

Sandeep Dutt

A PATH FORWARD FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN INDIA

Position: Social entrepreneur and chairman of Bhadrajun Artisans Trust

Location: Rajasthan, India

Connection to Learning Forward: Chairman of Learning Forward India

When he established the India affiliate: 2015

Why he promotes professional learning: India's teachers are undervalued and under-supported. They need opportunities to network and learn. With little financial support in India, teachers must take responsibility for their own learning.

Three keys to Learning Forward India's success: A relatively new but growing affiliate, Learning Forward India started working in one school and is now expanding across the country. He sees these as the biggest elements of success so far: building a nationwide community of educators and resources, prioritizing teachers' happiness and empowerment, and embracing social media and technology.

Sandeep Dutt is chairman of Learning Forward India, which he founded as an international affiliate of Learning Forward in 2015. He is a social entrepreneur, coach, consultant, and speaker focusing on school culture and school transformation.

Since 2012, he has been chairman of the Bhadrajun Artisans Trust, which runs the Fabindia Schools Programme with the goal of involving the community and helping rural youth live their dreams. He shares his passion for professional learning with educators in multiple regions of India and continues to expand the reach of professional learning knowledge in the country.

Q: Why did you decide to focus on professional learning as a tool for improving education in your region?

A: For long-lasting success in professional learning, educators need to be part of a culture of learning. This is largely lacking in India. Liberal arts is not a preferred area of study here, and teaching is not a favored profession like in many other parts of the world. Most people in the profession are teachers by chance and not by choice.

In my experience, few professional learning opportunities are available to teachers, and those that exist are expensive and run by profit-minded



people with no real background in education. In this context, for teaching and learning to improve, teachers need to take charge of their learning. Otherwise, there is no future.

Fortunately, with the explosion of information on the Internet and low-cost data services delivered in India, there is an opportunity for teachers to connect with and learn from their colleagues in India and elsewhere in the world. For example, we can now create professional learning communities. But for this to happen, teachers have to take charge of their own learning because no infrastructure exists from an outside entity.

Q: You have been creating professional learning infrastructure from the ground up. How did you start building capacity where there was none?

LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS AT WORK		
This table outlines the role of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in Learning Forward India's Professional Learning Program. Over the first three years, the program has made progress in implementing the standards.		
Standard	2015	2018
Learning Communities	Educators worked in isolation and professional learning was only an outcome of unstructured self-learning.	Trained educators have formed a dedicated chapter/learning community to expand Professional Learning Program access to other local schools and initiated chapters in other regions as well.
Leadership	No contribution from leadership and no professional support to guide/mentor educators.	Cultural change to incorporate educator voice in planning and decision-making, keeping in mind student learning outcomes.
Resources	No prescribed resources/courses for professional development.	The Professional Learning Program is grounded in concepts of transformative learning and collaborative inquiry in <i>Schools Can Change</i> and concepts outlined in the Standards for Professional Learning.
Data	Lacked understanding of student, educator needs as no empirical data to support any findings.	100% results in partner schools. One of the pilot schools was classified as a change maker school under the Green Schools Program.
Learning Designs	No predesigned program.	Predesigned three-year certificate program during which educators commit a minimum time period to complete allocated activities.
Implementation	Even though English is the medium of instruction, teachers did not use English extensively and there was little, if any, use of technology.	Educators learn by engaging in workshops, webinars, staff exchanges with partner schools, and e-learning exercises to find solutions to real-time challenges.
Outcomes	No structured outcomes that show an impact on educator effectiveness or student performance.	Teachers voluntarily put in extra time and effort. Qualified educators / trainers for new program cohorts. More proficient use of technology. Educators took their learning to class.

Source: Learning Forward India

A: My colleagues and I started with one school, the Fabindia School. The Fabindia School is a co-ed private school from preschool to what is considered high school in the U.S. It serves the children of artisans in the rural areas around Bali, a small village on arid land at the foothills of the Aravali mountains. The school started with 11 students in 1992 and has grown to nearly 500 students.

Before 2015, teacher professional learning at the school was limited. Teachers worked in isolation, as with other schools in rural India. There was little, if any, use of technology. Even though English was the medium of instruction, teachers did not use English

extensively for their own learning or working together. My colleagues and I wanted to change all of this. We looked inward and turned our focus to changing the instructional culture.

In 2015, we started by creating the Professional Learning Program, a three-year certificate program during which teachers engage in workshops, webinars, staff exchanges with partner schools, and e-learning exercises to find solutions to teaching and learning challenges. It immerses participants in a model of inquiry and problem-based learning tailored to individual needs and focused on collaborative learning

Educators divide their time between structured training sessions and self-

directed professional learning, with increasing amounts of self-directed time as they progress from year to year. The minimum time required to participate in the program increases from 90 hours in year one to 150 hours in year three. But we find that teachers voluntarily put in extra time and effort beyond what is required.

Q: What resources did you look to as you started these professional learning efforts?

A: The Professional Learning Program is grounded in the concepts of transformative learning and collaborative inquiry in *Schools Can*

Change by Dale Lick, Karl Clauset, and Carlene Murphy (Corwin, 2013). This guide provides a step-by-step, systemic approach to the change creation process.

It is based on the principle that genuine, effective school improvement requires leaders and teachers to be part of a broad-based, creative change system that focuses on generating improved teacher practices for enhancing student learning.

We also grounded the Professional Learning Program in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. We especially emphasize the Learning Communities and Leadership standards. The table on p. 15 shows how the program has moved us toward implementing Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

Q: How are you expanding the work you have done in Bali to other parts of India?

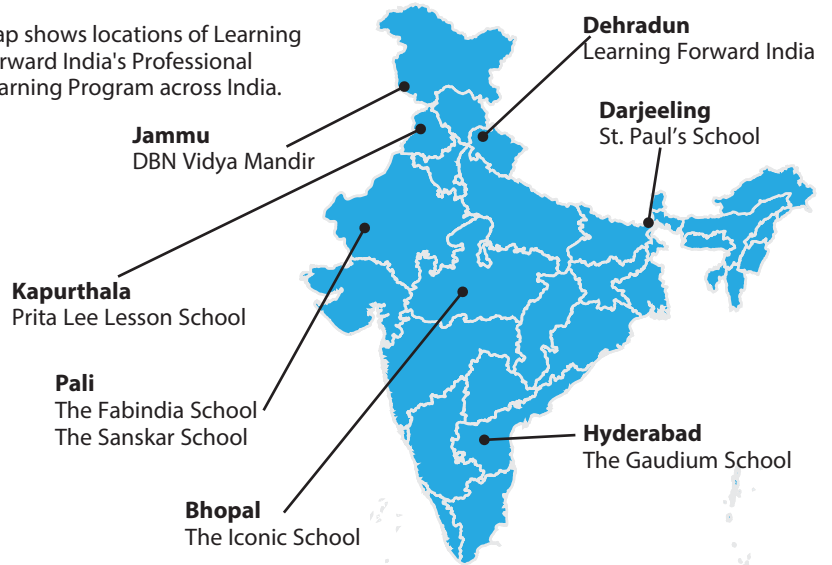
A: Professional Learning Program graduates, along with my colleagues and I, have established a Learning Forward India chapter at Bali. Our goal is to build a national network to support professional learning.

Through this organization, we are expanding program access for local area schools in central and southern India. From the 16 teachers in the program, six have taken it upon themselves to put in place a national training team. They and their colleagues have formed action teams to build the association for professional learning.

We have also developed My Good School, a process through which schools can get a designation showing the value the school places on professional learning and student achievement. To achieve the designation, a school must demonstrate commitment to the personal and social development of individuals and offer an environment where experiential learning is made

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN INDIA

Map shows locations of Learning Forward India's Professional Learning Program across India.



possible through activities beyond just book study. This brings to life learning that would otherwise be theoretical and uncoordinated.

To further broaden our impact, the Fabindia School hosts the annual Learning Forward India retreat in October. The goal of the retreat is to foster social interaction among educators and professional learning that can empower them to work for better learning outcomes. The program includes professional learning sessions, discussions, and social events.

Q: What are some of the things educators outside of India can learn from your experience developing a professional learning infrastructure?

A: We have begun building a professional learning system with no support from the government or any institutions beyond the general support of the sponsors of the Fabindia School. We believe the key to the transformation is not resources themselves, but how we use the resources.

By using technology extensively, we are able to keep the cost low. And an important reason we can do this work

with few resources is that teachers are taking charge of their own learning. They volunteer their time and work beyond the required hours and the call of duty. Their enthusiasm keeps the work alive.

Teachers are now reaching out to schools in the vicinity of Bali to invite other teachers to pursue the Professional Learning Program, and they are traveling to locations where Learning Forward India is helping develop more opportunities for learning and development.

Engaged, motivated teachers and principals are establishing a sustainable model for delivering quality education in India. That model is now being replicated on a larger scale. The map above shows the Professional Learning Program's reach across India.

We will continue to spread our work because we believe the future of young people is in our hands, and we must do all we can to help them live their dreams by providing them with the best possible education. ■