



# Learning Centers A Tool to Inclusion in Classrooms

## *The Teachers Collective*

The Teachers Collective aims to reframe inclusion in schools through building teacher capacity, offline and online, through customised masterclasses and self-paced courses. They aim to create 1,00,000 inclusive educators in the next few years and can be reached at [www.theteacherscollective.co.in](http://www.theteacherscollective.co.in).

Inclusion in classrooms is a part of NEP 2020, being enforced by many boards of education. What does it look like in practice? In a series of articles, Parul Mathur and Sangitha Krishnamurthi of The Teachers Collective will elaborate on specific strategies to implement inclusion in classrooms.

## Principles of Inclusion

Inclusion in practice requires the creation of learning environments that have firm goals with flexible means to achieve them. A key principle to be considered while designing these flexible learning environments is student engagement in learning which increases when teaching-learning incorporates:

- choice in activities.
- multi-sensory, hands-on methods that include movement while exploring concepts.
- the skills required to complete concept related tasks like reading, writing, sequencing, etc. and providing opportunities to practice them.
- social-emotional learning and interpersonal skills such as team work, collaboration, reflection, emotional literacy and self-regulation, expert learning.
- games in education as well as using parts of game design like leaderboards, awards, scoring, badges, etc. to incentivize learning.
- differentiation to cater to the diverse levels in every classroom.

## **Learning Centers are a fun tool to combine all these principles in one shot!**

Say you are a teacher teaching Maps of India to a 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom and that your learning objective is to ensure that your students learn the political and physical maps of India. Your class has a mix of students who -

- push you to challenge them
- are working on mastering reading
- need more time to process concepts, or
- don't have the exposure and background knowledge to comprehend what they are learning.

Some are motivated and enthusiastic while some do the basic minimum for the tasks assigned; others need significant support with all tasks and concepts.

In our work with teachers, they tell us that their pain points are the completion of portions, paucity of time and behaviour management. Learning Centers address these pain points by providing time for practice to students, allowing teachers to walk around and observe student learning as well supporting student engagement (reducing behaviour management needs).

### **When can learning centers be used?**

Learning centers are a dynamic technique that lend themselves to the practice of both skills and concepts. They depart from usual classroom sessions by giving students choice, flexibility and the time to learn in smaller groups.

After teachers teach concepts as they usually do, learning centers would be a good activity to consider for a block period towards the end of the lesson.

While teachers will need to invest time in lesson planning, it is a one-time exercise with subsequent iterations to refine activities. Resource needs for learning centers can be adjusted according to any budget, with materials being multi-use, created once.

### **How are learning center introduced?**

Teachers decide how many activity centers they want, based on their students' needs and learning objectives. An average of 3 – 4 centers is ideal with every center having activities that all students can attempt.

First, the teacher introduces the concept of learning centers and brainstorms on rules that would help all students take advantage of the activities. These could include attempting the activities as a group, respecting material and leaving them as they found them, etc.

The teacher decides the grouping ahead of time based on the learning objective: choices could be multi-skill groups where students can give and receive support, same skill levels where students could attempt the same activities together, same energy levels or mixed energy levels, etc.

When the teacher has invested some time at the beginning in introducing centers, students are given a time limit (with a reminder alarm or bell) to explore the centers.

### What do Learning Centers have?

Learning centers will have a mix of several types of materials, games and activities. Taking our maps example further, our learning centers would include

- Different representations of the concepts: a globe, physical maps with manipulatives, political maps with flags and/or puzzles that are already put together, an atlas, visual flash cards with the position of states, map outlines with state labels to stuck, etc.
- Games that help students practice facts as well as deepen their understanding: a colour coded dice game (available for download), taboo cards, Just A Minute with a timer to talk about a chit they pick (with states, physical features, capitals), etc.



**Scan the QR code to learn how learning centers can be utilised.**

