Learning beyond the Blackboard, A Study Of Learning Community

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UNESCO’s report “Learning-The treasure within”7 highlights the four pillars of learning and the third pillar which is most important is-Learning to live together. To help the learners to learn to live together, the present Educational policy in India needs to be reviewed and made systematic where the social aspects of education must have a place in the curriculum. In the Educational Institutions particularly Higher Education the curriculum should aim at contents to develop in the learners not only the desirable behaviour but attribute to the moral, cultural and ethnic aspects. In regards to ‘Learning to live together’ the dissemination of knowledge the learners must learn to respect and protect their relationship which is important to promote the frame work for appropriate behaviour.

This paper discusses the proposed design & draw attention how to achieve the learning environment for teaching and learning methods that promote participation, cooperation; problem-solving and respect for differences; by developing learning communities. This framework is based on collective communication (Dialogue) in learning. Keys of proposed design are - Personal reflection with shared vision, Individual accountability to create solutions collectively, Supportive and shared environment, Incentive for working effectively together as team. Learning communities,10 not only facilitate the sharing of knowledge, but have the potential to learn to live together that can be used for the benefit of the community as a whole and/or its individual members.

Key Words- Learning Community, Dialogue,
**Introduction**

A learning community is a group of people who share common values and beliefs, are actively engaged in learning together from each other. Cross (1998) describes a learning community as “groups of people engaged in intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning (p. 4).”

Learning communities, not only facilitate the sharing of knowledge, but have the potential to create new knowledge that can be used for the benefit of the community as a whole and/or its individual members.

Proposed research uses the classroom as a platform for sharing, collaborating, exchanging and understanding of knowledge by an open communication, in which students & teachers are engaged in different groups of 6 – 10 members. These groups learn as collaborative teams to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all. This structure facilitates open communication, shared meaning and understanding through dialogue.

Proposed research is a way of developing friendly and mutually respectful teacher-pupil relationship, by developing attitudes, behaviour of appreciation, cooperation, belongingness, trust and spirit of learning. It makes the learners more open minded and receptive, builds positive outlook inspired with values, ethics, attitudes and knowledge to constitute the social capital necessary to construct healthy societies and socially binding cultures. This focuses the holistic purpose of education which rests on intellectual, physical, emotional and other aspects of the learners and the overriding purpose of all these is to prepare the learners for the purpose of learning to live together.

**Methodology**

Authors’ framework for learning community is based upon the Cluster of Educators where Teacher Educators + Pupil Teachers, with each other build a team to go through the process of learning. The process includes Dialogue, Group discussions and activities to Share knowledge. All these actions have a common idea of communication through Dialogue. “Dialogue” here means a process of communication adopted from David Bohm’s model. The participants sit in a circle each having a chance of communicating with the group in a fear free environment.
This is also being conducted by author(s) in various seminars and workshops. The aim of this method is to share Knowledge, experiences, views & ideas.

The study is a participant-observer case study and included repeated close observations over a four month period (April 2010 to July 2010) within a college with a purposive sample of participants. The primary purpose of Author’s study was:-

   To know what happens in the process of learning community?

Author(s) followed a variety of data collection and analysis techniques participant-observer method in this study because it allows for in-depth information to be gathered about the case, which provides for thick descriptions. The study will be bounded by time and place. Author(s) spent 4 month period of time describing the context or setting for the case, and used multiple sources of information to provide the detailed, in-depth picture of the member’s actions, interactions, and responses in order to determine the role of their capacities play in creating the learning community.

Author(s) conducted individual semi structured interviews. The interview was guided by a list of questions whose wording and order are only loosely determined before the interview. This structure facilitates an investigator’s ability to respond appropriately to the situation, to new ideas about the subject, and to the emerging view of the participant.

Author(s) used an inductive approach to data analysis because this orientation enabled them to treat human activity and social action as text that may be viewed as a collection of symbols describing layers of meaning. That they used to understand the implementation & process of learning to live together in Learning community.

**Proposed Learning Community Model**

Developing learning communities in an effort to improve educational organizations is a popular strategy within the education community. Dufour (2004) notes “people use this term to describe every possible combination of individuals with an interest in education” (p. 31). Learning community is based on "the group of practice," where the group forms around the sharing of understood knowledge. Members of each group sit in a circle. Teacher educator causes one member to initiate talk expressing his or her idea about the Topic that is taken up. Starting with the initial
talk will lead to know more about the issue. Next step would be response from some other member in circle and there will be a beginning of different reaction from all members one by one. The steps of implementation of the programme were

- Organizing students and faculty into smaller groups,
- Providing a setting for students to be socialized,
- Bringing faculty together in more meaningful ways,
- Focusing faculty and students on Dialogue,
- Encouraging integration of the curriculum.

**Major Findings**

**Increasing understanding among learners**

When people work together which involve them in unused forms of action, differences and even conflicts between individuals tend to pale and sometimes disappear. It develops behaviour of appreciation; co-operation; belongingness; trust and spirit of learning which are the great source of togetherness.

**Tolerance, acceptance of others, respect for differences**

These can be cultivated through dialogue. Participants know the balancing between deserving and desiring, they develop tolerance and respect for differences, concern and care for others, they help each other in learning and moreover they move from competition to cooperation. Cooperation is the foundation of togetherness what reflects in their behaviour.

**Appreciation of interdependence**

It enables people to exceed the routines of their knowledge and attach value to what they have in common against what divides them. They appreciate each other and enhance their knowledge, skills and attitude starting with abstraction of knowledge (what teacher educators and pupil teachers contain), generalization of it and to finish with multiplication of their understanding by exchanging it through Dialogue.

**A spirit of respect for the values of pluralism**

Research shows that the learner understands that differences and diversities are opportunities to know each other & it can be installed through learning community.
It presents a forum for the explicit discussion with active listening, self-expression, reframing, and assertiveness of knowledge. It enables the ability to think critically about prejudice, Ability to deal with each and every one. It teaches respect for all and appreciation of group work.

**Learning to manage conflicts**
Democratic dialogue provides the platform to know each other and to listen & reflect at the same time so one can have administration and interactions what comprise responsible behaviour to learn to live together. Face-to-face interaction offers, how well the team is functioning and how to function even better. These are the key factors of managing conflicts.

**Mutual understanding and peace**
It cultivates tolerance and respect for differences, concern and love for others, and moving from competition to cooperation. The Dialogue in learning community uses teaching and learning to promote participation, cooperation, problem-solving and admiration for diversity. These factors grow peace and harmony in learning communities.

**Awareness of the similarities and interdependence of all people**
Learning communities develops affirmation, positive thinking, kind listening and communication, assertive behaviour, decision-making and critical thinking, etc. It may integrate an understanding of peace, human rights, social justice and global issues throughout the curriculum for the goal of learning to live together. LC’s offer this type of environment to learn & understand individuals in group.

**Positive interdependence**
Learners learn a sense of sink or swim together by learning community. Democratic administration and interactions builds the desirable and pleasant ambience to learn to live together. The learner understands that differences and diversities are opportunities to know each other. As it is the only way for elimination of conflict and it develops positive values in learners.
**Individual accountability**

Moto behind the learning community is each of us has to contribute and learn, LC’s Demonstrate the principles of equality and non-discrimination in their behaviour which is helpful in Building an effective, integrated personality in individual with positive self-esteem. This is most important to all particularly to the learners to learn to live together.

**Conclusion**

Our former president APJ Abdul Kalam linked Nation’s prosperity with peace. He referred the message received from a Buddhist Monk in a statement that, ‘If you want peace; remove ‘I’ and ‘Me’. When you remove ‘I’ and ‘Me’, you remove Ego. When you remove Ego, you remove hatred. When you remove hatred you have Peace and for an enriched and meaningful life. In order to survive on this planet peacefully every one must learn to live in harmony and in a violence free environment. Which includes, tolerance for diversity, respect and love for differences, harmony in human relationships, conflict reconciliation and resolution, love, friendship, unity, mutual understanding, co-operation, brotherhood, democracy, community building, etc. LC’s Provides opportunities for open communication, trust, leadership, and decision making in groups. They promote conflict resolution, peaceful and respectful behaviour in the relationships between all members of the learning community. It gives continuous reflection and professional development of all educators in relation to learn to live together.

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