

# Approaches to Strengthen Learning Community for Improvement in Learning Outcomes

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**Abstract-** *Learning Communities have huge potential in exchanging experiences and forming a collective knowledge on the basis of interaction among individuals. Learning communities are such environment where persons come together to obtain or share knowledge, to learn, to discuss and to be with other. A good learning community provides a conducive environment for teaching learning process and directly influences the learning outcomes. This qualitative study was conducted on a sample of 40 government secondary school principals selected from the Aligarh district of U.P. The researcher administered a self constructed structured Interview schedule based on 8 questions for data collection and the gathered information was analyzed through qualitative method. The analysis of the data gives interesting results regarding the various approaches like collaborative learning, respecting diversity, Standards-based curriculum, action plan in schools, fostering transformative approaches, provide equal importance to students, discussion among teachers and student and formal conferences which must be helpful in strengthening learning communities.*

## Introduction

The twenty-first century indicates shift, focusing on the learning with the individual to learning as part of community. In the literature, the term “learning communities” is being defined and used in flexible and various ways: Roland Barth (1990) described a community of learners as “a place where students and adults alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance to them and where everyone is thereby encouraging everyone else’s learning”. Myers and Simpson (1998) described learning communities as “cultural settings in which everyone learns, in which every individual is an integral part, and in which every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else” on the similar lines Speck (1999), who stated that shaping a learning community is the most pressing task and building principal and members of a learning community are mutually responsible for building the community. Thus building a school learning community becomes the collective pursuit of the principal, teachers, students, parents, and all other community members. If Schools work as professional learning communities, the learning outcomes and quality of life will improved by developing education system. Where all aspects of the community nourishes learning and helping every individual who got opportunity of formal learning to contribute learning community are important concepts.



## **Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes explain the knowledge or skills which are acquired by the learners at the end of a particular course, program, or project and help students to understand why this knowledge and these skills will be useful to them in future. Learning outcomes emphasize on the potential applications of knowledge and skills which help learners to connect learning in various contexts, and guide to assess and evaluate the problems. Best learning outcomes focus on the application and integration of knowledge and skills, instead of focusing on completion of curriculum because learning outcomes show how students are able to use the resources, both in the context of the class and in real life situation.

## **Learning Community**

Learning communities, not only facilitate the exchange of knowledge, but have the courage to create new knowledge which benefits the community as a whole and also to individual members. This broad view of learning communities contrasts with the enhancers of individuals learning in educational settings. However, even when applied in narrow sense to single individual, it is identified that “building learning communities of learners creates an environment that can potentially develop complete society”. The common goals are achieved through planning together and developing new knowledge. In this context Watkins and Marsick point out: “learning helps people to create and manage knowledge that builds a system intellectual capital” (1999, p. 81). The field of socially shared intellectuals, in the fields of learning communities and communities of practice gives the view that knowledge is commonly socially constructed, through collaborative efforts toward shared objectives or by dialogues and challenges brought about by difference in persons’ perspectives. Thus on constructivist view of learning we can say that learning cannot be taught, but must be constructed by the students.

## **The Present Study**

The present study was conducted in Aligarh district of U.P to know the opinion of government school principals regarding the approaches used to strengthen learning communities for improvement in learning outcomes. A sample of 40 secondary school principals was selected from the different government secondary school of Aligarh district of U.P. The researcher administered a self constructed structured Interview schedule based on 8 questions for data collection and the gathered information was analyzed through qualitative method.

## **Finding of the Study**

After analyzing the data, the investigator is summarizing the Approaches as suggested by school principals to improve the learning outcomes by strengthening learning community in the following lines:

- **Collaborative Learning:-** According to principal of schools individual and groups external to the community introduces new ideas, promote awareness about new practices and exposes new norms and value of society such type of networks will improve the capacity of communities to learn.



- **Respecting diversity:-** Most of the principal responded that respect for diversity approach increases the capacity of learning community. Linkage between learning communities and community development, are much correlated with the acceptance of diversity. The willingness to entertain new thought and accept progressive change will increase the learning community.
- **Development of leadership:-** According to respondents education system should provide leadership quality to the stakeholders of learning community through exchanging ideas to improve approaches and by opening up their platform for all to learn about effective approaches and instructional practices for effective learning outcomes.
- **Standards-based curriculum:** - In the opinion of principal academic standards can be used to measure student learning outcomes which is possible by quality teacher preparation collectively and use appropriate curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment procedure to ensure that all learners have an opportunity to achieve the standards.
- **Action plan in schools:** - According to principals in learning community schools, action planning is a dynamic aspect in the learning outcomes improvement strategies. Teachers use their collective intelligence to plan, exchange ideas and provide feedback to their peers and to evaluate and improve their teaching and learning practices through school activity.
- **Fostering transformative approaches:-** Most of the principals' focuses that teacher should include participants with varying backgrounds, expertise, and experience in learning communities through which they provide multiple perspectives for good learning outcome.
- **Provide equal importance to students:-** In the opinion of respondents learning community should respects a "different but equal" approach to ensure that all students have an equal participation in discussion and decision making because each learners has unique qualities that enrich the classroom. The learning community should encourage each individual's strengths and accommodates differences and diversity.
- **Multilevel classroom:** - School principals believe that, by providing a wide range of collaborative work opportunities by which students work with same-age peers. They also mentoring relationships with older or younger peers and in mixed-age groupings. It develops responsibility in students to contribute and participate according to his/her developmental level.
- **Supporting Social Goal:** - Respondents responded that teachers at various level of school education should support in strengthening learning community, both in a whole-class setting and individually. Teachers should plan learning goals in various areas, such as social interaction and knowledge and skills integration. Teachers must share their own goals with students and guide towards progress by attaining powerful planning for self-directed learning.



- **Discussion among teachers and student:-** According to respondents much of the learning in a multilevel classroom occurs with the conversations that happen among students and the teacher during the course. These informal discussions must occur and the teacher should be instructed to watch and listen, and also learn about each student's needs, progress and should provide immediate feedback for learning.
- **Formal conferences:-** If school teachers often designate 15 to 20 minutes during each session for individual conferences with two or three students then these conferences will become helpful in strengthening learning community and in revisiting the students' learning goals and to reflect students on their own progress, and monitor students learning.
- **Classroom organization:-** Most of the principals believe that physical environment of classroom conveys powerful information to learners about the expectations of the classroom. It facilitates the development of learning community by providing workspace for whole class, small group, and for individual learning.

## Conclusion

To build learning community requires a paradigm shift of schools as bureaucracies to a vision of schools as communities. School teachers in learning community should work in team collaboratively through sustained efforts and innovative approaches. Teachers should corporately engage in conversation and deliberate about teaching process and gain new knowledge and create original ideas to resolve learning outcomes issues. Learning communities have much to suggest them in an increasing global world where we cannot expect that one person to have sufficient knowledge and skills to confront the complexities of global village. Thus to face these challenges our society and individuals should be consistent with a progressive approach to develop learning community which play important role to improve learning outcomes.

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