CLT & Cisco: Building Virtual Classrooms across Government Schools in Karnataka

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The Vicious Cycle of Bad Teachers Giving Birth to Bad Teachers

"**The Children's Lovecastles Trust (CLT India)** story began in 1997 from a room with a view from my apartment window I would see children building castles out of mud. Kids who should be spending their time in school were out there, accompanying their parents to the construction site. This image that stayed with me repeated itself day after day until I realized a universal truth – Children love building castles, a place of belonging, whether in affluent neighborhoods or at a construction site," shares Bhagya Rangachar, Founder, Children's Lovecastles Trust (CLT India)

Born out of passion to keep children at school giving them the education they deserve, CLT initially started with Mid-Day-Meal in one Government School for day labourers' children in 1997. But the real problem was the lack of qualified teachers to teach these kids. As a minimum qualification for teachers, Government of India requires that the interested candidates pass Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) to become eligible to teach Classes I – VIII.

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This also means that teachers need not be graduates or even possess subject matter expertise to teach the kids. Often, the teachers who teach in government schools are the product of the poor quality of teaching in the same government schools. How will this vicious cycle come to an end?

A Beginning to the End of a Serious Educational Crisis:

ICT has been the answer to this long troubling problem of providing good teaching resource to resource starved government schools. Although an old idea, in an attempt to end this situation, in 2000, CLT went onto use curricula-based digital content developed by a commercial model in 1 village school with 600 kids. Though this intervention with ICT Tools was yielding results with kids passing with better marks and, aspirating to continue education in college, it was not a scalable model, as it was cost-prohibitive. In 2006, CLT decided to develop curricula-based content in Kannada and English languages for K-12 that was cost-effective, localized and scalable and replicable under the banner CLT e-Patashale. In 2009, they had set up DVD libraries for PC/TV in 100 schools and 15 after-school libraries benefitting close to 10000 students in Karnataka.

Since March 2011, CLT has been doing 8 hours of live online distance-learning program for 42 rural remote classrooms for 5th- 10th grade in all subjects through a PPP Model , in collaboration with Cisco and Dept. of Education, Karnataka. CLT Resource Centre acts as a Hub where teachers and resource people with subject expertise come together to develop a repository of localized multi-media content in regional languages that supports all lessons in all subjects for State-Board syllabus. And, CLT's teachers are connected online to several remote classrooms simultaneously with the aid of an interactive software platform to deliver the lessons. The learning environment is designed to be dynamic, where teachers can share content, use white board for explanations and students can interact with live discussions.
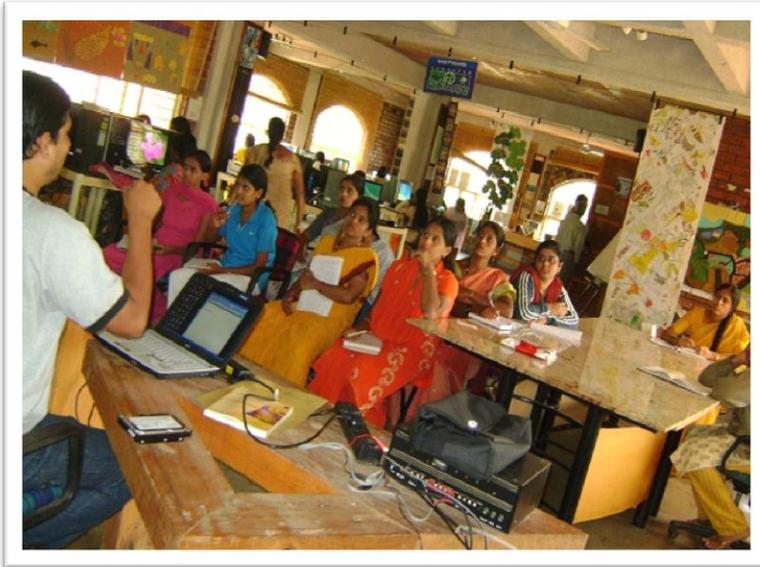
This makes the model economical, as the content can be centralized and different teachers will deliver lessons using same content. That brings about standardization of content, yet allowing each teacher to be innovative about how he/she could present with add-ons. CLT has a very dedicated team with qualified teachers, software and network engineers and resource people with diverse background and hundreds of volunteers. Cisco and the Department of Education are feverishly scaling this model using CLT's content in another 500 classrooms in 100 schools across the state in the next year. It would be interesting to watch this model scale across all the states in India to provide students from all economic strata with the same quality of education. We wish Bhagya Rangachar and team CLT the best.