

Centre for Learning has been in existence for over twenty years. As a school, we had a free hand to explore what learning meant in our subjects. Also, though we were kindly supported by many organisations and individuals, availability of money played an important role in our pedagogical explorations. Since moving to a permanent campus in 2000, CFL has been involved with the local schools, informally at first and then with class –class interactions. We at CFL have also been wondering how to extend these interactions in sustainable ways i.e. something that is not one-off and energy consuming.

Among the organisations that have supported CFL consistently and from the beginning has been the Kumari L. A. Meera Memorial Trust (KLAMMT). They have given grants for books, laboratory materials and equipment like ticker timers, ray boxes etc.

In 2012, KLAMMT offered a grant to CFL to use to host a conference /workshop. Earlier, CFL had hosted a meeting of the local government school teachers in the Magadi area, where the school is located. The teachers meet monthly with the Curriculum Development Officer, and during this particular meeting, we had explored the issue of discipline and learning. We had also met with teachers in the afternoon and demonstrated some of the science material that had been created, both of which had been well-received. The teachers had suggested that it would be useful to repeat or continue with it. So, among the ideas considered was a meeting on discipline and classroom management, teaching of English as a second language, and development of science teaching material. The last was decided upon and we were on.

The first thing to be considered was, would such a workshop be useful? The second, who would the workshop be aimed at? Third, when would be the best time to hold it and for how many days? To discuss these questions and get feed back, we talked informally to Shri Umashankar Periodi of the Azim

Premji Foundation (APF). He was very encouraging and suggested that a minimum of three to four days would be needed to really make it meaningful. He also kindly offered to have a survey done by the APF if we wanted it. Azim Premji Foundation also offered to cover the costs not met by the KLAMMT grant and this allowed us the freedom to plan our workshop they way we wanted to.

It was decided that we would hold the workshop mainly for high-school science teachers of the 8th, 9th and 10th standards, because science becomes more academic and perhaps more difficult to demonstrate and find real life examples for. We felt that a survey would be very useful, to determine what teachers find difficult, what materials are available for use in the class- rooms and what are the topics that are covered in these classes.

We decided on September 1st to 4th, beginning with a weekend. The final list included about 30 teachers, from Magadi area, Yadgir District (the area covered by Azim Premji Foundation), Chamrajnagar and from schools run by NGOs in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

The work of preparation for the meeting involved two or three main themes:

First was to determine what the curriculum needed and to figure out what we could cover. This entailed looking through the state text-books and making a list of topics and experiments mentioned in the texts. Fortunately, one of the senior students of CFL had just finished his exams and could read Kannada, so he took on the task of making the summaries. He had studied science for his 12th standard and also knew the school labs, so his write-up included experiments that could be done and apparatus that could be used. As an aside: students in CFL do optics experiments using a ray box, so he said, 'the book says you can determine angle of refraction using pins. I don't

know if it will work.’ I had to point out that all of us had done precisely that when we were in school and college and that it works very well!

The next job was to decide what we should cover in the time we had with the teachers. It was very clear to us that there should be a balance between what the text books covered, some modern topics and what we felt the teachers would enjoy, since science to all three of us has been a highly enjoyable activity. We also felt there should be time for the participants to suggest what they wanted to see and do.

The third was to structure the day so as to give time for all that we considered important. The idea of a residential workshop was to give ample time for interaction and allow the participants to enjoy the campus. So the structure of the final day reflected these considerations. After a very brief informal introduction on the first day, there were three parallel sessions in the morning punctuated by a short tea break. Three groups of teachers went to the physics, chemistry and biology labs. In the afternoon, after a long lunch break, they came to the labs to share their experiences with each other. The evening was left free for

walks and interactions. After dinner, we had an hour long discussion on general aspects of teaching, the nature of science and so on. The next two days followed a similar structure with one of the afternoon sessions being a climb to Savandurga. The final day had a feed back session and a group photograph.

The feedback was very valuable to us. We had deliberately kept the sessions limited and did not try to cover too much. This was to give time for informal sharing and deliberation and to make things oneself rather than just watch a demonstration! This was noticed and appreciated. They did suggest that we could have sent the topics we were covering to them earlier so that they could have studied it and come. The other suggestion was that the subject teacher should have stayed with their subject rather than all doing the three labs. I would not agree with this because I feel the sciences should be integrated.

One memory I carry is that of the participants testing their conductivity meter. Their smiles when the LED lit were really lovely!

– Dr. Yasmin Jayathirtha
Teacher, Centre for Learning, Bangalore

