

Academic mentoring



Teacher Education
through School-based
Support in India



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TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) aims to improve the classroom practices of elementary and secondary teachers in India through the provision of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The TESS-India OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school textbook. 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.

The TESS-India OERs are supported by a set of guidance documents for teacher educators aimed at all those tasked with educating teachers, including initial teacher training and continuing professional development. These guidance documents offer teacher educators further practical guidance on key practices to support them in their work to embed the pedagogy modelled in TESS-India OER and Indian education policy. They include ways of organising networks and facilitating teachers' meetings, guidance on running participatory workshops and developing reflective practitioners, as well as how to use action research to improve practice. Further resources will be added later. These guidance materials will be available on the website for teacher educators or other educators.

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TEGN_Mentoring

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Academic mentoring

Academic mentoring is a developmental relationship between a more experienced individual (a mentor) and a less experienced partner (a mentee). The mentee is supported through regular interactions by the mentor's guidance to gain skills, perspective and experience. Mentoring is therefore a long-term, ongoing process of guiding someone in order to develop their overall personal and professional development.

Many of us use the terms 'mentoring' and 'coaching' interchangeably. In order to develop a clear understanding of the differences between mentoring and coaching, you could refer to the School Leadership OER on coaching and mentoring, and read the definitions given in the resources section. When you have finished, reflect on what you initially thought about mentoring and how you see mentoring now.

These notes focus particularly on mentoring teachers and therefore the roles of BRCCs and CRCCs in this respect.

Who mentors who?

There are many different mentoring contexts in the Indian school context such as:

Operational level	Mentors	Mentees
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District Institute of Education & Training (DIET) faculty Block Resource Centre Coordinator (BRCC) Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator (CRCC) 	Headteachers(HTs) New/practising teachers
2	DIET faculty	BRCC/CRCC
3	BRCC	CRCC
4	Principal/headteacher	Teacher
5	BRCCs/CRCCs/principals/teachers	BRCC/CRCC/principal/teacher

As an example of how mentoring can be initiated, Durga Mohanty describes in the next case study how he recently started the process of mentoring with one of the teachers working in one of the ten schools in his cluster. Durga has worked for eight years as a CRCC working in a tribal district of Odisha.

Case Study 1: Starting the mentoring process

As a CRCC, I am expected to visit schools to collect data, interact with and observe teachers, conduct monthly meetings, and, most importantly, provide academic support to teachers working in all the schools. In the past five years there has been a lot of emphasis on academic mentoring being undertaken due to the SSA. Recently, with the NCF 2005 and RtE Act promoting a participatory, child-centred, inclusive approach, I am forced to ask myself, 'How do I, as a CRCC, help and mentor my teachers as they try to use these approaches in their practice?'

In order to start this process and get ideas, I discussed this informally with other CRCCs in my block and also a few BRCCs. Then I observed the teachers while they were teaching and discussed with them the major problems they faced. In this way I identified which teachers would benefit from my help. One of the language teachers, Rani, surprisingly came forward and asked me if I could help her to ensure that all the children in her language class would pay attention and participate in activities, as she had a number of tribal children who did not know or speak Oriya. I discussed with her the problems and concerns she had and also what help she expected from me.

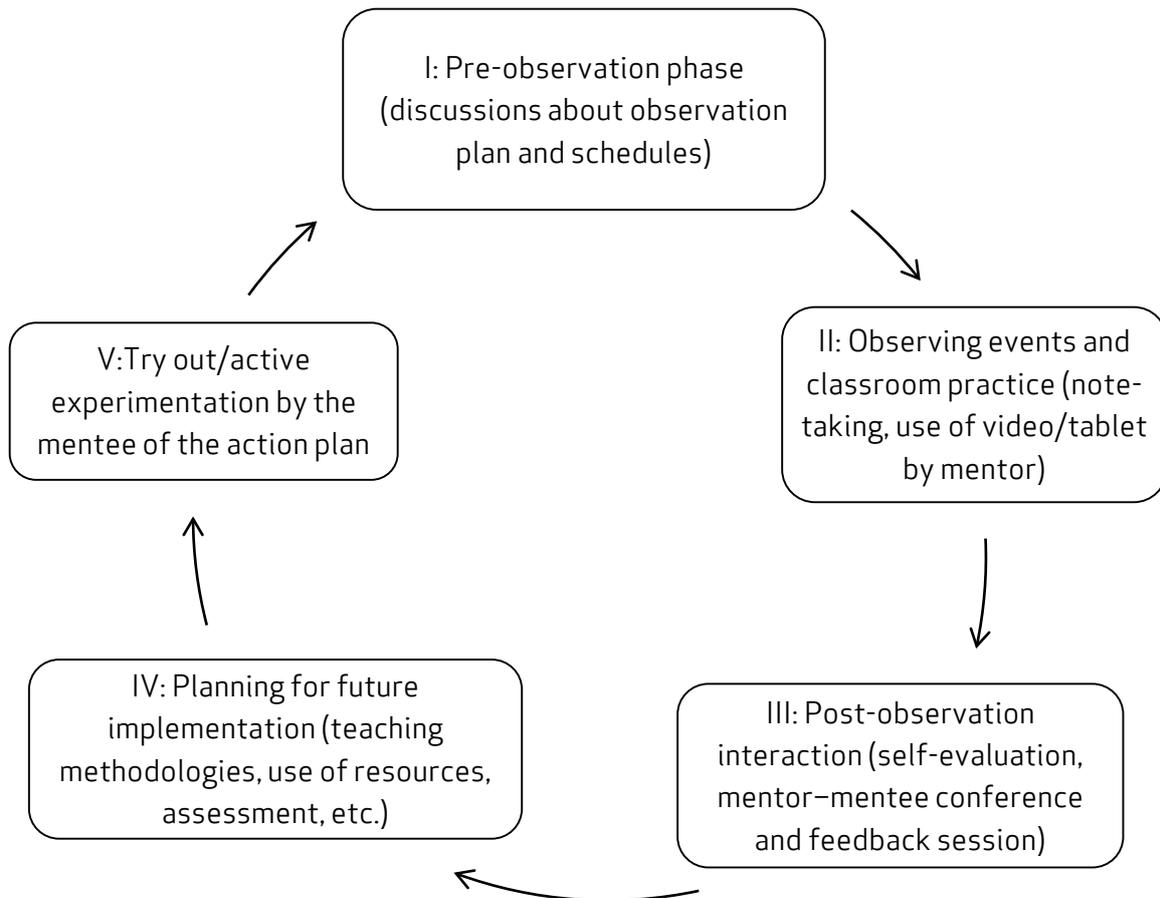
In the first meeting she was shy and hesitant, so I planned two more meetings when she was free, in a quieter place in the school. We got to know each other better and she seemed more comfortable by the third meeting. I had learned a lesson, I needed to make her comfortable and listen very carefully without passing any comments. I realised that she wanted to use a variety of different activities and materials in her lessons but she did not know where she could find them. To make sure, I asked her if I had understood her needs properly.

In the third meeting I shared a plan of what could be done in her language classes over the next three months but I felt that she was not very comfortable with my plan. I went on probing and encouraging her to share her apprehensions. After a lot of convincing she told me her major concern was that the syllabus may not be completed in time if too many activities were introduced, and also my plan did not match with the textbook. I thought it might help if we planned together. Together we developed a plan based on the syllabus and textbook, also thinking about the students' difficulties and resources/TLM available. On reflection I realised the significance of something quite small but important: when we worked and decided things together, the plan was going to be more acceptable to her.

On my fourth visit I wanted to encourage her to use different activities and resources. I looked at the materials we had in the Centre, but felt they were not what was needed. Then I remembered that one of the DIET lecturers and the BRCC had shared information about the TESS-India OER, Key Resources and Video Resources. They were confident that these materials could help us in providing academic support to teachers. All this material is available in Oriya as well as many other Indian languages. I started by looking at the TESS-India Language and Literacy OER. I selected two OER for Rani to read and also selected some activities. We sat together and decided whether she could use the activities as given or should adapt them based on her students' needs.

During subsequent meetings we decided on a plan of action, detailing the methodology, materials and activities that she would be using and the support that she felt she needed from me. I also convinced her to let me observe her while she was teaching in class and to take notes, as this would help me to target further support better. I told her that I would not be able to remember everything I saw and that these notes would be important for our future discussions and planning. We decided that I would observe her Classes II and III twice a week, provide feedback after each observation, and then discuss what worked well as well as ideas for improvement or change.

The mentoring cycle is shown below:



It is clear that starting the mentoring process is not easy as is shown in the steps that Durga the CRCC undertook to initiate the process of academic mentoring. It requires time to establish a trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee, and so calls for developing important skills. This initial phase of mentoring is also referred to as the pre-observation phase.

The mentoring cycle

I: Pre-observation phase

(a) Developing rapport and a trusting relationship

In order to develop rapport and a trusting relationship it is necessary to hold consensual conversations. As a teacher educator, you may be used to having most people agree with you just because of the position you are in or who you are in the DIET, BRC or CRC. Therefore, holding consensual conversations may be a skill that as a mentor you have to patiently learn quite a lot. A consensual conversation is one in which the mentor and mentee are in harmony. While the purpose of the conversation may not be to seek agreement, it is important that both agree about how they will listen in order to understand each other, show true interest in what the other person is sharing and show respect and value for the other person and the views they express.

Other important aspects are:

- the mentor initiates the mentoring process by finding out what the mentee needs – this requires building trust between the mentor and mentee, in order to identify successes, gaps and challenges
- establishing a clear focus for mentoring by clarifying exactly what you will be doing together
- supporting the mentee to move towards the desired teaching-learning practice in agreed ways such as direct teaching, collaborative problem solving, questioning, etc., by using resources and different materials
- promoting accountability for growth by identifying specific next steps, and setting schedules and time for feedback and follow-up with the mentee.

(b) Demonstrating active listening skills

Some of the techniques of active listening include:

- paraphrasing – the mentor states their understanding of what has been said in their own words and asks the speaker to verify or correct this interpretation (this may also involve expressing feelings if necessary)
- body language – a mentor can convey that they are listening through eye contact, leaning forward, nodding their head, smiling or saying phrases such as, ‘Please tell me more about it’ or ‘I’m not sure I understand’
- probing – as a mentor you can also probe by raising a topic that is related to the mentee’s statement and asking the mentee to elaborate on that topic, such as: ‘Let me see if I understand what you are saying correctly’, ‘Would you tell me a little more about what you were thinking/proposing to do just now?’, or ‘Can you give me one or two examples of what you are telling me?’

II: Observing events and classroom practice

Observing events and classroom practice is one of the basic requirements expected to be undertaken by CRCCs during their school visits. Developing effective classroom observational skills is vital when acting as mentor, but may take some practice.

(a) Preparing for observation

When preparing to conduct observation of an event or classroom teaching-learning, reflect on the following questions:

- What will be observed and how it will happen?
- What aspects do I need to focus on?
- How long will it take?
- What will my role as an observer be?
- Will notes be taken during the observation and why?
- Will audio-visual recordings be made?

(b) Discussing the observation

Effective mentors actively model the process of observation: ‘I noticed that’, ‘I saw that’ or ‘I heard that’, followed by examples and/or evidence of what was seen and heard. Their reports of the observation are therefore purely descriptive and not evaluative at this stage. In this way a mentor can generate a shared understanding of the current reality with the mentee. Using a tablet to video-record the class being observed helps in this process.

III: Post-observation interaction

The aim of interaction after the observation is to provide constructive face-to-face feedback that determines the plans for further strengthening the teaching-learning processes undertaken by the mentee. This is an opportunity to listen to the mentee's views and ideas with open ears, mind and heart, and to hold an enabling conversation that is focused at building the confidence, capacity, knowledge and skills of the teacher/mentee. Encouraging the mentee to evaluate their own lesson and to identify what went well and where they see room for improvement will be important here as ultimately they are the ones who will need to put the plans for improvement into practice. At times you may demonstrate or model certain aspects of good teaching practice in order to build the skills and capacity of the teacher.

In the next case study Durga describes how he provided constructive feedback to Rani after observing her lesson.

Case Study 2

Rani and I had agreed what I would do during the classroom observation, based on the mentoring plan we had developed together. We agreed that I would video-record of some important aspects of teaching on my mobile phone; that I would not make any remarks or comments while Rani was taking the class, and that we would use the video to discuss the lesson together afterwards. We also decided that the feedback discussion would take place in the school library, as it was quiet and no one would disturb us. The discussion would be about what had happened during the lesson, thinking particularly about the children's participation and whether this was as good as we hoped. We would highlight what had been achieved as planned and consider areas for improvement for the next observation.

During the after-observation session, I started by appreciating her efforts in getting all the charts and flash cards made (some with the help of the students) to conduct the activities. I asked her, 'Were you happy with how your class went and what you had developed for the students to use?' She nodded her head and smiled, but said, 'Not completely satisfied, as four students did not use the materials. What can I do to involve them better next time?' I wondered if she could find out what games they liked to play and plan an activity based on those games. She thought that was a good idea.

I then asked her what she thought went as planned and what had not, asking her to give me as much detail as possible. I prompted her by asking, 'What was the best part of the lesson, how do you feel about the experience and what the students learned?' While she was talking I kept noting down the major points. At the end she asked me 'Am I moving in the right direction? What do you think?' I reassured her that she would slowly reach her goals. I then showed her the video I had recorded on my phone. She was surprised that she had forgotten to discuss two important problems she had faced while teaching, so we talked over what actions she might take next time.

I asked her opinion on whether she felt her students were participating more after she had started using groupwork and flash cards with the Odia words also written in the students' tribal dialect. She smiled and said, 'Those students were a little more involved in activities after I started playing games in groups using the flash cards. All the children are looking happier, especially the tribal children, and are talking with me more.' She asked me if I would try and think of some more games to help her make sure that they get more involved in speaking Odia. I told her I would contact her by phone with ideas after two days.

We then discussed her assessment of the students while they were doing the various activities. She promptly said by observing them and asking questions. I told her these are two ways of undertaking assessment and asked her if she could think of any other ways of doing this. She was quiet so I gave her

the TESS-India Key Resource material on assessing performance and the NCERT source book on assessment for language. I told her she would get a lot of ideas from these materials and we could then plan to use the ideas the next time round. We then made a little modification in the following week's lesson plan to include two games and introduce three new Odia words. I thanked her for her time and once again praised her for certain things in her teaching that I had observed and liked. I informed her when I would come next week and concluded the feedback session.

The case study above reveals some of the important aspects of mentoring, such as:

- good preparation is made prior to the observation using a focus agreed with the mentee
- providing immediate face-to-face feedback as far as possible after the observation
- comparing what was planned to happen with what actually happened and discussing the implications arising from this
- discussing the observation using evidence, in this case video/audio recordings on a phone – this helps to jog memories and identify strengths, gaps, ideas and approaches for building effective future teaching-learning practice
- sharing feedback respectfully by practising listening empathically and presenting ideas clearly and specifically, without criticism and evaluation.

Constructive feedback must be focused on the actions and consequences, never on the mentee. Speak for yourself only, by using 'I', not 'you', and restrict your feedback to things you know for certain. You must check whether the mentee has understood your feedback, accepts it and is able to act on it. The best feedback sessions happen when the mentee evaluates their own practice and you use your expertise to suggest ways that they can develop the areas they want to develop.

The advantages of constructive feedback are that it:

- reinforces desired behaviours
- acknowledges the mentees' competence and strengths
- helps to align expectations and priorities
- fills gaps in knowledge
- enables the mentee to know where to improve.

IV: Planning for future implementation

The mentoring process is designed to specifically enhance the quality of the teaching-learning process in the classroom. To realise the vision of a participatory, child-centred pedagogy and improving student performance (NCF 2005, NCFTE 2010), as a mentor you could:

- invite self-reflection by teachers, promote goal-setting and progress checking; probe to clarify ideas and explore questions, not provide answers
- model problem solving and teaching approaches, using ideas and options from the TESS-India OER
- observe and confer about teaching-learning with students, analyse student work together, and co-plan learning tasks; connect practice to its effects students
- encourage the examination of beliefs and attitudes; promote discussion on preparing and using other resources besides the textbook such as TLM, audio and video, local songs, dances, stories and materials, and CCE.

V: Try out/active experimentation by the mentee of the action plan

The future course of action, negotiated and decided upon by both the mentor and mentee, will determine what, when and how the mentee will undertake classroom teaching-learning. The mentoring cycle thus continues until the goals and issues are resolved to the mentee's satisfaction.

Using a learning diary or reflective journal

A learning diary is a book or reflective journal where you collect together your thoughts and plans in one place. You may have already started one, since the BRC/CRC guidelines suggest that the sub-district functionaries maintain a journal. The notes you make will be useful for meetings or discussions, but will also help map out your own longer-term learning and development.

Who mentors the mentor?

You can work to become an effective mentor alone, but you will learn much more if you are able to discuss your learning with another teacher educator. This could be a colleague with whom you already collaborate, or someone you can build a new relationship with. As a mentor you may at times need help, advice and support in mentoring – you may like to discuss what you are doing and planning with your mentee with someone. Thus mentors need to ask themselves, 'Who mentors me?' and it will help if you can identify at least one person that you can turn to for advice and support.

Pause for thought

Reflect on what you perceive are the responsibilities of a mentor in creating an effective and successful mentoring process. Do you agree with what has been given below or would you like to add on anything you view as important?

Mentoring:

- fosters a trusting, confidential relationship
- serves as a critical friend
- provides timely and appropriate feedback after observation/visit
- maintains continued involvement in professional growth opportunities
- encourages recording in a journal/diary for self-evaluation and discussion
- models effective teaching-learning techniques
- provides/suggests a variety of resources.

Decide which what aspect of your work as a mentor you need to focus on more in the future.

Resources for effective mentoring

Here are some resources to help you prepare and act as a mentor:

Building a trusting relationship: Am I listening as much as speaking? Does the mentee feel safe in expressing their concerns? Am I showing respect and valuing their ideas?

Pre-observation: What are the mentee's concerns? What is the focus of the mentoring? When will I observe and offer feedback on a lesson? When will future progress be seen?

Observation: What will be the focus of the observation, why and when? How will the lesson be recorded?

Post-observation interaction: Where will the post-observation conversation be held? Is the mentee contributing as much as the mentor? Have the strengths been identified?

Planning for future implementation: Have specific ways been agreed to develop the mentee's teaching-learning? Have dates and deadlines been set?

Try out/active experimentation by the mentee of the action plan: Has the mentee developed an action plan? Are they excited by the ideas? Do they feel supported in taking risks? Are their actions going to make a difference?

Reflection: Were the mentee's ideas treated with respect? Do they feel comfortable working with me? What else could I do to help them move their learning forward?

Teacher educator lesson observation form

Teacher's name							
Date				Time		Duration	
Class		Average age		No. of boys		No. of girls	
Subject				Topic			

Notes on the resources/board work used in the lesson:

Notes on how the teacher uses students' previous knowledge:

	Time	What is happening in the classroom?		Any ideas captured, comments, questions, suggestions
		Teacher	Students	
Introduction				
Middle				
End				

Summary feedback session template

What was the focus of the observation?

What we agreed went well (*refer back to previous summaries*):

Agreed areas to improve:

Discussion on specific development for the next observation:

Teacher educator

Teacher

Date

Date

Teacher educator reflection

What went well today? Is there anything you need to find out? How is the teacher progressing? What have you learned?