UNIT 10 LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Structure

10.1 Introduction
10.2 Objectives
10.3 What is School Environment?
  10.3.1 Physical Environment
  10.3.2 Psychological Environment
  10.3.3 Social Environment
  10.3.4 Cultural Environment
  10.3.5 Political Environment
  10.3.6 Dynamism of School Environment
10.4 Can Schools be Classified Based on Their Environment?
10.5 Influences of School Environment on the Learner
  10.5.1 Planned versus Unplanned Influences
10.6 Classroom as a Miniature Society
  10.6.1 Creating a Positive Classroom Climate
10.7 Classroom Climate
10.8 Curriculum and Classroom Environment
10.9 Environment in e-Learning
10.10 Let Us Sum Up
10.11 Unit End Exercises
10.12 References and Suggested Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Apart from the home and family, the school in which one studies is a major influence on an individual. To which school a child should be admitted is an important decision for parents. Like individuals, schools do differ from one another. Studies on twins reared in different environments have shown that they grow into different personalities. Similarly, children schooled in different types of schools may be intellectually, socially, morally and emotionally different and manifest different behaviours. Hence, for a student of education, a study of school environment and its types is essential for understanding the nature of learning among children in different schools.

In this unit, you would study school environment in terms of physical, psychological, social, cultural and political dimensions and the dynamism of relationship across these dimensions. Apart from knowing about an environment-based classification of schools, you would be studying the influences of school and classroom environment on the learner and the process of learning.
10.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- know the meaning of school environment;
- understand the components of school environment;
- explain the dynamism of relationship between the components of school environment;
- classify schools based on environment;
- explain the nature of influence of school environment on the learner;
- differentiate between the planned and unplanned influences of school environment;
- describe the influence of teacher on learners;
- justify that classroom is a miniature society;
- discuss the nature and influence of classroom environment on the learner;
- outline the characteristics of positive classroom climate;
- explain the relationship between curriculum and school environment; and
- understand that e-learning creates a unique environment for the learners.

10.3 WHAT IS SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?

Broadly speaking, environment refers to one's surrounding. The surrounding of an individual can be viewed from several perspectives. A slogan like 'Keep your surroundings clean' refers to using mainly your physical environment. Whereas, the statement 'She grew up in an unhappy surrounding' would refer to one's psychological environment. Even though everything that surrounds an individual has the potential to influence that individual, no individual may interact with every element of her/his surrounding. Since one has to interact with elements of one's surrounding to influence or to be influenced, it may be appropriate to view one's environment as that part of one's surrounding with which he/she interacts. School environment, then would refer to that part of one's school surrounding with which he/she interacts on a regular basis. Thus if we have to understand the nature of the influence of school environment on a learner, we have to understand what constitutes the surrounding of a learner. Some elements of school environment are discussed in this unit.

10.3.1 Physical Environment

Physical environment of a school is composed of its physical surrounding and facilities in which a learner finds oneself while in school. In the absence of the minimum essential standard for running a school, we commonly find that the physical surroundings and facilities differ from school to school. You might already be familiar with some of the following instances of schools varying in their physical environment.

Case 1:

A rural lower primary school like others managed by the Government has classes from I to IV. It is a vernacular medium monograde school wherein each class is assigned to one teacher who is required to teach all subjects to that class. The school has a total number of four teachers apart from a Head Mistress. The strength of the school is 146 out of which 81 are boys and 65 are girls.

The school is located on the main road in about 44 cents of land and the building, which is fairly old, is almost in a dilapidated condition. The built up area of the
school is about 400 sq. fts, and it falls short of 460 sq. fts., which, as per the norms, is the minimum area required for appointment of a sweeper for maintenance. It has a large hall of 80x20 feet and a room of 20x20 feet. The hall accommodates classes II, III and IV whereas, the room accommodates class I, HM’s office, and staff room. Mid-day meal is also cooked in this room and the teaching aids and a cupboard are also kept in it.

A community member who did not have children donated the school building. But now, his relatives who are the legal heirs want the property back due to its high commercial value. Hence, the building has not been maintained for a long time and the walls and floors are badly damaged. The roof can fall any time and has been declared unsafe by the engineers of the public works department. One part of the building is dark and dingy with little ventilation. The building is under litigation for the last 10 years.

The school has no toilet facility. Drinking water is available in the form of an open well and a bore well just outside the school. A little space in the front and at the back is available for children to play. Children are provided with wooden planks to sit on.

Case 2:

A rural upper primary school is run by a private management. This school has regional language as the medium of instruction. It was started about 90 years back and draws children within a radius of 1.5 kms. The school manager is the Headmaster and his wife the assistant. The management runs three other schools.

The lower primary section i.e. classes from I to IV has seven female teachers apart from the manager. The school received an award as the best school that caters to the SC students. The staff room and the HM’s rooms are in one block, which is newly constructed. The three sections of standard I are in one building and standards II and III are in another building, which also houses a library room. The IVth standard along with the Vth, VIth and VIIth are in another building. The buildings are close to each other and have the necessary facilities of toilet, electricity and drinking water. The school building is old but neatly white washed with meaningful quotations written at several places. The building has corridors on all four sides. The staff and HM’s room have a RCC roof, whereas the other rooms are tile roofed. The rooms are spacious and confirm to the Education Act of 1959, according to which the classroom must have a size of 200 sq.ft. i.e. 20x20x12. On three sides of its building, the school has a well maintained garden. On the fourth side is the school playground, which is about two acres in area.

The expectation of two reasonably large, weather-safe rooms for primary schools is far from ambitious, yet it remains unrealised in the majority of schools in India. Most schools function from open areas under a tree, rented rooms, or crumbling structures with leaking roofs, bad lighting, no sanitary or drinking water facility, and few resources. The above stated cases are just two types of schools. You can see that schools can be placed on a continuum from poor-impoverished to rich-affluent physical environments.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) What is school environment?

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

34
List any four aspects of school environment that constitute its physical environment.

10.3.2 Psychological Environment

If building, space and facilities provide physical environment to a school, its philosophy and practices provide a psychological environment to it. The psychological environment of a school would refer to the stimuli that impinge upon the learner’s psyche in the school. For example, the attitude of the principal and teachers towards a learner would act as a stimulus for the learner to do or not do certain things in the school.

As you would normally find, most teachers have their favourite students in the class and that they are usually the so-called good students of the class. Imagine the class where teachers have only one such favourite student and teachers give importance to that student on every occasion. Like a pampered child at home, this student would grow as an individual characterized by a tendency to be rather aggressive and dominant over others. By pampering, children are taught that they can take without giving. Their wishes are everyone else’s commands. This may sound like a wonderful situation, until you realize that the pampered child fails in two ways. First, he/she doesn’t learn to do things for himself/herself; and discovers later that he/she is truly behind. Secondly, he/she doesn’t learn any other way to deal with others than giving the commands. And society responds to pampered people only in one way: hatred.

On the contrary, imagine a class where the teachers are always suspicious of some children’s ability and where they doubt or criticise the children, they need to defend themselves from such occurrences and hence may avoid expressing their true self. In such a psychological environment, you may find a child who grows into a sensitive person and has developed a shell around him, which protects him. They learn about inferiority in the class because they are told and shown every day that they are of no value. They learn to be selfish because they are taught to trust no one. If you haven’t known love, you don’t develop a capacity to love. We should note that the neglected children include not only orphans and the victims of abuse, but also the children whose parents are never there, and the ones raised in a rigid, authoritarian manner.

School thus has a role that is strategic as well as indispensable in the development of healthy personality. For example, much attention has been given to the conflict between the democratic tradition to which the school is dedicated and certain anti-democratic practices and attitudes to which it is often prone, like authoritarianism in human relations, competitiveness rather than cooperation in the classroom, caste and religion based segregation, and other less tangible forms of inter group discriminations.

10.3.3 Social Environment

Every school provides to its students a social environment in addition to the physical and the psychological environment. As you know, a learner is not alone in a school. He/she is surrounded by other learners as well as the influential adults, the teachers. The social surrounding of a school constitutes its social environment. A learner is in constant interaction with the peers and teachers for a significant part of the day he/she spends in the school. Be it studies, playing, quarrelling or simply gossiping, the learner has someone around. Every interaction and interpersonal relationship of a learner occurs in a social environment. One’s interaction with others in a social environment is also known as socialisation. It is the process whereby individuals are
made aware of the behaviour that others expect of them related to the norms, values and culture of their society. **Agents of socialization** include the family, school, friendship groups, religious institutions and the mass media.

In collective undertakings with the peer group students learn and practice the social virtues of cooperation, self-sacrifice and loyalty, while outdoor activities offer many opportunities for the exercise of daring, resourcefulness, self-reliance and initiative. Many social skills, habits, attitudes and prejudices of individual students are tried out, tested and refined in the social environment of the school.

### 10.3.4 Cultural Environment

Another component is the cultural environment, as inhabitants in different regions pursue different traditions, customs, rituals etc. and thus differences in culture. Why do the Chinese dislike milk and milk products? Why do the Hindus perform rituals to invoke the rain god? Why do some nations trace descent through the father, others through the mother, and still others through both parents? Not because different people have different instincts, not because they were destined by God or fate to different habits, not because the weather is different in different countries or regions, but because **they had been brought up that way**.

By **culture** is meant the total life ways, the social legacy the individual acquires from his/her group. Culture can also be regarded as part of the environment created by human beings. Culture is used in its broadest anthropological sense to include all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products that are humanly produced, both material (buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing), and immaterial (ideology, value systems, mores), as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio/political order. A humble cooking pot is as much a cultural product as a Beethoven sonata. Culture is a way of thinking, feeling and believing. It is the group's knowledge stored up in memories of men and things they do and in books and objects for future.

A good deal of human behaviour can be understood and predicted if we know the culture of the inhabitants, which is their design or road map for living. Many acts are neither accidental nor due to personal peculiarities. Nor are these caused by supernatural forces or are simply mysterious. Even those of us who pride ourselves on individualism follow most of the time a pattern not of our own making. We brush our teeth on arising, eat two meals a day—not three or four, we sleep in a bed and not in a hammock. One need not know the individual and his life history to be able to predict these, and other countless regularities, including those implicit in the thinking process.

Cultural determinism is one sided like biological determinism. Culture arises out of human nature, and its forms are restricted both by man's biology and natural laws. It is equally true that culture channels biological processes—vomiting, weeping, fainting, sneezing, the daily habits of food intake and waste elimination. When a man eats, he is reacting to an internal drive, namely; hunger contractions consequent upon the lowering of blood sugar, but his precise reaction to these internal stimuli cannot be predicted by physiological knowledge alone. Whether a healthy adult feels hungry twice, three times, or four times a day and the hours at which this feeling recurs is a question of culture.

One never sees culture as such. What are seen are regularities in the behaviour or artefacts of a group that adhere to a common tradition. One never sees an electromagnetic field but the happenings that can be seen, may be given an abstract formulation by assuming that the electromagnetic field exists. Obviously, every school presents to its learners an environment characterized by practices that is its cultural environment.
10.3.5 Political Environment

You know the school environment has a two way relationship with political environment. It is influenced by political environment as well as influences it. You may be familiar with the myth that poor parents do not care about educating their children which is astonishingly widespread in official circles, where it provides a convenient rationalization for India’s low schooling levels. On the contrary, the typical fathers and mothers are quite keen that their children receive good education, despite their little faith in the system’s ability to impart such education.

In rural India in particular, sending a child to school on a regular basis requires a great deal of effort and sacrifice on the part of the child and his or her parents. Other impelling factors include prohibitive costs - often indirect, no school within easy reach, a hostile environment at school, lack of support and lack of progress at school, all of which sap the morale of parents and children. In the light of these obstacles it is easy to understand why so many children are out of school even when their parents express a strong interest in education.

Imagine that a town has one government and one private school within walking distance from each other. Would both of these schools be equally attractive to every parent in town to educate their children? Or will they be equally easily accessible to every child for admission? You know that they would not be. On one hand, the socio-political status of the parent determines the choice, and on the other hand the economic status of parents would dictate the decision.

All people in a society do not belong to the same social class. You would find that every community consists of the dominant and subordinate social classes. The Indian caste system has created social classes and a stratification of society, where one caste group tries to dominate over the other. Dominance of one social class over others is called ‘hegemony’. Since teachers and students in a school belong to one or the other caste or community group, the practices of hegemony are also found in the school environment. This is the reason why only certain students can attend a public school and certain others a government school. Even inside the classroom, certain students receive better attention and treatment while others do not. Hence, every school creates a political environment for the learner.

You can infer that the school is a social institution in any country controlled by historical and cultural forces. Can labourers or persons belonging to disadvantaged sections, poor and dispossessed people start or control a formal school is a question, considered very rarely. Who controls the activities of a school is determined by the powerful in the political environment.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) Differentiate between the psychological and the political environments of a school.

..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................

2) How is social environment of a school different from its cultural environment?

..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................
10.3.6 Dynamism of School Environment

In the above sections, we have discussed that a school provides a learner in addition to physical environment with unique psychological, social, cultural and political environments. Do these environments in a school exist in isolation from one another? Or is there an interaction among these environments as well? Before answering these questions, you may like to read the following field notes from observations reported on the internet about schools that catered to three villages.

Field Note 1

The explorations in three villages situated in climatically different tracts have brought out several aspects of culture and modalities of child socialization. Arising from human interaction with nature and a time-honoured value system, which transcends the day-to-day subsistence concerns of the rural people, the cultural commitments of the family and community shape the child's personality almost from the moment of birth. However, the local primary school transplanted by the state in this cultural milieu may remain unaware of the education received by the child through participation in various rites, rituals, celebrations, lifestyle and allocated tasks. It is this education that shapes the child's personality and makes it feel secure within its cultural setting. It knows who it is, what it is expected to do, in what way, and how to relate itself to the kinship structure and the neighbourhood. It learns a tremendous amount about nature and develops emotional bonds with its different seasonal manifestations. All this knowledge, gathered at first hand, infuses self-confidence in the child and forms its cultural identity.

Field Note 2

In the process of growing up the child is helped by the various stakeholders, parents, kin, neighbours and the community as a whole. The school teacher, being an outsider, is not a participant in this process of incidental but fairly well-organised cultural learning. For the rural child, therefore, the teacher in the formal school is a stranger and the school is a place where it has no protection from parents, older siblings, or relations and neighbours. School entry for the child is traumatic, an entry into insecurity, into a world of which the ways are quite different from what the child has experienced in its cultural milieu. This is often the reason for non-enrolment of rural children and of a large dropout rate. Not only the child but the parents also are distanced from the school, since it is only the teacher who is designated by the system to transmit education according to a state-prescribed curriculum. The textbook is the only tool of education, but the standardised, formal language it uses is far removed from the local vernacular. Its lessons deal with subjects with which the child has no cultural familiarity. The so-called co-curricular activities are also prescribed from a 'national' and 'international' standpoint about which the community, parents and children know next to nothing. Local festivals and celebrations receive a small place in the annual list of state-prescribed holidays, but the school does not figure in them as a cultural participant. The parents do not know what the curriculum intends to do nor what the textbook teaches. As a result, this education can receive hardly any support at home. The results of school learning fail to correspond with the parents' expectations of schooling and they withdraw their children from school. The children, by and large, do not regret this withdrawal and happily return to the security of the culture imbibed by them before school entry. This picture was seen in the three villages under investigation. It reinforced the overall research findings in this respect.

Having read the above field notes, what conclusions would you draw about the various components of school environment? Yes, the various components are not like watertight compartments. There would be a constant and continuous interaction among these
environments. The unique environment of a school is the product of a dynamic relationship among the various components and environments.

For example, the personality of a learner can be described in terms of the physical, psychological, social or emotional dimensions. Even though we can study these dimensions separately, personality of the learner is a dynamic organisation of all these dimensions (and more). Similarly, what we call school environment is a dynamic organisation of the physical, psychological, cultural, social and political environments.

Shared power in learning is exercised to control the curriculum, its contents and methods, and the coordination of all learning activities. Education for liberation provides a forum for the imagination and free exercise of control of learners, teachers, and the community, while also providing for the development of those skills and competencies necessary for the exercise of such power.

In text Activity

1) Recall the primary school you attended. Make a brief description of the physical, psychological, cultural, social and political environment of it.

2) Visit a nearby secondary school. Observe and talk to the students and teachers. Write a field note describing its physical, social and psychological environment.

10.4 CAN SCHOOLS BE CLASSIFIED BASED ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT?

We have discussed so far that schools differ in terms of physical environment. If some schools are run in dilapidated buildings, others in crowded classrooms with poor illumination and ventilation, there are others having spacious buildings with good architecture. For a moment, close your eyes and imagine the physical environment of a government school, a private school and a public school. Do these schools present different pictures to you? Similarly, if you imagine a rural school and an urban school, do you see them as having different physical surroundings? If yes, then, it is possible to classify schools on the bases of their physical environment.

We all know that if any single factor makes a difference between a poor school and a successful school, it is the commitment and initiative of the teacher. Teachers do play a crucial role in fulfilling the potential of a village school. However the state of teachers in India is not satisfactory. The rural primary school teacher occupies the lowest position in the hierarchical administrative structure and is expected to bear the burden of education in complete isolation with very little support. The rural teacher in addition to normal teaching is also expected to perform other functions such as census taking, etc., which take time away from teaching. Would this be the same in an urban English medium private school or a public school?

Will the teachers belonging to different types of schools provide their students with similar psychological environment? It is true that in some schools teachers demand discipline and regularity in work from their students, while those in other schools are almost unconcerned? In other words, schools can also be classified according to their psychological, social and political environment.

You would agree that certain kind of physical environment goes with certain kinds of psychological, social, cultural and political environments. A school with a dilapidated building is more likely to practise social segregation, may have greater political interference, may present to the learner poor standards of learning, and may truly adhere to the local culture. Whereas, a well-maintained and spacious school may present to its learners a variety of planned experiences, set higher standards for learning, act as a true critique of cultural practices, and interfere the least with its policies and programmes.
Let us think for a while of the analogy used earlier of the personality of a child. We know that every child has a unique personality. Still we do classify a set of children in categories such as extrovert-introvert, social-inhibited and impulsive-reflective. Children classified as extroverts are not all at the same level of extroversion, nor those classified as social are equally social. We may find them more extroverts than introverts or more social than inhibited. Similarly, even though schools are unique in their environments, we can classify schools into specific categories based on their environment.

10.5 INFLUENCES OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ON THE LEARNER

We will use two anecdotes to discuss the influences of school environment on the learner.

Anecdote I

This anecdote starts with the visit of one Mr. Narayanappa, who came to meet the Headmaster of a government school adopted by a non-governmental agency. Mr. Narayanappa wanted to take his 10 year old son out of the school. His stated reason for seeking to take out the boy was that he was moving to a different part of Bangalore.

As luck would have it, I (the author) happened to be visiting this school on that day and I decided to probe this matter further. With a little coaxing, it became apparent that Mr. N was taking his son out of school for good. When I expressed my concern that he should think about the long-term prospects of his son, Mr. N retorted (respectfully), “Sir, that is exactly why I am taking this step. What sort of future do you think my son will have studying up to the 10th Std in a government school? He may not even be able to get through the examinations in the normal course. If he is lucky, he may manage to score 50-60% at the end, which will be totally inadequate for him to gain admission in a decent college. On the other hand, if I place him with a good ‘maistry’ (contractor), he will learn a useful trade and earn money for my family. And then with some luck, by the time he is 25, he may even become a small-scale contractor on his own. Worse still, if he continues with his schooling any longer, he may not even be inclined to do manual labor, which I see as essential for him to earn a living.”

This anecdote demonstrates a father’s apprehension that the school influences the learner, but the influence need not always be positive or as expected.

Study of school influence on the learners in fact has been a concern of researchers in education. They have posed questions such as: ‘Does the physical setting; the building and its architecture have any influence on the student achievement?’

Two noteworthy evaluation efforts on this topic are those of Beck (1979) conducted over 120 schools, and of Traub et al. (1976) over 30 schools. Both students made an effort to control each school’s curricular emphasis, and also distinguished between different types of environments. Both looked at noncognitive as well as cognitive student outcomes. Although noting considerable variations within the school types, the Beck study found that on the average, students in conventional schools significantly outscored the open-plan students on mathematics and reading achievement tests. Noncognitive outcomes such as attitude toward school showed no relationship to the physical setting. In contrast the Traub et al. evaluation found no consistent relationship between school architecture and achievement outcomes. Moreover, they observed that students in open-plan schools displayed more positive attitudes towards school, their teachers, and themselves, and also rated higher on independence.
You would find it true that a beautiful and clean physical environment may lead to feeling of ownership and attachment among pupils and teachers to the school. However, it is doubtful that the building alone could significantly affect children's test scores. In order to fully understand the impact of the environment, it is important to examine those social and instructional variables that intercede between the architectural shell and educational outcomes. The following anecdote may illustrate this more clearly.

Anecdote 2

I (Mr. X) went to see the Head Master of one of the schools, immediately after my organisation had adopted the school. It was actually my first meeting with the Headmaster and after we exchanged preliminaries, the following exchange transpired:

Mr. X: What can we do for your school?

Headmaster: Sir, how much money does your trust roughly control?

Mr. X: Don't worry about the actual money reserves. We have enough to help improve the learning levels of the children in your school. Can you give us some ideas about what you need?

Headmaster: To start with, how about getting us ______? (fill in a long list of school items)

Mr. X: I don't mind getting you all that you requested and much more! I can promise you the sky.... But, can you assure me that as a result of our efforts, each class will show a 'X' % improvement in their grades.

Headmaster: Ahhh, I see.. let me think about it .. I think we need teaching aids like charts and models badly. Can you get us some?

Mr. X: No problem, please give me a list.

(Headmaster hands over a list after some discussions. A day later..)

Mr. X: Here are all the items you wanted. What next?

Headmaster: Sir, we never thought you were going to come back in a day!! Anyway, can you find us at least two more teachers? We have only five teachers for seven classes.

In sub-section 10.3.2, we discussed psychological environment in a school. How does the psychological environment influence a learner? Probably the psychological environment of a school has the most telling effect on the learner. The expectations of conduct, the reward and punishment mechanisms, the nature of learning engagements, etc. have an influence on the learner.

Imagine a situation in a school where there is incongruity between your image of yourself and your immediate experience of yourself (i.e. between the ideal and the real self).

Imagine that you are in a threatening situation. For example, if you have been taught to feel unworthy, if you do not get A's on all your tests, and you aren't really all that great a student, then situations such as tests are going to bring that incongruity to light that tests will be very threatening. When a student is expecting a threatening situation, he/she will experience anxiety. Anxiety may lead to specific influences on the learner behaviors such as escaping from tests, blaming the teachers for faulty questions, engaging in malpractice and so on.

Social environment of the school is another factor that influences learner behaviour. The social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communications in a school, (the social environment) influence a learner and his/her learning. Learning can be enhanced
when the learner has an opportunity to interact and collaborate with others on instructional tasks. Learning settings that allow for social interactions, respect diversity, and encourage flexible thinking are socially competent. In interactive and collaborative instructional contexts, individuals have an opportunity for perspective taking and reflective thinking that may lead to higher levels of cognitive, social, and moral development, as well as self-esteem. Quality personal relationships that provide stability, trust, and caring can increase learners' sense of belonging, self-respect and self-acceptance, and provide a positive climate for learning. Positive interpersonal support and instruction in self-motivational strategies can offset factors that interfere with optimal learning such as negative beliefs about competence in a particular subject, high levels of test anxiety, and undue pressure to perform well. Positive learning climates can also help to establish the context for healthier levels of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Such contexts help learners to feel safe to share ideas, to actively participate in the learning process, and to create a learning community.

By taking into account the cultural diversity of students, the school can create its own enriched cultural environment. Learning is most effective when differences in learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account. The same basic principles of learning, motivation, and effective instruction apply to all learners. However, differences in language, ethnicity, race, beliefs, and socio-economic status all can influence learning differently. Careful attention to these factors in the instructional setting enhances the possibilities for designing and implementing appropriate learning environments. When learners perceive that individual differences in their abilities, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences are valued, respected, and accommodated in learning tasks and contexts, their levels of motivation and achievement are enhanced.

Teacher Influence

The teacher has important responsibilities to create positive physical, social and emotional environment for his/her pupils. He/she determines to a great extent the emotional tone of his/her classroom by own appearance, attitude and methods. He/she helps the shy child to be accepted by the group and helps the aggressive child to utilise his/her energy in constructive projects. He/she adjusts pupils' work to their abilities and strives to arouse interest and enthusiasm in areas of study that he/she considers of vital importance. How wonderful it would be if every teacher made the following pledge to students?

My Pledge to Students I will greet students each morning with a smile, and will be generous with my smiles throughout the day. I will look for opportunities to reward and praise students for their work and good behaviour. I will not show favouritism, and will try to be fair to all. I will use fair and appropriate methods of discipline. I will try to make classroom instruction as interesting as possible and look for new and diverse ways of presenting materials. I will maintain a positive atmosphere for learning. I will treat my students with respect and will not embarrass them in front of their classmates. I will make myself available and approachable to students. I will recognize the individuality of my students and will provide opportunities for each of them to experience success. I pledge to work toward making this a very successful year for all of us.
10.5.1 Planned versus Unplanned Influences

We have discussed in the earlier sections that the school has an environment of its own, and the environment of the school has an impact on learners and their development. A school trying to make a positive impact on the learners would have consciously incorporated requisite factors in it. However, all influences of the school environment are not always planned. In other words, there are influences of school environment on the learners which are unplanned and probably unintended. Some unplanned influences are embedded in the educational philosophy of the school or the absence of it, yet there are others that result from the unplanned and not well-articulated practices. The following illustrations from classroom may help you to understand the planned and unplanned influences of school environment.

Illustration 1

This teacher is finding it difficult to control the class. The first standard has three sections. The Headmistress is in charge of one section. She is always engaged in the office-related work and hence her class is split and each teacher handles one and a half sections. The teachers shout to get the attention of the children. Children do not listen. Then the teacher asks all of them to stand and wait. Two kids were fighting amongst themselves. The teacher makes them sit near her. The rest of the activities of this class were done with the students standing. The teacher hits the stick on the table to get the kids to listen to her. She repeats that all children should write but many do not do so. The teacher says “I have never seen such children like you”.

Illustration 2

According to the register there are 12 children. Seven of them have come today. The last attendance was taken on the 18th of September. The date today is 23rd September. The afternoon class started at 2.20 p.m. The attendance register was filled up and brought forward till the 22nd of this month. The teacher did this during the break time. The teacher seems to be unaware of the date. Today is 23rd and the attendance is marked for the 22nd.

Illustration 3

With respect to punctuality it was observed that a Headmistress is no different from the teachers. She also comes late, goes early or takes leave. When the Headmistress is present in the school she conducts assembly, oversees the lesson notes prepared by teachers, allocates work other than teaching to teachers, supervises arrangements for activities of the school such as meetings of PTA etc., undertakes liaison work with community in improving the school facilities and implementation of incentive schemes such as mid-day meal. It is found that due to her belief that she is an administrator and not an academic, the Headmistress knowingly or unknowingly adversely influences the functioning of the school and learning there in. For example, the class, which is assigned to the Headmistress, is generally found to be either looked after by some other teacher or is involved in rote learning and repetitive activities for a substantial time in the day since they do not require the presence of the teacher. The Headmistress also unwittingly causes interruption in a class involved in learning. She peeps into or engages in talking to teachers in the middle of the class. This is primarily because of her thinking that her spot consultation with a teacher is more important than the learning of children.

The above illustrations, you would agree, have adverse, unplanned and unarticulated influences on the learners. You know that children do not start showing adverse behaviours like telling lies or using abusive language unless such behaviours exist in their environment. Hence, students in a disciplined school will also be disciplined, even
though there is no subject taught called discipline. The requirement then would be to monitor the unplanned influences of a school on the learner and if possible convert some of them into planned influences of schooling. The good schools are found more concerned about such practices.

Some factors are used by instructors to facilitate student development in the desired direction. These are:

- attending to group dynamics;
- promoting a safe environment;
- decentering authority;
- promoting interdependence;
- maximizing potential for co-creativity;
- encouraging diversity of perspectives;
- valuing experiential learning; and
- assisting students in developing support systems.

As you are aware that many teachers expect their students to actively participate in the class activities and particularly in discussion. When this does not happen in a desired manner, they tend to blame students as uninterested or incapable. On the contrary, there may be an unplanned influence on them, which inhibits their participation.

Teachers need to be aware of such unplanned adverse influences and take steps to turn them into positive influences. In situations where the students actively engage in class discussions, you may find the following enabling factors operating for them.

- Students have a clear goal.
- The teacher has high expectations.
- The teacher demands high-level performance.
- Skills are introduced to the students.
- Skills are immediately applied and reinforced after they are learned.
- Students are provided with repeated controlled practice.

Establishing a positive classroom climate enhances academic achievement and helps to promote appropriate classroom behavior. You may find that a teacher in such classrooms tries to ensure the following practices.

- Fostering of a classroom atmosphere of trust, cooperation, empathy and risk taking.
- Model positive attitudes, respectful behaviour, helpful conversation and constructive actions.
- Do not permit ridicule, sarcasm, or superiority to exhibit in classroom.
- Promote healthy relationships and value among all students.
- Give students opportunities to share their experiences and learning with each other.
- Help others to view your students positively and treat them well.
- Use humour.
• Use a variety of instructional strategies and activities to maintain student interest in learning and to accommodate student differences.

• Teach problem solving, conflict resolution and/or social skills.

• Show students how to build on their strengths and compensate for weaknesses.

• Model and teach students to accept and learn from mistakes.

• Emphasize improvement rather than perfection.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) List any five adverse and five positive influences of school environment on the learners.

.................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................

The school as a social system is a kind of the human habitat for students. It is created and controlled for the purpose of enabling young children to function effectively in life situations, they must participate in. It provides a system of human interactions in which the participants are oriented to live with their individual rights and obligations. In school, learners are constantly involved in the process of forming and re-forming themselves into social groups- classes, clubs, student councils, athletic teams, and so on- for the purpose of accomplishing the educational tasks assigned to it by the society within which it operates. A network of roles is developed in each of these groups in order to ensure the unity and productiveness of the group. These roles are integrated with one another through values that are developed and commonly held. Over any given period of time, different participants in the system perform different roles. It is through participation in the variety of roles, students develop the knowledge, skills and values the society expects them to acquire as citizens and individuals.

According to Gale E. Jensen, the social system of the school consists of different structures that need to be understood. Let us briefly discuss these structures.

The Formal Work Structure

The main task of the school is to fulfill certain educational needs of the society in which it operates. This is “public” task as the school has been created to enable its participants to attain the level of action or practical competency to deal effectively with the problems and situations they face in their private and public lives. In order to accomplish the assigned public task it brings together the participants and provisions and creates the conditions of learning necessary to acquire the practical competencies by members. The manner in which participants relate to one another and obtain gratifications by performing the functions necessary to achieve the school goals is designated as the formal work structure of the school.

The Authority Structure

Within a social system, decisions that affect its efficiency, productivity, state of equilibrium, and integration need to be made in an ongoing manner. The system thus devises structure to institutionalise the rules and procedures by which vital decisions
are made. The manner in which different groups and individuals in decision-making positions relate to one another and to the other participants is termed the authority structure of the school.

The Communication Structure

The relationships that participants establish with each other and the procedure of reporting to authorities, and the status of their assigned responsibilities within the formal-work structure represent the communication dimension of the school system.

The Power Structure

The ways in which participants of a social system exercise their individual ability to give or withhold satisfaction of other's needs represents the power dimension of the social structure. The school principal may deny a leave request of a teacher. A group of students may upset the work plans for a certain day and block the progress of the class toward commonly recognized goals because they feel the teacher has dealt with them unfairly.

The Status and Privilege Structure

Some members by virtue of the position held in the system are accorded deference, honour, recognition, and material rewards that others do not receive. Students are aware of those eligible to receive rewards primarily because of their position rather than performance or contribution to the work of the class/school. Such examples reflect the prestige and privilege structure.

The Informal Clique Structure

The manner in which the participants of the school relate to share concerns, anxieties and private perceptions, for supporting one another in threatening and uncertain situations, and for taking concerted action toward ensuring their personal welfare, represent the informal-clique of the school structure.

10.7 CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Classroom climate is defined as the authority pattern and social and emotional relationships within a teaching group. White and Lippitt categorised classroom climate as authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. Classroom climates can also be conceptualised on a continua, e.g. supporting-belittling (like personality, it may be most consistent style). It relates to styles of teaching and models of leadership (International Dictionary of Education, 1978).

Improving Classroom Climate

How the classroom feels to students, both physically and emotionally, comes under the umbrella of classroom climate. More and more studies show that establishing good classroom climate is essential for learning to take place. A beautifully decorated class with colorful bulletin boards does not necessarily mean that the classroom is a happy place to be. Teachers must do many other things as well, such as the following:

- Have a genuine interest in children. Teachers should greet students as they come into the classroom in the morning. They should make certain that they get to know each child individually (say each student's name). They should use praise and encouragement lavishly.

- Make sure that classroom rules are clearly stated. Teachers should be fair and consistent in enforcing rules.

- Be objective, not judgmental. Teachers should try to see things from different perspectives.
- Show that you are human. Teachers should have a sense of humor and be willing to admit when they are wrong.

- Minimize the power differential in everyday communication. Teachers should not hide behind the desk or a podium; this may send a message that they wish to create a distance between themselves and the students.

- Address problem behavior directly and immediately.

- Actively go after the students' opinions. Teachers should honor student voice.

- Give choices to students. Students should be given opportunities for making choices and decisions and learning how to solve problems. Given the opportunities to make mistakes, eventually students are able to learn through experiences.

Creating caring classroom/school communities also includes creating warmth on a daily basis by doing things such as having morning meetings, teachers sharing their own personal experiences with students, and learning about students' interests. If the teacher makes eye contact, shows open body language, continues to paraphrase in order to check for understanding, and asks probing questions, he or she is continuing to set up an open environment of trust. Giving positive attention and focusing on the students' strengths are as vital as involving parents children's school lives.

And finally, teachers must be consistent, show personal connections to all parts of learning, be willing to share their experiences and, most importantly, be an empathetic person. A teacher who establishes a healthy, learner-centered classroom will find that his/her students have positive self-esteem. The child will feel important, honoured, validated, and self-confident.

Perhaps every teacher at the beginning of the year should keep this as a reminder on his/her desk.

10.7.1 Creating a Positive Classroom Climate

Having known that classroom climate has an influence on student learning and their personality development, it becomes necessary for a teacher to know how to create a positive classroom climate. Let us discuss a few skills that can help a teacher in creating a positive climate.

**POSITIVE CLIMATE SKILLS**

- Recognize individual differences
- Learn names
- Arrange seating
- Establish expectations
- Make yourself available
- Encourage the students

**Sensitivity to Individual Differences**

One essential characteristic of effective teaching is to be responsive to the individual needs of students. Students in a class have too many differences for a teacher to be able to teach all the same content at the same time. However, quality teaching entails being sensitive to the individual differences in preferred learning styles by varying the rate, amount, nature or content of the instruction. Teachers who alter instruction to accommodate individual differences send the message that they want to reach to all of their students all the time. Students are much more likely to participate actively in learning activities when they know that their teacher has carefully considered their needs.
Learn Students' Names

Calling students by name signifies a positive relationship between teachers and students. Students who recognize that their teachers think of them as individuals, feel more comfortable in class and are more responsive in discussions.

Create a Safe Environment for Student Participation

Teachers can foster a safe climate in the class by ensuring that they do not ridicule a student’s questions or remarks. It takes only one or two instances of “That’s a stupid comment. Haven’t you prepared for class?” to discourage participation. By doing so a teacher provides a model for students’ proper classroom etiquette.

10.8 CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Curriculum makers, for example, take into account the social demands on the individual as a source of curriculum content. Broadly speaking, curriculum deals with the experiences of the learner both inside and outside the school, as long as they are planned. Curriculum at the school stage, which connotes the sum total of experiences provided in a school, are also based on functional areas of living such as family living and other personal relationships, civic responsibility, vocational participation, leisure-time activities and a philosophy of life pertinent to all of these.

As long as teachers insist on forcing curricular material that, from the students’ perspective, has no relevance to their lives, education will be an arduous process. It is amazing that a boy who can’t remember the number tables can remember decades old cricket statistics or a girl who can’t write a coherent paragraph can tell stories that would make anyone proud. If calculus or Shakespeare or any other subjects which we feel children should learn seem difficult to them, it is not because the children are dumb, but because they don’t see any reason for learning them. Teachers must get to know their students, because the motivation to learn is “inside” them, in their phenomenal fields and phenomenal selves.

Case A

The marushalas (desert schools) of western Rajasthan exist where there are no other schools. Pioneered by an NGO called the Urmul Trust, this unique alternative desert school is any urban pupil’s fantasy. There are no classes in the typical sense of the term. No corporal punishment, no stress-inducing tests. Instead, a relaxed learning environment, where children look forward to coming to school. The marushala follows the agricultural calendar, enabling its students to study as well as contribute to the family’s livelihood. At the marushala, students themselves chalk out the study programme. Teachers prepare for the following day’s lesson, but these are flexible and can change at the last minute, depending on the students’ request, preferences and convenience. This perhaps explains the kids’ delight in attending school every day, often coming earlier than the scheduled time.

10.9 ENVIRONMENT IN e-LEARNING

If Marushala provides one context of schooling, we have another context emerging rapidly with the computers and the internet. What kind of environment do these provide to a learner? Are learners capable of dealing with them in the same way as they deal with peers and teachers in a classroom?

Sugata Mitra has a PhD in physics and heads research efforts at New Delhi’s NIIT, a fast-growing software and education company with sales of more than
$200 million and a market cap over $2 billion. But iMitra’s passion is computer-based education, specifically for India’s poor. He believes that children, even terribly poor kids with little education, can quickly teach themselves the rudiments of computer literacy. The key, he contends, is for teachers and other adults to give them free rein, so their natural curiosity takes over and they teach themselves. He calls the concept “minimally invasive education.”

To test his ideas, Mitra launched what he calls “the hole in the wall experiment.” He took a PC linked to a high-speed data connection and imbedded it in a concrete wall next to NIIT’s headquarters in the south end of New Delhi. The wall separates the company’s grounds from a garbage-strewn empty lot used by the poor as a public bathroom. Mitra simply left the computer on, connected to the Internet, and allowed any passerby to play with it. He monitored activity on the PC using a remote computer and a video camera mounted in a nearby tree.

What he discovered was that the most avid users of the machine were ghetto kids aged 6 to 12, most of whom have only the most rudimentary education and little knowledge of English. Yet within days, the kids had taught themselves to draw on the computer and to browse the Net. Some of the other things they learned, Mitra says, were even more astonishing to him.

What can you infer from the above? You would agree that e-learning can create a unique environment of its own. Students can learn in this environment as much as they learn in a formal face-to-face situation of teaching.

### 10.10 LET US SUM UP

School is a major influence on an individual. Therefore, the kind of school the child is sent to is an important decision for parents to make. School environment can be defined as that part of the school surrounding with which the child interacts on a regular basis. There are various elements that constitute the surrounding of a learner in a school. Physical environment of schools in India vary from poor-impoverished to rich-affluent. The psychological environment of a school refers to the stimuli that impinge upon the learner’s psyche in the school. School has a strategic as well as indispensable role in the development of a healthy personality. The social surrounding of a school constitutes its social environment. Many social skills, habits, attitudes and prejudices of individual students are tried out, tested and refined in the social environment of the school. Culture is the total way of life, the social legacy, an individual acquires from his/her group. Culture is that part of the environment which is totally a creation of humans. Every school has a cultural environment characterised by certain practices. School is a social institution and the members belong to different social classes. Dominance of one social class over the other is common. Such behavioural dynamics are operative among both teachers and students and create a political environment. There is constant and continuous interaction among various components of the school environment. The dynamic relationship among the various components (environments) create the unique environment of a school. The different elements of the school environment can influence the learner positively or adversely. School is a social system and can be considered as a miniature society. School as a social system can be better explained in terms of structures such as formal work structure, authority structure, communication structure, power structure, status and privilege structure, and informal clique structure. Classroom climate is another component of school environment that influences learning. A positive classroom climate creates a conducive environment for the learner. As an example of positive classroom environment, we discussed the case of marushalas in western Rajasthan. Finally, we discussed the significance of e-learning in creating a unique environment for learning through the case of study of “the hole in the wall experiment”.

Learning in the School Environment
10.11 UNIT END EXERCISES

1) Describe the components of school environment with suitable illustrations.

2) Explain the influence of school environment on a learner.

3) Describe a school having an environment that has positive influence on learners.

4) What are the specific features of Marushala and an e-learning group? As a teacher what classroom climate you would like to create and how?

10.12 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


