Children learn their early lessons of life at home. The socio-emotional and intellectual environment of home determines to a great extent the future course of learning and development. As the child grows, the contours of personal and social space for interaction expand. The child gradually gets introduced to more formal institutional environments such as school. As the exposures increase, the informal settings such as peer groups and formal ones like school get incorporated into the learning framework of the growing child. In fact, this process continues throughout life changing and reconstituting the context and components of the social environment of the individual and thereby reshaping the personality in an ongoing manner. In the life-long process of exposure and accommodation, experiences of the early stage of life at home and community leave a lasting impact on the individual’s trajectory of learning and development.

This unit discusses the importance of home and community environment in the life of the growing child and how it impacts the learning process of the child. With the help of some real life illustrations, the Unit presents an analytical account of different types of home environments and their influence on different individuals. Further, it discusses the dynamics of home and community environment as it influences the individual’s learning style and capabilities.
9.2 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the importance of home in early learning experiences;
- identify types of home environment and their influence on learning;
- explain different aspects of home environment in the context of learning;
- analyse various issues related to learning and home environment;
- understand the close interaction among home, community and wider social environment; and
- understand how community environment affects learning process.

9.3 IMPORTANCE OF HOME IN EARLY LEARNING

9.3.1 Home as the First Learning Place

Early home environment influences the child's learning throughout life. The kind of experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, that the child goes through at early stage sets the tone and tenor for later development. A sense of security is a basic prerequisite to all development including learning. Children desire a conducive environment at home. During early years the social and emotional environment of home becomes a critical factor in influencing the individual's course of learning and development. Some of the basic strategies and styles of learning in fact begin to be moulded even before the child goes to a formal school. The informal learning endeavours that children engage in at home and in the surrounding community set the tone for their learning explorations in later life.

Learning involves the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values and dispositions and as it takes shape in the young child's life it is more than intellectual in nature. It is a process located in and influenced by the social and emotional experiences and characteristics of the environment. The nature and quality of emotional experiences and the sense of security and belongingness at home and in the immediate surroundings at the early stages in life and attachments developed are crucial for the learning to take place. If children grow as secure individuals they learn to trust people around them. The attachments children form with parents and siblings last a lifetime, and they serve as models for emotional relationships and learning explorations in the neighbourhood and society. At home they learn the first lessons of life, understand home and physical surroundings; and acquire necessary coping skills and social norms of personal and group behaviour. They learn how to respect family, community and other social groups, how to adjust to others and live together, how to listen, how to give and take, how to forgive, how to appreciate others, and how to think for themselves. Within the family, children also experience their first social conflict. Discipline by parents and arguments with siblings provide children with important lessons in compliance and co-operation and provide opportunities to learn the strategies to influence the behaviour of others. These skills though do not form part of the curriculum based learning outcomes in schools, constitute the basic framework for acquiring knowledge and skills in later life.
Activity 1

Take a few minutes to recall and reflect on your early home experiences and write a brief description of experiences that became lasting in your life.

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9.3.2 Developmental Context in Early Life and Its Impact on Learning

From your experiences you can understand how family and home constitute the child’s first and long lasting context for learning and development. The developing infant, the child, the adolescent, and the adult continuously attempt to build on early experiences as they grow into independent individuals. The effects of the quality of home environment during this period are more influential and lasting than any other phase of life. The availability or absence of specific environmental conditions or early deprivations significantly affect the stimulation of the neurological system of an individual critically conditioning response patterns in later life. In early childhood, children are introduced to the physical world through opportunities for play and exploration of objects around them, which are integral to the stimulation process.

Children learn to interact with their environment in random patterns involving sensorimotor coordination of their bodies and limbs in space and to manipulate objects. Gradually they learn to be independent and acquire everyday life skills, like eating, dressing, playing, making friends with others, and so on. As they grow older, they begin to explore the world of objects and people outside home, and individual differences begin to emerge in their style of exploration and areas of interest. They learn to develop a sense of autonomy. They become eager to try out new ideas and actions. Learning to be independent involves acquiring mastery over their environment on the one hand and accepting their capabilities/limitations and willingness to learn to improve on the other. It leads to the development of a positive self-concept. They also acquire a sense of right and wrong and learn to differentiate between good and bad. Further, they acquire language skills, cognitive skills, and social and moral values embedded in the community and cultural context.

As they enter into adolescence, they realise that many demands for new learning are externally imposed. It is at this stage that children come into conflict with their parents, community, and social norms. The struggle is to balance between externally located demands and the internal choices and explorations. Thus home becomes the focus in learning to set priorities for intellectual pursuits and also for socialisation into the ways of the larger community and society to which they belong.

You would have noticed that often, in order to gain a sense of security an adolescent is tempted to accept the standards of behaviour of parents and seek their advice, and is yet pulled towards peers to do as they do even if it means violating parental rules. There is a constant struggle at this stage to strike a balance between independence and dependence. It is hard but necessary to achieve a complete balance between warmth and guidance, and autonomy and support. Parents can help them plan and acquire skills of time management, choosing friends, and developing positive attitude towards themselves and life in general.
9.4 TYPES OF HOME ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING

9.4.1 Parenting Style and Child Rearing Practices

We are familiar with the saying that child grows into the direction initiated by parents through their practices and behaviours. It is useful to differentiate and understand the different types of home environment and how they influence learning in the growing individual. Home environment is essentially shaped and characterised by the child rearing practices adopted by parents. There is no one right method of child rearing to be used by every family and everywhere. However, there are certain child rearing practices, which provide a conducive environment for appropriate growth, and learning in the children. In such an environment, the child rearing practices help the growing child to develop a sense of confidence and then to acquire sense of autonomy and independence. This helps the child in learning by allowing her or him to incorporate new knowledge and skills in an expanding intellectual framework. It is necessary to recognise that child rearing is an interactive continuous process, in which children and parents learn to grow together, and reform their relationships. The interactions between parents and their children include the parents’ expression of their attitudes, values, interests, and beliefs, which in turn influence the child’s own value systems as learning styles and capabilities.

To sum up, types of home environment, determined mainly by the child rearing practices, is generally understood in terms of the ways the parents handle the child in areas of nurturing, protecting, training, disciplining, teaching and giving opportunities to develop and achieve to the best of his/her ability. These childhood experiences of rearing, training and learning have their effects not only in shaping the present state of the child but also his or her future development and learning.

9.4.2 Types of Home Environment

Let us go through the following cases and understand different types of home environment and parenting styles, and their impact on learning.

*Raja* comes from a home where everyone including his mother is scared of his father. As soon as the father enters home all of them start moving here and there. Raja, his brother and sister cannot express their views freely at home. Everyone has to listen to father. They have to take permission from the father for every little thing. They are afraid that they will be punished severely if they do not obey. They have to follow a schedule for doing different tasks at home, to play or to watch TV, even to study.

*Amol’s* parents remain quite busy in their work. Amol’s every demand is fulfilled by them. They generally do not bother about when he returns home from the school or go out. Whenever he asks for money or anything, they give him without much questioning. They do not have time to sit and talk to him. Basically, Amol feels that there is nobody at home who cares for him or is concerned about him. Gradually, Amol drifted and began neglecting his school work. Obviously, this affected his learning and began showing in his performance in the school.

*Everybody* finds Raghu and Lakshmi loveable. They clearly present a picture of happy and joyful childhood. Their parents make it a point to spend at least sometime every day talking to them and playing with them. At home, they have been given opportunity to express their ideas and views freely. Though their parents constantly watch and guide them, no decisions are imposed on them arbitrarily. This has helped them to become independent and confident individuals. They feel free to explore new things in their environment inside and outside their home. They do not hesitate in taking risk and in making mistakes.
The environment at home has given them a sense of security which has in turn helped them in their learning.

Activity 2

Write below your observations on the above cases. How the cases are different from each other? How would you characterise each case? What differences do you find in the parenting styles?

Let us review here the observations possible on these cases. In the first case, one finds an authoritarian parenting style. Parents who use an authoritarian style are also demanding, but they place such a high value on conformity that they are unresponsive - even outright rejecting - when children are unwilling to obey. 'Do it because I say so' is the attitude of these parents. As a result they engage in very little give and take with children. Children are expected to accept an adult's word in an unquestioning manner. If children do not obey, authoritarian parents resort to force and punishment. The authoritarian style is clearly biased in favour of parents’ needs; children's expression and independence are suppressed. Consequently, when such children interact with their peers, they tend to react with hostility whenever their views are not accepted and feel frustrated. In adolescence, young people with authoritarian parents continue to be less well adjusted than those exposed to a democratic style.

The second case represents the permissive or indifferent style of child rearing. It is apparently nurturant and accepting, but it avoids making demands or imposing controls of any kind. Permissive parents allow children to make many of their decisions at an age when they are not capable of doing so. They can eat meals and go to bed when they feel like and watch as much television as they want. They are permitted to interrupt and annoy others without any parental restraint. These children are found to grow up as immature learners and they generally have difficulty controlling their impulses. They may grow to be disobedient and rebellious whenever a demand is made on them to do tasks that conflict with their momentary desires and comforts. For many of them hard work and persistent attention to learning tasks may prove to be an extremely difficult proposition. They are also overly demanding and dependent on adults. Particularly in adolescence, continued parental indulgence is likely to lead to poor self control and less focused attention to the learning tasks in the school and result in gradual loss of interest in learning as a whole.

The third case represents democratic authoritative parents who make reasonable demands on the children. They express warmth and affection, listen patiently to the child's point of view, and encourage participation in family decision making. In sum, this kind of child rearing creates a rational and democratic ambience at home that recognises and respects the rights of both parents and children. These children grow to be lively and happy, self confident in exploring and mastering new tasks, and self controlled in their ability to resist engaging in disruptive acts. These children also generally display less traditional gender role behaviour. They exhibit higher self esteem, social and moral maturity, involvement in school learning and academic achievement. Nurturant parents who are secure in the standards they hold for their children provide model of caring, concern as well as confident, assertive behaviour. They are also
more effective as reinforcing agents, praising children for striving to meet their expectations. These parents let children know that they are competent individuals who can do things successfully. Since democratic parents continually try to adapt themselves to children's growing competence, their practices change with age.

In child rearing practices, including rewards and punishment, it is important for the parent not to take out his/her frustration on children. Most parents use punishment as one of the major approaches to child rearing. Unfortunately, many such parents do not remain consistent and respond to the child often on the basis of their own moods than the child's behaviour. On a day when the father is happy and in good mood, he would play and read out stories to the child. The next day, the father would be in a foul mood, and if the child asked to read out a story, he would be curtly called 'a pest bothering his father all the time.' How will the child figure it out? After many such experiences, the child is likely to stop asking his father for anything; become withdrawn and anxious about how his father is likely to react. Children need consistency in their lives. Of course, they will eventually learn to live in an inconsistent world. But at home, it is best if the parents are as consistent as possible in responding to the child on the basis of the child's behaviour. Extreme inconsistency at home may produce uncertainty, anxiety, and seriously affect their concentration and attention to learning tasks.

Children learn many of the socio emotional and cognitive behaviours through observing and imitating people who are significant to them, such as parents. Children often imbibe their parents' fears and biases, and they often try to act the way their parents act. Very often, you will find children getting angry when things do not happen their way. They learn from observing their parents that it is alright to get angry. But, this is not what parents want to teach. It is very important that parents set an example to their children rather than preaching them what to do and what not to do. A parent can model such basic behaviours as being honest, compassionate and understanding and handling conflicts through reasoning.

A very common tendency among parents is to compare their children with others, and failing to understand the individual differences. Parents often do not realize the harmful effect of such invidious comparison on the child, by projecting the ability or superiority of one child over another. This creates a sense of inadequacy in children finally resulting in an irrational “fear of failure.”

Unreasonable expectations of parents tend to curb the development of children and push them to live with a perpetual feeling of guilt as they cannot meet the standards set by their parents. It affects their learning process severely distorting their long term goals and styles of learning.

Decision making and independence training are important aspects of child rearing practices. Often one finds that many parents take decisions about children without knowing the opinion of children. This may be about trivial issues such as wearing a dress, or going out to places, or it could be the very vital decisions such as career options or selecting a life partner. This may work out in early stages of growth, but in the long run, it erodes the confidence and ability of the child to explore learning areas independently.

A note of caution is required in understanding the parenting styles and their impact on the learning of children. The above observations on the impact of different parenting styles are only indicative of broad trends. Influence of parenting styles is not altogether irreversible. One may come across exceptional children who overcome the adverse impact of wrong parenting styles and unfavourable home environments. But, they are exceptions. Many children succumb to the pressures and fail in their learning endeavours for no fault of their own, but due to inappropriate practices adopted by parents. Positive impact of a conducive home environment on the child’s personality as a whole and the learning process in particular is all pervasive over the life.
### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** Write your answers in the space given below.

1) Write down the features of the different parenting styles.
   
a) Authoritarian: 
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b) Permissive: 
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c) Democratic/authoritative: 
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2) Which of the three parenting styles is the most desirable one according to you? Why?
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### 9.5 COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND HOME ENVIRONMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS

#### 9.5.1 Physical, Psychosocial and Cultural Environment

We discussed in the previous section how child rearing practices influence the pattern of growth and development of the child in general and personal learning style and thinking processes in particular. Every home is to some extent a microcosm of the community in which it is located. The traditions, customs, norms of relationships and inter-personal interactions prevalent in the community may significantly influence child-rearing practices and the interaction patterns between parents and children at home. It is essential, therefore, to study and analyse the physical, psychosocial and cultural characteristics of the community context in which the child is growing up in order to understand her/his development and learning.

To understand the relationship between home environment and community, let us read the case given below.

Arun and his sister Anu lived in a small town with their parents and grandparents. They had a big house with a lot of space to play. Every evening, all the children of the neighbourhood gathered near their house and played cricket and other games. They had lot of fun in celebrating different festivals. Children in the neighbourhood would organise different programmes and invite their parents. Arun and Anu enjoyed being with their friends. Anu was encouraged to help her mother at home. Their school was very near to their house. Life changed dramatically when their father got transferred to Bombay. They started
living in a small apartment. There was no open space at home or outside to play. Both of them felt miserable in the new environment as they were used to living in a big house with many people around. It was strange for them not to find children to play with and to travel by bus to go to school. At home, they also found it amusing that the father who never helped mother earlier started helping in daily chores.

Activity 3

After reading the case, characterise the changes in the community context in which the family lived and list the factors influencing the home environment for the children.

One can easily make the distinction between urban vs rural and joint vs nuclear family settings. One can also find gender stereotyping practices inherent in the functions to be performed at home in the two contexts.

Let us now discuss how the changing community characteristics influence children’s learning.

Urban vs Rural Residence and Learning

In the later half of 20th century, urbanization and the growth of cities have been the most significant developmental factors influencing child rearing practices and human relationship patterns. We know that living in a city or in a town or in a village make a big difference in the way we organise our lives. Rural societies tend to incorporate nature’s concerns in their worldview, while urban societies often overlook environmental issues even if out of compulsion. It is a challenge to the people in urban centres to reconstruct the links between nature and nurture. However, cities also create and nurture their own culture - different ways of living and patterns of relationships. Urban culture brings with it new dynamics, creating tensions arising from population density and spatial proximity. To make life in cities agreeable, spaces have to be created for cultural expressions such as music, theatre and art. The availability of such spaces is critical for the intellectual development and learning for a growing child.

Some people characterise the quality of life in urban areas superior, though some others hold an exactly opposite view. However, it is not a matter of being superior or inferior. It is different and one can characterise the differences as alternative living styles and opportunities. The main advantages and disadvantages probably derive from the greater concentration of power and opportunities in urban areas, while children in rural areas may have more direct experience of nature. These differences are greater among some urban and rural localities than others, and there may also be important differences in the experiences and opportunities available to particular groups of people within each community.
In urban areas with multi-story buildings, there is hardly any space for children to play. There is no opportunity for children for physical exercise and interaction with the same age group children. If living conditions are favourable, children have a better chance for growth and learning and develop their full potential. If living conditions are poor, children suffer from a variety of diseases and deficiencies which affect adversely their health and psychomotor skills.

A commonly expressed myth is that rural children are less intelligent than urban children. It is true that children in rural areas have fewer opportunities for interaction and exposure to intellectual challenges in schooling. However, it is also true that children in rural areas develop insight into life’s processes in a deeper sense through non-formal and direct involvement. The contextual variations influence the way children develop their thinking and information processing capabilities. This also influences their styles and habits of learning, both in formal and informal contexts.

Tribal communities

All communities are not always of the rural urban kind. Some communities have typical cultural histories making them unique in many ways. These settings also influence learning of children. This is particularly important in the context of modern school based learning as these communities invariably have indigenous non-formal socialisation and educational processes for knowledge and skill building among the youngsters. We shall discuss some of these issues here in the context of tribal groups.

Through centuries of living close to nature, people from tribal communities have acquired detailed and personalised knowledge of their environment and its natural resources. They possess a unique understanding of the functioning of the eco-system, the properties of plants and animals and the techniques for using and managing these systems. Their children grow to learn about these knowledge systems in an informal manner. Similar to the life of the tribal communities being closely related to nature and environment, their social relationships and interaction patterns are also unique. Unfortunately, as pointed out by many observers, the uniform structure and transaction of curriculum adopted in formal schools offers no space or opportunity for the children from such unique background to utilise and build on the knowledge and skill base they bring with them. It is of critical importance to establish relevance of the school based formal learning in their life contexts. The lack of connectivity may lead to a sharp division between home and school and negatively influence the interest of children in school learning.

9.5.2 Socialization of the Child in Different Family and Social Settings

Socialization results from the variety of encounters between children and the adults around them, beginning with parents and other members of the family, and later extending to the members of the larger community. In these encounters the child extends his or her perceptions by first identifying roles and then enacting some of them, through the use of language and in all those activities, which are broadly labelled as play. Through language and play, the children locate themselves in the world they see and experience. They enhance their participation in the context around by accepting the roles and functions they have to undertake as they grow into full adulthood. In this process of growing up and performing, children sort out, choose, and try out the ones they choose in uniquely individual manner. The process is both vocal and quiet, and it does not end with childhood although it does not remain as vigorous an activity once the children have found their place in the world at least temporarily acceptable to them. The learning styles and thinking processes that children acquire are intricately embedded into the socialisation processes in the family and the community they live in.
The Learning Environment

The differences in the socialization practices of different families get translated into differences in the structured learning experiences provided to children. Middle class families have more resources at their disposal than poor families. They employ more educative patterns of interaction, and are more likely to expand and enrich the variety of developmental experiences of their children. In contrast the poor resources of families and other disadvantages operate as limiting factors in shaping the development and learning styles of their children, leading to low self-esteem and restricted acquisition of social skills and competencies.

If you look beyond the community to the cultural group, you would notice the socialization patterns differ in different cultural contexts. These vary from relatively simple and unsophisticated to complex and rich, from rigid to flexible, from principled to opportunistic, from compassionate and universal to restrictive and exploitative practices. Each of these tends to shape the child's style and capability to process information and establish personal competencies and habits of learning. Thus, it is possible to say that differing sets of parenting styles, different situations, circumstances and problems, and different socio-cultural contexts, have numerous implications for learning among young children.

You may have also observed that some family and social situations provide greater scope for structured and organized learning experiences to the children while some others limit them from gaining such experiences. Middle class parenting styles reflect sharing of experiences, responsibilities and participation in decision making at work, because of which they find negotiation and explanation with children meaningful and rational. In contrast, working class parents experience direction and subordination at work, and see little point in discussion, explanation and negotiation with children and thus pursue authoritarian parenting styles. However, there is no ideal family or social setting and no ideal set of socialization practices, which can allow full development and learning of children. Nor can it be assumed that the range of social situations existing in most societies are adequate to facilitate the full realisation or achievement of human potential for learning. There are numerous cases of children from very impoverished social contexts demonstrating high academic performance. The relationship of family and community characteristics with learning of children need to be examined in relation to their context.

It emerges that parenting is to a good extent socially determined, with some parents holding substantial competencies and resources at their disposal, and be able to act in ways they consider right, while others, having severely limited resources are subject to forces operating upon them, including the consequences of actions of other people. Hence, any changes in parenting that can be beneficial to all children would require changes in the structure and operation of societies, and in the ways people act on their beliefs, and with respect to each other. Correspondingly, efforts that involve changes in means or which are essentially instrumental in nature, appear to be relatively ineffective where parents do not see such means as relevant for them and for their children. The differences among parents in their material, social and personal resources or in their economic, political and cultural characteristics are reflected in the contributions they make to their children's development and learning from the outset, and these prove to be significant in shaping the capacity of the children as they grow.

The social class related differences in child rearing practices can also be understood in terms of different life conditions in different income group families. Education itself contributes to social class differences in child rearing practices. Middle class parents with higher levels of schooling tend to stimulate their children through talking and grant them more freedom to explore. When their children are older, they use detailed explanations, verbal praise, and inductive discipline. Middle class parents' interest in verbal stimulation helps their children to learn to think independently. In contrast, the
constant stresses that accompany poor families gradually weaken their family organisation. When daily crises arise, parents become depressed, irritable, and distracted. Marital conflict often makes parenting less nurturant and involved regarding the children’s development. Consequently, learning in the school and their formal skill acquisition during the crucial period of the child’s life gets adversely affected.

9.5.3 Value Inculcation and Learning

The source of values lies in interactive behaviour between the parent and child. A child’s earliest conception of what is right and what is wrong, good or bad, is in terms of rules and expectations of elders particularly the parents referring to specific acts and situations. Parents are the primary social agents who transmit personal and social values to their children. It is well known that the behaviour of others constitutes a powerful influence on the way children act by observation, imitation, significant identification etc. Identification, a concept derived from psychoanalysis, refers to the process that leads the child to think, feel, and behave as though he/she possessed the characteristics of the significant other person called the model of identification. In fact, identification is the basic process through which children learn moral standards and behaviours.

When children are able to adopt parental standards it makes them feel similar to their parents. Identification with a stronger parent may be an important source of security for a young child. Most parents display some beliefs about the characteristics they would like to see in their children and the child rearing methods they would use to attain them. It is in this context that parental warmth is regarded as an important element of the socialization process for several reasons. First, the child would like to have the parent’s approval and will feel distressed at the prospect of the loss of love or a warm parent. Second, it is easy to teach the child to internalise social rules and identify with a warm and nurturant parent. Third, warmth and nurturance by parents are found associated with security, low anxiety and high self esteem in the child. Child rearing practices are found to make significant contribution to the development of values. The parent who talks and reasons with the child about his/her misbehaviour is likely to provide the child with a clear understanding of what he/she did wrong. Value development in children is facilitated if the parents own values are not overtly rigid.

Parental modelling can be a powerful influence on the development of the child. Parents should be careful about their own behaviour in family interactions and social relations. The child will not be able to share feelings with others unless relationship between the two parents and parent and child are secure. Moreover parents cannot tell their children to have good interpersonal relations with other people, unless their own relations with others are sincerely established.

As children grow older parents should provide them opportunities to exchange viewpoints, and attitudes on various moral and social issues. They should also allow children to participate in family decision making. Parent-child verbal interaction, such as discussing, arguing, or planning are other ways to help social development. In traditional families, children are generally taught to obey and pay respect to parents and older adults. Opportunity to exchange opinions and attitudes with them is unlikely.

Children’s books and programmes can be used as tools by parents to assist children. Children can learn a great deal about the social world through reading books, listening to radio and watching television or film. For example, books about home and family, urban and rural lives, occupation and people in different cultures and nationalities, success stories of people, a kind man or a woman, all convey important facts and ideas about life in the social world that would be difficult for children to experience directly.
Check Your Progress 2
Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) Point out the different ways in which contexts influence learning.
   (a) Urban ..........................................................................................................................
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   (b) Rural .......................................................................................................................... 
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   (c) Tribal .....................................................................................................................
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2) How do class differences in socialization affect child learning?
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3) Explain the concept of ‘identification’. How do children learn values through the process of ‘identification’?
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9.6 LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY

9.6.1 Home as a Part of Community and Larger Society

As noted earlier, home is a part of the community and larger society which separately and interactively transmit to the young children a variety of experiences, knowledge base and mental predispositions towards learning. Cultures are often regarded as unified systems of ideas and beliefs of people in a society. It is true that basic ideas do recur uniformly in several cultures because cultures have partly common roots, built on similar human experiences and in the course of history have often learned from each other. Yet, cultural differences would often exist along gender, class, religion, caste, language, ethnicity, and other fault lines, which deeply influence the young as they grow. Different faiths stand as cultural, symbolic and intellectual creations which reflect the diversity of human experiences and the ways in which people accept the promise, challenge and tragedy of human life.

It is well known that ties with the community and society help in reducing family stress and enhancing child development. There are several reasons. First, social support
offers interpersonal acceptance. A neighbour or a relative who listens sympathetically and tries to relieve a parent's concern enhances self-esteem. The parent in turn is likely to behave more sensitively toward children. For families experiencing economic strain, social networks influence parenting indirectly but in a significant manner by reducing mother's feeling of economic and social burden. Second, social networks provide parents with opportunities to exchange valuable information, goods, and services. It also offers child rearing controls and role models. Friends and relatives may advise and demonstrate effective ways of interacting with children. They also provide warmth, stimulation and exposure to a wider array of competent models.

Gender has been one of the most sensitive issues in a changing world. The extent of gender identity is relational. It affects not only the inner person in his or her self-representation, but also the outer one in his or her exercise of power. Every culture offers its children an account of the existence of the two genders and their multiple roles according to work, marriage, and age, and provides them with broad guidance on how to handle the relationships between them. There can be no substitute for this kind of account and guidance transmitted to individuals through a bundle of attitudes, narratives, images and myths.

The cultural interpretation of gender is central to the identity of every individual. A new emphasis on gender, as a relational concept has opened up possibilities for looking at the full range of social and cultural institutions which reproduce gender hierarchies and gender based inequalities having far reaching consequences on the self-concept of the child as well as the learning dispositions and interests.

**9.6.2 Peer Group and Neighbourhood**

As children grow older their social world expands. They begin to look outside their home and toward other children in their neighbourhood as their companions and playmates. With change in their play interests comes an increasing desire to be with and be accepted by children outside home. Becoming socialized is one of the major developmental tasks of this period. Children become members of a peer group, which will incrementally reduce the family influence on their attitudes and behavior. The peer group as defined by Havighurst, is an aggregation of people of approximately the same age who feel and act together.

Children learn to redirect their egocentric interests into channels that promote the group's interest and thus move towards other centredness. Peer interactions in general and peer conflicts and arguments in particular are the necessary conditions to learn to accept other's point of view. In the course of such interactions, the child is forced to examine his/her own contentions. Therefore, experience with peers is needed to breakdown the egocentrism of the child and to allow him/her to consider other perspectives. As role taking abilities emerge, the child could engage in reciprocal social behaviour, such as cooperation, discussion and planning with others. Piaget suggested a bidirectional causal relationship: peer interaction is a necessary factor for the development of the role taking skills. The greater an individual's participation in a social group, the more opportunities one has to take the social perspectives of others.

Thus, peer relationships undoubtedly play a meaningful part in the development of social skills in children. A child with good social skills is likely to be popular among the peers, having higher social competence in several areas, such as leadership, and ability to get along with others. To allow children to interact with their age mates is perhaps to help them to build good social relations with their peers. According to developmental and social psychologists, social perspective taking is the central mechanism a child has for acquiring the ability to understand own behaviour from the other's point of view. This ability conveys to the child the need to recognise that others' thoughts and feelings may be different from oneself. He or she must learn to take, that is to internalise others' view points. This enables him or her to restructure the way he or she perceives and feels about a particular issue. Once the child develops this skill s/he can
communicate more accurately with other people in different social situations. Researches reveal that social perspective taking skill is a prerequisite for desirable social cognitions such as moral reasoning and problem-solving thinking, and social behaviours such as better peer interaction and behavioural adjustment.

Parents can promote social perspective taking skills of their children through child rearing. The warm, affectionate and nurturant relationship between the parents and the child makes the child feel secure and comfortable, and thus reduces the feeling of self-concern, fear or dislike, while making him or her aware of others’ thoughts and feelings.

9.6.3 Community Resources and Learning

Every generation inherits from its ancestors a wealth of tangible and intangible cultural resources that embody the collective memory of communities across the world. An awareness of their responsibility to preserve this fragile wealth tends to get crystallised around built environment: historic monuments and sights and enrichment of museum collections. It has become a world wide movement now to preserve the historical monuments. It is also the pride of international cultural co-operation, as it cements solidarity between people for a common cause. Their sustained existence means that the assets of heritage are not merely evidence of a bygone past that is valued in itself and protected. There are forces emanating from it which actually enter into living practices-mythical, spiritual or ritual behaviour. While generally serving the myth making process, they also have great potential for examining and questioning unproved traditions, skewed myths and conventional values.

Within the above framework of preserved heritage, museums have come to play an important part in defining the meaning of culture, and creating explicit or implicit systems of value for defining their importance. Museums are both repositories and sources of information. The museum resources form information of many kinds. They include material relevant to studies of environment of local and national culture.

Schools and parents should help the children in exploring the social world directly by taking them out to such places. There are many places which are appropriate as well as valuable for children to visit, for example, museums, libraries, parks, banks, airports, markets, theatres, and zoo. Taking a trip to a near by village is another way to introduce children to people who have different ways of living.

These are only some illustrations of how to use community resources for learning. In reality, the situations would vary widely in terms of what is available for use as learning resources. Yet, every context - urban, rural, tribal, and so on - have abundant possibilities for creating learning opportunities for children. It essentially depends on the ingenuity and innovativeness of teachers and parents. In fact, children are the best judge of what they want. Allowing them to choose contents based on their natural curiosity and interest can go a long way in exploiting local community resources for learning.

9.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to understand how home environment is crucial for child’s learning and development. It also presents the social and developmental context in early life and its impact on learning. Further, it analyses the different types of home environment - democratic, authoritarian, and indifferent or permissive style of parenting and their influence on learning with the help of the real life illustrations. Discussion of different cases should be helpful in understanding the various types of home environment like, urban-rural, tribal-nontribal context, joint and nuclear family settings, and gender stereotyping. Finally, focus has been on how community and society context and home environment affect the socialization of the child and lead to value inculcation through various learning experiences. This has been highlighted by discussing how home is part of the community and the broader social and cultural context.
9.8 UNIT END EXERCISES

1) Home is the first and crucial learning space. Discuss.

2) Visit a couple of homes in your neighbourhood, observe the parenting style in these homes. Present your observations in your group.

3) Children learn from their peers. Illustrate.

9.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


