TELC-net COVID-19 Crisis and teaching in difficult circumstances: discussion 2 – 17 April 2020

Richard, Prem, Els, Harry, Vinay, Marina, Sudhakar, Marisol, Elia, Dipika, Manjusha, Nadeem, Smriti, Sanjeev

Note: Also see ‘summary of text chat’ for this discussion available at <http://telcnet.weebly.com/>

**Richard**: Reminded audience of TELC-net network <http://telcnet.weebly.com/>

**Prem**: Summarised common themes from previous discussion: focus more on mental and emotional health and social aspects of teaching; the digital divide (teaching with lack of access to internet in many contexts); focus less on heavy content/input which is mentally challenging but focus more on life skills.

**Harry**: Added the issue of the use of technology: not only the issue of access but Ts in many contexts weren’t allowed to use e.g. mobile technology in past but are now required to. Are there any good examples of using basic technology which work which could be shared to give such Ts ideas? E.g. understands that Ts are using WhatsApp more and more for devt, but how’s that working for Ls in cultures where perhaps Ls don’t use mobiles or parents don’t allow them to use them? So how are Ts navigating that space?

**Richard**: (Continuation of the summary of previous discussion). This is an opportunity to share experiences, not necessarily solutions, but good to hear from different ppts in different contexts about what they are using and how it’s working, eg to recreate a live classrooms via Zoom possible? Or better in some contexts to upload materials for Ls to download via mobile apps, eg WhatsApp etc. Some members of the group mentioned that as parents they have added burdens from getting worksheets via mobile phone (e.g. needing to write it out/not having access to mobiles) and frustrating when no feedback from T is given on this work. So, what can be done to give support to parents on how to help their children? What guidance can parnets give to their children re learning? More questions than answers at the moment. So good to share ideas you have that may be helpful.

**Prem**: Recently had a meeting with policymakers (Nepal) re how to help Ls, parents etc. One was maybe not necessary to focus on the curriculum/textbook content but instead focus on life skills, e.g. cooking, storytelling, movies, music etc. Maybe use radios since families don’t have access to synchronous tools – programmes are being produced to address that.

**Vinay: (India)** Working on a US-funded project (USIEF?) to help 30 Ts statewide. Mentoring (10 weeks) so that when schools reopen the Ts can connect their classrooms based on the plans they are making now. Created a WhatsApp group and focus on lesson planning for 21st Century skills, social responsibilities and language. Ts work in pairs to make a plan which they present using Zoom – others give feedback and they refine their ideas. To date had 10 Zoom meetings.

**Marina (Argentina)**: Re supporting parents – Ts are making themselves available to parents via WhatsApp for when they have queries etc. about the Ls’ activities.

**Sudhakar (India)**: In his district there is a 15-minute programme on FM radio to enhance the English skills of Ls in rural areas. Also sharing tests, practice lessons, and videos via WhatsApp groups to parents for their children. Also parents meeting: contacted them to gain permission to create the groups, and for the children to use the mobile phones and access these materials. But (question to Prem) how to maintain contact with those who have no connectivity?

**Prem**: Was instructed to maintain contact with Ss ‘online’ (no specifics given). Started off by emailing but around 50% didn’t have access to internet. What is working for about 60% is FB groups/messenger and short messages via mobiles. Still those in rural areas aren’t able to join in. So, contacted MP and suggested contacting telephone companies to try and get Ss some free data so they get access to classes (this is HE).

**Marisol (Mexico):** Speaking as a parent, it’s important to approach education in a different way – more of an opportunity than an obligation. Motivation is an important factor for Ts – to try modalities that are new and not easy. Despite all the constraints, it’s an opportunity to reflect and embrace opportunity to adapt and learn.

**Elia (Pakistan):** Teaches UG Ss. No good connectivity so uses Google classroom (very popular app used by all Ls) and posts short Youtube videos and records material and assisgnments and uploads these. Also uses WhatsApp groups to communicate and Zoom too. She responds to Ss questions/gives feedback by contacting Ls individually via WhatsApp.

**Harry:** Many educational institutions are treating remote teaching as ‘usual’ i.e. just moved from classroom (F2F) to home (online) but without recognising the issues associated with using a home space/not working F2F – what particular challenges have you faced as a teacher with this remote/online teaching?

**Prem:** Space is an issue. If you have a separate room to work from, not so bad, but many Ts don’t have that luxury – it’s a shared family space. So, e.g. online Zoom classes are very difficult when whole family uses that space.

Re family literacy: Ts are engaging their kids in soft skills activities, e.g. cooking, storytelling etc. Are other Ts doing that too?

**Richard:** (Summarising answers to these Qs from chatbox) If want to make a recording to share with Ls, difficult to find a quiet time/space to do that Elia: waits for everyone to go to sleep to do it!

Feedback is interesting – how Ts are doing that, Dipika?

**Dipika** **(India):** Found it difficult to get parents to understand about WhatsApp groups and sharing worksheets and lessons and wouldn’t allow children to have the mobiles. Since last week they have called all parents individually and explained how the Ls are going to use the phones *for educational purposes* and that this can be done via a group. Gave an example: posted a digital worksheet and posted it to the group, called some parents and asked them to be with/watch their child while they did the work so they could ‘see’ that this is work and play or watching videos etc. – this reassured them. (led to a more positive attitude to this mode of learning).

**Manjusha (India):** Last week parents and Ls called about examinations, so took that opportunity to discuss online learning with them – had some more positive response and has now created a WhatsApp group for Ls and will start online learning via Zoom next week – discussion has led to a change in attitude to technology for learning-more positive.

**Harry:** These examples illustrate the range of things Ts have to do in this current context – not just teaching but much more – education, communicating with parents and community, and all of this responbsibility falls to the Ts. What institutional support are they getting?

**Manjusha (India):** Is actually on holiday! So doing this alone and independently.

**Dipika (India):** Ts are obliged to do this since they are not at school but on paid holidays. Also, they think that since Ts have no work like checking papers or preparing for school, they should. But many teachers are stressed as they don’t know how to use technology. They’re finding it difficult to get the authorities to understand that not all Ts can make worksheets and share them – not used to technology. They also assume that Ts have access to devices, but many don’t have a computer! These Ts are scared about what will happen of they can’t do what they’ve been asked to do.

**Harry**: If using Zoom, who’s paying for the licences? Prem’s friends helped him with cost (nothing from institution). (see chatbox comments).

**Sanjeev (Nepal):** Through NELTA conducting training with Ts on how they can connect with Ls. But pre-pandemic, technology was shunned in education so now it’s a task to change thinking and train Ts.

**Nadeem (country?):** with Ts uses Zoom, but with Ls (Grade 12) using Microsoft teams. Security concerns with Zoom; Microsoft teams safer. Continues to use Zoom with Ts as it’s more popular and they’ve used it for 3 years. 17,000 Ts – large group! Zoom handles large groups better than Teams.

**Smriti (India):** Re collaborative work – teaches BTEC and PhD SS tech communication – lot of writing and large class 106 ss. Divides into groups of 5, divides assignment into different parts, each L highlights work they’ve done, and upload. Using Microsoft teams and webex. With webex unable to upload though. So, corrects assignments online and sends feedback. Having group instead of individual assignments lessens the marking load, but is able to see what each L has contributed.

**Richard**: invited feedback on usefulness of discussion in chatbox.

**Harry:** Interesting themes: parents and comms; lack of support for Ts with little/no experience of tech. but incredible creativity in these difficult circumstances. A lot of support for health workers (financial, etc.) but very little for Ts – not heard of any stories where govts are asking e.g. mobile provioders to offer support to Ts. It seems that on top of the already numerous challenges Ts faced before in certain contexts, this pandemic is just creating more and these are not being addressed/alleviated. How do we step up this issue/raise awareness of these numerous challenges Ts are facing? On other hand, great that Ts are communicating with parents and getting parents on board re tech for education, and maybe parents will understand and value more the role Ts have to play and become their allies when it comes to greater recognition for Ts. Feels angry and frustrated at how Ts are being exploited and undervalued generally around the globe – this pandemic situation seems to highlight this even more.

**Nadeem:** Not only Ts, also administrators. E.g. all admissions need to be done online now, so extra work for admin.

**Prem:** Any suggestions for themes next week?

**Harry:** We will look at these in chatbox and focus on some of these next week.