet with them on their own ground. You probably want to talk with them about their youngest child to agree how best to approach their disruptive behaviour, exploring with them what may be at the root of this (possibly a hearing impairment). As these parents have had limited schooling themselves, your communications are likely to be verbal rather than written, but you may also consider how best to communicate with the mother: if she lip reads, you need to make sure you face her when you speak.

In more general terms, you can invite these parents (through their children) to open days, tours of the school, performances, forums, etc., being sure to greet them when they arrive as guests – the more they feel your individual interest and attention, the more welcome and valued they will feel.

You are likely to have some level of engagement with parents whose children are enrolled in your school. Some of these relationships may be excellent. However, it may be useful to audit your ongoing school activities to determine where parents might become more fully engaged and to check that all parents are treated equally.

Activity 7: Auditing your school's engagement with parents

Reflect for a moment on your school and consider the statements in Table 2, scoring your school out of 10 for each one (where 10 is full agreement).

Table 2 Audit of your school's engagement with parents.

Statement	Score out of 10
My school holds meetings at least once a term with all parents to discuss their children's progress	
There is an active parent–teachers association, or some forum that does not limit its activities to fundraising	
Parents are welcome in the school and have easy access to their subject teachers to discuss their child's progress or to express concerns, including a suitable space to meet	
The school get back promptly (within three days) to parents when dealing with complaints	
There are current parents who are members of my SMC	
There are events for parents that focus on how to help their child at home with their studies	
Sometimes parents visit classrooms to contribute their knowledge and skills to the learning	
Parents have a calendar of important dates in the school's academic, social and sport-related events	
A range of parents attend events such as special assemblies	
The school recognises the diversity in parents (literacy, language, prior education, availability, etc.) and is committed to including all of them as stakeholders.	
Total	

Look carefully at the list you have generated.

- Are there any other activities that you could easily take on?
- Which activities would involve more changes for you?
- Which activities are the parents involved in more?
- Which activities contribute most to your school goals and development plan?

Note down your thoughts in your Learning Diary. At the end of the unit you will have the opportunity to revisit this audit and make a plan for next term.

Figure 5 It is important to engage with your students' parents.

While these are not all the ways in which parents could be involved in their child's school, the audit may give you some ideas about how to improve. If you total up your scores, you will end up with a percentage score as to how far you engage parents in your school.

This audit may have prompted you to think about other ways that you might engage with parents and involve them more in school life. Make a note in your Learning Diary of any ideas you may have for engaging parents more. In Activity 9 you will have the opportunity to revisit this audit and make a plan for next term.

When parents are engaged with the school as stakeholders in its success, they can help to solve problems and address difficulties. By talking to them you can understand issues from their perspective and find ways to tackle factors that have a detrimental effect on students' progress, learning and performance.

Case Study 3: Mr Bharti investigates the dropout of students after Class VIII

Mr Bharti has been the school leader in a secondary school for five years. He was the proud father of four girls but had grown increasingly worried about the female students' drop-out rate in his school, as he could see that perhaps his enthusiasm for their education was not having an impact. He noticed that, year-on-year, while the female students' performance was consistently far higher than that of the males in the Class X board examinations, they made up only 20 per cent of the cohort.

Mr Bharti was an English teacher and not that confident in maths, so he asked the maths subject head to help him look at the data more systematically. What he asked him to do was to look at the list of female students who dropped out in Class VIII two years earlier and then – based on their performance in maths at that time – to make a best guess of how they would have performed if they had stayed on. When he checked the names and talked with their teacher he found out that of the ten girls who dropped out, four scored in the top ten of maths students in their final end-of-year tests and only two were below average.

At the same time, Mr Bharti looked at the list himself and noticed that eight of the ten female students who dropped out came from the same village. He decided that this problem could not be solved without engaging with the parents of these students, so he determined to find out more about why this was happening and what might be done to resolve the inequity. Mr Bharti was able to gather information to identify a trend that was impacting seriously on the learning of a number of students in his school. He resolved to find out more from the parents of these students.

Activity 8: Investigating student drop-out rates

Make some notes in your Learning Diary about the difficulties Mr Bharti might encounter and how he might take an approach that brought the best results for the girls affected.

Discussion

As a school leader, it is easy for you to forget that your work is not limited only to finding solutions to problems relating to teachers teaching well, students learning and running the administration. What Mr Bharti did that was remarkable, because he addressed a basic issue that many schools face: that of female students dropping out. He used data that was in the public domain to try to find the answer to a more important question: 'If female students' performance is so good at Class X, what do we need to do to keep girls in school after Class VIII to make it even better?' This question helped his small team of teachers to focus on finding ways to improve enrolment and performance. The staff decided to reach out to parents, talking to them about their difficulties and trying to find solutions to help keep their daughters in school. He and his team of teachers decided to look for solutions outside the school – with the parents as stakeholders in their child's educational success.

There may well be some difficulties in the conversations with parents, due to:

- apprehension about being chastised
- apprehension of their beliefs feeling challenged
- their feeling that, economically, there is no alternative.

But it may be that some very practical things are uncovered, such as problems in getting safely to and from school. However, the simple fact that the school leader was so interested in their daughters' education that he visited their homes motivated the parents of potential drop-outs to keep their daughters in school. Mr Bharti decided that in future, all Class VIII girls will receive at least one home visit every term as a means to encourage ongoing attendance and continuity.

If your students' parents are to work closely with you to help the school succeed, you need to communicate regularly with them and provide openings for them to communicate with you. This may be in the form of meetings, informally at the school gate or on an individual basis regarding specific students.

Once you have this open communication, you can share issues and seek help with solutions, just as Mrs Chandra did in the following case study.

Case Study 4: Mrs Chandra's security solution

Mrs Chandra's school had not had any repairs or maintenance for some time. Recently the boundary wall had broken and fallen down, leaving the whole school site insecure. Although it was in a very poor area, she enjoyed the support of her students' parents and the students came to school willingly and regularly. In one of the parents' meetings she mentioned the problem about the wall and was delighted when two brothers, who both had children enrolled in the school, offered to organise a working party to repair the wall. They also suggested using some of the older students to help. While this was being organised and the funding sought for materials, the brothers got together several of the fathers and uncles of other students to take turns to help guard the school at night.

Mrs Chandra had spent a great deal of time with the parents since coming to the school, encouraging them to feel that the school was theirs and that the success of their children depended on them to a large

extent. She encouraged a widespread pride in the school among all parents. She felt that this kind offer to help was a direct result of the mutual respect she shared with her students' parents.

Activity 9: Make a plan for engaging with parents

Go back to the audit that you did in Activity 7 and identify where you could make progress in parent engagement. In your Learning Diary, make a plan (possibly involving your deputy, if you have one) about what you can do next term and then in the longer term.

Set yourself a few easy targets for improving engagement with parents and guardians in your school. For each activity or target you set, be sure to indicate the benefit that this will bring to the school and student learning.

Discussion

You may already do a number of things to involve parents in your school – but there will probably be more initiatives you could take, such as:

- hosting a discussion about homework policy
- getting the students to conduct a survey about their parents' views
- sending success postcards home
- holding an 'open house' once a month after school for parents to talk to specific teachers.

You do not need to do everything at once, but you will find that once you start these conversations with parents, more will follow, and your students will feel direct benefits from the joined-up approach.

An important part of working with parents in your school involves capacity-building so that they are aware and informed, and can contribute more fully to the school's vision and goals. This might include helping parents become effective representatives on the SMC or parent–teacher associations. It can be hard for parents to focus on the whole school rather than just their child, but in roles where they represent parents, they need to understand that it is important that they advocate for others, not just themselves.

Activity 10: Enabling parents to be representatives

Make some notes in your Learning Diary about how you might enable parents to take on roles at the school where they become the voice of the local community's parents. Perhaps think of some of the parents at your school who are accepted by the local community and could also be looked upon as leaders and so could naturally step into this role and do it well. Are there other parents who speak out but are not necessarily representative of other parents' opinions? Try to draw up a set of six guidelines you might give to a parent representative.

Discussion

You might have thought about some things you don't want parents to do (such as making personal statements about teachers), or about general guidelines such as observing confidentiality or taking a holistic view of school life. There is no doubt that an engaged parent who is well connected with other parents and who can speak up for student learning would be a real asset to you in leading the school – not just in terms of passing information to parents, but also in terms of passing ideas from parents back into the school. They could also be useful in facilitating other parents in identifying problems and solutions. But

this is not necessarily a skill that all parents have, and those that come forward for these roles are not necessarily the most suitable. As a school leader you need to enable a cross-section of parents to take up roles as representatives and to support them in developing their skills and confidence.

Are there any other aspects of your school (or, more importantly, the school development plan) that they could be involved in?

You might also act to organise parents so that they can help each other more informally. If they are intimidated or anxious about coming to school or meeting a teacher, you could encourage other parents to act as intermediaries or 'friends' (see Case Study 5).

Case Study 5: Mr Chowdhary sets up a parents' friend scheme

Mr Chowdhary has recently become the school leader in a small rural school where there has not been a tradition of parents coming to school or the school communicating with parents. He sees this as a big gap that is holding the students back in their learning. It also means that he and the other teachers know very little about the students' home backgrounds.

He decided to set up a scheme run by parents, for parents. He hoped that this would bridge the gap in communication and give parents the opportunity to raise any concerns.

He talked to the local community leaders and his teachers, and they decided that it would be useful if these 'parent friends' were women, and that they initially networked with other mothers using their usual interactions and meetings. Mr Chowdhary sent out an invitation through some of the students and set a date for mothers to come along to a meeting to talk about their role. Only three mothers came to the meeting, but they were all willing to take on the role outlined by Mr Chowdhary, and were pleased when he said there would be a short training session, certificate and even a badge that they could wear.

Once the scheme had been running for a year, a suggestion was made that there should also be male parent friends and Mr Chowdhary set about recruiting volunteers from the fathers.

As a school leader, you may have a well-developed relationship with the parents of your students – or they may already have a forum for discussion what happens at school. But there may be more that you could do as a school leader to promote this communication and support on a continuous basis. You should not see this as a threat to your authority or be worried about the criticism that may come back to you. Feedback from parents is more than likely fuelled by a desire to see their children learn.

Activity 11: Helping your parents to organise and support each other

Think about the parents who are least likely to come to school or have a conversation with you or the teachers. Why are they not engaged, and what might other parents do to enable them to become interested and feel comfortable? Do you have any more confident parents you could approach to help bridge the gap?

Case Study 6: Mrs Rawool helps parents with their own literacy

Mrs Rawool became the leader of a small rural primary school a few years ago. One of the problems that emerged during her first year was the fact that students in Class III and IV were not doing their homework. She decided to go out into to the village and to talk to some of the mothers, explaining the importance of homework and how it provided the opportunity for children to practise their reading and writing. She suggested that perhaps they could help their children with their homework. But then she realised that many of the mothers could not read and write themselves, so they could not help their children.

One mother, Nisha, asked if Mrs Rawool could start a class for her and the other mothers, and agreed to talk to the other mothers to encourage them. Mrs Rawool organised a one-hour literacy class, once a week after school. The students stayed at school and played in the playground while their mothers had lessons with Mrs Rawool. Nisha did a good job in encouraging other mothers to attend and her husband was very supportive, encouraging other fathers to send their wives. Soon the mothers gained confidence to help their children with their homework and Nisha set up a little reading club in her neighbourhood so the mothers could help each other and learn together.

Pause for thought

- Are there any parents in your school who would be particularly suitable for connecting with certain parents – for example, because they come from the same village or speak the same dialect?
- Who might you approach initially and how you might explain what they might do?

5 Summary

A school does not exist in isolation. It not only serves the local population living around it, but also interacts with the wider community and operates within networks and regulatory functions at state, district and sub-district levels. The school leader is responsible for building collaborative relationships and investing time to initiate and sustain those partnerships in order to have a positive impact on teaching and learning in the classroom. Just as a school does not exist in isolation, nor does a student's learning – it permeates their out-of-school lives. Through partnerships with parents and their communities, it is possible to extend the students' learning and make it more meaningful.

The school leader needs to build networks and relationships so that the school makes maximum use of the local resources and expertise, as well as ensuring that each student benefits from a shared responsibility for their learning.

Resources

Resource 1: Your engagement with state level intuitions

Table R1.1 *Your engagement with state-level institutions.*

Name of Institution	Regular two-way contact	Regular one-way contact	Only occasional contact	No contact	Aspect for which contact is made	Name your main contact there
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA)						
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)						
Education Department						
State Council of Education, Research and Training (SCERT)						
District Institute of Education and Training (DIET)						
District Resource Centre (DRC)						
Block Resource Centre (BRC)						
Cluster Resource Centre (CRC)						
Zilla Panchayat						

Resource 2: Template for scoping a partnership

Table R2.1 Template for scoping a partnership.

Prompt	Response
What is the goal of the partnership? (For both parties)	
What is the timeframe for the partnership? (Short term or longer term)	
What are the desired outcomes?	
What actions will be taken to meet those outcomes?	
What resources are required? (People and things)	
What budget might be available? (Who makes how much available)	
How and when will the partnership be monitored and evaluated?	
How will communications be handled between partners and with the school community?	

Additional resources

- SWOT analysis : http://www.businessballs.com/swotanalysisfreetemplate.htm
- A blog about a school trip: http://www.shishuvan.com/wp/?p=1242
- *School Management for Quality Inclusive Education and Decentralised School Governance*, a Save the Children report: http://eruindia.org/files/school-management-09-04-13.pdf
- Information about the RtE: http://righttoeducation.in/know-your-rte
- *People as Changemakers*, an Oxfam report : http://preview.tinyurl.com/ksvptsp

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