The environment in which learning takes place influences one's learning in multiple ways and at all levels. In this unit, we are going to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of environment for learning. Children come from homes having different socioeconomic background. They attend schools that have different amounts of physical and learning material resources. The home and school environment together constitute the kind of learning environment a child has/ can have. Here first we discuss the physical aspects of learning environment at home and school. We then, briefly describe the effects of the physical environment on the learning of disabled children. There are some social class and culture factors that influence learning and achievement. We also briefly examine the effects of gender on schooling and learning behaviour. Finally we discuss the issue of creating conducive learning environments for all children and the pivotal role teachers are expected to play in it.

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

- explain the effects of physical environment at home and school on children’s learning behaviour and achievement;
- identify and discuss the different factors related to social class that have an impact on learning behaviour and school achievement;
- discuss the effect of gender socialization on learning behaviour;
- discuss the influence of culture on learning; and
- describe the steps a teacher can take to create facilitative learning environment.
11.3 EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNING

In unit 8, you have learnt about different kinds of learning environments. In units 9 and 10 we have discussed in detail the various aspects of learning environment in school, home and community. From the earlier three units you might have drawn the inference that while some environment facilitates learning, the others may have adverse or deterrent effect on learning. In this section, we are going to discuss the effects of environment on learning.

11.3.1 Physical Environment

By now, you know that physical environment is one of the important elements that constitute the learning environment. Although learning can take place anywhere, we will centre our discussion around factors related to home and school.

Accessibility and Infrastructure

The establishment of elementary schools within one kilometer radius of habitation has been the goal of our national policy for long. This brings in the significance of physical accessibility to schooling. If the school is not easily accessible to children, it creates the first barrier in the path of learning. Difficulty in accessing school demotivates parents to send their children to school. Even if some parents send their children to far away school, they do have reservations against sending girl children so far away from home. The physical distance between home and school also affects the learners' motivation. In short, we can say that easy physical accessibility to schools is definitely an environmental facilitator of learning. Lack of availability of schools near one's habitation is an environmental disadvantage, in particular, for the girl child's schooling.

Infrastructure facilities available at the school are significant constituents of the total physical environment. If you visit schools in different parts of India, you would notice that there is no uniform pattern of physical facilities available in schools. You may like to recall the examples we discussed in unit 10. Some schools have well built structures with spacious classrooms, science and computer laboratories, and library whereas some schools operate in dilapidated buildings with leaking roofs, or in makeshift structures or under trees. The first category of schools often have play grounds as well as material resources for promoting psychomotor and affective learning. Most of the second category of schools may not have lab, library, toilets or drinking water facilities. Children in these schools are not protected against weather or noise pollution due to lack of proper permanent structures. Many of these schools do not have appropriate teaching-learning aids. Does the level of infrastructure facilities influence students' learning? Govinda and Varghese (1991) conducted a case study of primary schooling in Madhya Pradesh and found that the level of infrastructure facilities provided in the schools played an important role in improving the teaching-learning environment and, consequently, in the learner's achievement level as well as the overall school quality.

Often children in lower middle or working class families have to contribute to the family income or assist the family during seasonal income generation. If the time schedule of the school calendar doesn't match the local community requirements, children are often pulled out of school for assisting or participating in the income generating activities. Many children face such environmental disadvantages that negatively affect their schooling. This can be remedied only if the school timing is in congruence with the needs and context of the local community. In this situation also, it is the girl child who is at the most disadvantaged position of being the first casualty as she is required at home for cooking and taking care of younger siblings while parents are engaged in economic activities. So far, we have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of physical environment for learning. The particular context of
our discussion was school. As you know, home is another agency that exercises
significant influence on the child’s learning. In what follows, let us examine the
physical environment at home and its influence on the learner.

**Home Environment**

Earlier we stated that there is no uniformity in the facilities available in different schools.
It is true even more of the physical environment in the homes of different learners.
Some children live in well built houses with proper ventilation and lighting, adequate
number of rooms that shield them from outside noise and provide the quietitude needed
for learning activities. These homes also have resources like, television, radio,
newspapers, books other than textbooks, computer with Internet connectivity and
educated family members. In these homes children often have their time structured
for different activities like schoolwork, sports, entertainment etc. by the adult members
of the family. Children are not expected to waste time in household chores. As the
surrounding community also has matching physical environment, interactions with the
community add to the resourceful physical environment at home. Such environment
facilitates and influence learning. Now contrast this scene with houses that are poorly
built with inadequate lighting and ventilation, houses that are crowded due to lack of
adequate space where children undertake learning activities in the midst of noise. In
such homes children may not have additional resources like books, newspaper or
computer. The family members may not be adequately educated to assist the child’s
learning activities. The child may be expected to pitch in with the household chores too.
The physical environment may be yet again different in other homes. For example,
children may be living in makeshift houses where even basic minimum resources like
textbooks may not be available. These children may be pulled out of school every now
and then by parents as and when they need them at home. No particular learning time
is allotted to these children at home. And parents being illiterates can’t assist the
child’s learning activity. Such physical environment at home fails to positively influence
the child’s learning. A facilitative physical environment is a requirement for creating a
facilitative learning environment.

Till now we were discussing physical environment at school and home and its influence
on learning in the context of regular children. By regular children we mean, children
who are considered to have normal mental and physical ability. Let us now discuss the
influence of physical environment on learning in the context of children with disability.

**Disability and Physical Environment**

Children may encounter physical as well as mental disabilities. Disabled children may
not find schools in their locality catering to their special needs. Added to this problem
is the attitude of the society that considers disability as deficit and not difference.
When there is attitudinal deficiency, a viable physical environment of learning for the
disabled is a far cry. Before we examine the advantages and disadvantages of the
physical environment for learning of the disabled, let us take an overview of the different
areas of disability and the provisions available through legislations. The Rehabilitation
Council of India Act, 1992 was the first legislation to have dealt with disability. Two
other legislations followed; the Persons With Disabilities (equal opportunities, protection
of rights and full participation) Act, 1995, and the National Trust for Welfare of Persons
with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act 1999
and Rules 2000. In these three acts, the following areas of disabilities are identified
and defined:

- blindness
- low vision
- leprosy cured
- hearing impairment
The Learning Environment

- locomotor disability
- mental retardation
- mental illness
- autism

Definitions of terms:

- **Blindness** refers to a condition where a person suffers from any of the following conditions, namely:
  - total absence of light; or
  - visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses; or
  - limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.

- Person with **low vision** means a person with impairment of visual functioning even after treatment or standard refractive correction but who uses or is potentially capable of using vision for the planning or execution of a task with appropriate assisting device.

- **Leprosy cured** person means any person who has been cured of leprosy but is suffering from:
  - Loss of sensation in hands or feet as well as loss of sensation and paresis in the eye and eye-lid but with no manifest deformity;
  - Manifest deformity and paresis but having sufficient mobility in hands and feet to enable them to engage in normal economic activity;
  - Extreme physical deformity as well as advanced age which prevents them from undertaking any gainful occupation.

- **Hearing impairment** means loss of sixty decibels or more in the better ear in the conversational range of frequencies.

- **Locomotor disability** means disability of the bones, joints or muscles leading to substantial restriction of the movement of the limbs or any form of cerebral palsy.

- **Cerebral palsy** means a group of non-progressive conditions of a person characterized by abnormal motor control posture resulting from brain insult or injuries occurring in the pre-natal, peri-natal or infant period of development.

- **Mental retardation** means a condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind of a person which is specially characterized by subnormality of intelligence.

- **Mental illness** means any mental disorder other than mental retardation.

- **Autism** means a condition of uneven skill development primarily affecting the communication and social abilities of a person, marked by repetitive and ritualistic behaviour.

Let us now examine some of the educational provisions specified in the PWD Act, 1995.

The appropriate governments and local authorities shall:

- ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he/she attains the age of eighteen years;
endeavour to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools;

promote setting up of special schools in government and private sector for those in need of special education in such a manner that children with disabilities living in any part of the country have access to such schools;

set up adequate number of teachers' training institutions and assist the national institutes and other voluntary organizations to develop teachers' training programmes specializing in disabilities so that requisite trained manpower is available for special schools and integrated schools for children with disabilities;

make provisions for transport facilities to the children with disabilities or the alternative financial incentives to parents or guardians to enable their children with disabilities to attend schools;

make provisions for the removal of architectural barriers from schools, colleges or other institutions imparting vocational and professional training; and

make provisions for the supply of books, uniforms and other materials to children with disabilities attending schools.

The provisions as envisaged in various Acts are meant to create appropriate environment for the education of the disabled. However, reality continues to be quite different. For the disabled children (especially those with locomotor disability) and their parents it is a difficult task to commute between school and home. In most schools, the building structure is not modified to facilitate the mobility of the disabled child. For example, a child on wheel chair or on crutches has limited access to the different parts of the school building. The physical environment in the school is often unfriendly with no ramps or even proper toilet facilities. Using public transport between school and home is an almost impossible task as public transport system like any other public service in the country is the least disabled friendly. Disabled children who study in mainstream schools are at a disadvantage as most of the physical environment in a classroom is designed keeping in mind the non-disabled child. For example, a child with low vision may find the lighting in the classroom and the distance between the seat and the visual presentation as a handicap even if the teacher has taken care to seat the child in the best place possible. The child's inability to do certain things (disabilities) is compounded by the limitations imposed by the society (handicap). Some disabled children need personal attention for their mobility or safety. If their parents cannot afford such service either by themselves or by hiring, they are not sent to schools. Therefore, in the case of disabled children non-accessibility to school is more profound than among able children. Non-availability or non-affordability of aids such as hearing aids or braile books is another environmental disadvantage that hinder the learning of the disabled. A physical environment that is disabled friendly both at home and in the school is a primary requirement for creating an appropriate learning environment for the disabled.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) Describe the physical environment in your school. Discuss those environmental factors that facilitate learning.

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### The Learning Environment

1. Choose two students, one a high achiever and the other a low achiever. Analyse the home environment factors of these two children. What could be the factors that influence their performance? How can you enhance the performance of the low achiever?

2. Describe the advantages and disadvantages in the physical environment of your school for the inclusion of the disabled.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>11.3.2 The Sociocultural Environment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In unit 8, we have discussed the dynamics of sociocultural environment in a school system. We discussed the idea of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973), a system of deeply internalized values which determine attitudes towards educational institutions and thus school behaviour and the level of educational attainment. In this section we will further discuss the influence of sociocultural environment on learning.</td>
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<tr>
<th>11.3.2.1 Effects of Social Class on Learning</th>
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<td>As we pointed out in unit 8 and in the previous section of this unit, learners belong to different socioeconomic status (SES) families. There are many factors that are taken as indicative of one’s social class or standing in a society. Indicators like annual income, occupation/profession and level of education are commonly used to describe the concept of socioeconomic status. The influence of social class on the behaviour is more observable in urban than in the rural areas. While caste and language are strong identifying and rallying factors in rural areas, social class is a determining factor of behaviour in urban areas. For example, in a place like Delhi, the members of working-class families from different parts of India may have more in common than members of an upper-middle or middle class family and those of a working-class family belonging to the same region, caste or speaking the same language. In spite of the caste reality in rural areas, it is the social class that influences behaviour such as, which school you send your children to or the kind of experiences you expose your children to.</td>
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How do differences in social class influence learning and performance in school? Let us examine the issue by looking at the advantages and disadvantages of different environments on learning.

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<th>It is found that illiteracy is highest among the low-SES. It is also true that drop-out rate is very high among the low income groups. Researches conducted in elementary schools in India have pointed out many causes for the drop-out phenomena, some of which are:</th>
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<td>• poor financial conditions of the family;</td>
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<td>• illiteracy of parents;</td>
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<td>• parental ignorance of the value of education and priority of household work for girls;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• difficulty in finding a bridegroom for a literate girl;</td>
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Studies conducted in other countries have also indicated the relationship between SES and school performance. For example, it is found that high-SES students of all ethnic groups in the United States show higher levels of achievement on test scores than low-SES students (Alwin & Thornton, 1984; Goleman, 1988; White, 1982). In spite of the well established positive relationship between low achievement and low-SES, it is observed sometimes that children from low-SES perform well in school. This is an indication of other factors operating along with income, education and occupation of parents that may have an effect on the child's learning. Some possible explanations of the effects of low-SES and low school achievement are: living conditions; family environment; child rearing styles; low self-esteem; learned helplessness; resistance in culture, and tracking/streaming (Snowman & Biehler, 2006; Garcia, 1991).

**Living Conditions**

There are wide variations in income among Indian families. Many low-SES groups live in poverty and do not receive adequate primary health care. We have observed earlier that research findings show poor financial conditions of the family as a major reason for children dropping out of primary schools. Most school-going children from low-SES families suffer from under and malnourishment that adversely affect their growth and development. Due to unhealthy living conditions, lack of proper diet and inadequate primary health care, many low-SES children suffer from variety of illnesses compared to the middle-class children. The housing conditions in which most low-SES students live do not create a proper physical environment for learning. We have discussed this point in detail in unit 8 and earlier in this unit. While middle class children get private study space at home, low-SES children often live in makeshift arrangements and crowded houses with absolutely no private space.

**Family Environment**

One of the reasons cited for dropout in primary school has been parental illiteracy and ignorance of the value of education. In contrast to this, middle-class families attach high value to their children's education. Middle class parents support their children's education in many ways. Most middle class parents are school or college educated, therefore, they are able to provide academic support to their children. Formal education is rare among low-SES parents, therefore, their ability to participate in the child's academic activity is very limited. Middle class parents provide their children with additional resources (such as, additional books, newspaper, computer etc.) to enhance their school achievement. They expose their children to wider variety of stimuli/experiences, such as taking them to a science exhibition and making it a meaningful learning experience by attending to their queries, and by describing and discussing the displays. Such guided learning experiences make it easy for the child to deal with school learning and become interested in lateral learning. A child who doesn't receive such stimuli would often be at a disadvantage when placed together with children who have had those experiences. Middle class family seems to provide mediated learning environment as advocated by Vygotsky in the children's zone of proximal development. Studies have shown that middle class mothers talk more; give more verbal guidance; help their children to understand the causes of events, make plans, and anticipate consequences; direct their children's attention to the relevant details of a problem, and rather than imposing solutions they encourage children to solve problems themselves (Hess & Shipman, 1965; L. Hoffman, 1984; Willerman, 1979). Differences in interaction styles of parents may explain some of the differences among children from different social classes. However, one cannot prejudice the kind of learning environments based on income or social status. There are low-SES parents who value education and attempt to provide rich learning environments for their children. In fact the actual behaviours of the parents are more predictive of their children's school performance than income level or parents' occupation (White, 1982).
The Learning Environment

Low Self-esteem

Children who come from a rich learning environment get a head start in school. They easily interact with the teachers. These children mostly belong to the middle and upper middle class. Low-SES students usually do not have the advantage of rich learning environment. They also do not have the material advantages like the middle class children. Due to lack of varied experiences and differences in child rearing styles, children from low-SES families may find the classroom environment intimidating and, therefore, remain passive. This passive behaviour may be construed by the teacher and the peer group as lack of ability owing to the disadvantaged and deprived environment of the student. Therefore, the teacher starts with low expectations of the child from the deprived background. Since the teacher presumes that the child is not intelligent, the teacher may not include him/her in the classroom interactions to avoid embarrassing situations for the child. Through such teacher behaviour children come to believe that they are not good at school work (Elrich, 1994). Low expectations of teacher set in low self-esteem in children which adversely affect their school achievement.

Learned Helplessness

Due to any factor or a combination of factors discussed so far, low-SES children may show low achievement and may repeatedly fail in schoolwork. Overtime they may develop a sense of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), an expectation of failure, based on previous experiences with the belief that nothing can be done to succeed and all efforts will be futile. They may come to believe that doing well in school is a difficult task. Such belief may be reinforced if they have not experienced success at home (family members, relatives or friends doing well in school and completing school), and eventually drop out of school and think of it as normal.

Resistance Cultures

Peer group influences may affect the performance of socially and educationally disadvantaged students. The following narrative by an African American female student describes the peer group attitude towards students who do not share their academic values.

I’m a member from Amherst, Massachusetts, and it is predominantly White. … I’m able to get along with the White kids, but it’s the Black kids that I find I have a hard time relating to. … In class, they’re always thinking, “There goes that girl, trying to be smart, trying to act White.” It seems like I can’t relate to them, and I’m Black myself. How is that supposed to make me feel? I’m trying to fit in both worlds, and it’s like I have no place(Ash, 2000, p.6).

The Black students, who accuse the female Black student of ‘acting White’, are members of resistance culture that is characterized by group values that refuse to adopt the behaviours and attitudes of the majority or dominant culture. Some researchers have suggested that low-SES students may subscribe to resistance culture to maintain their identity and status within the group. Resistance culture is demonstrated by rejecting behaviours that would make them successful in school - studying, cooperating with teachers, even coming to class (Bennet, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Willis, 1976).

Tracking/Streaming

Earlier we discussed the effects of teachers’ low expectations on the low-SES learners’ self-esteem and school achievement. Such teacher behaviour which continue throughout their schooling, create a different academic environment for many low-SES students.
If teachers track them into low-ability, they are not given challenging tasks. Teachers prepare and encourage high achievers to take up academic streams that are considered tough and challenging. If teachers have low expectations of low-SES students, they are taught differently from the beginning that maintains their low-achievement status and get pushed into inconsequential streams of study. It is worth noting the comments of a Latino male student from Evanston, USA:

A white student is considered to be an honors student unless proven otherwise, and a student of color is a ‘regular’ student unless he proves himself to be ‘honors’. When I was in sixth grade, they put me in ESL because of my Mexican accent, and since then I’ve had to prove myself to every teacher, every year, even in my A.P. classes, that I actually belong in that class... sometimes you just get tired of it (Ash, 2000, p.7).

Studies conducted on the social effects of streaming found close correlation between social class and stream. Streaming created pupil subcultures; lower stream boys (largely from working-class backgrounds) created anti-school, anti-academic attitude as they were labeled by the school as failures; they placed high value on behaviour which teachers considered as indiscipline; in contrast, top-stream students behaviour conformed to the academic norms and values of the school (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970).

Check Your Progress 2

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1. Describe the profile of low achievers in your class. Identify the possible social class factors that contribute to their low achievement.

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2. Do you have students with low self-esteem? Is it a result of your low expectation behaviour? Describe steps to remedy the situation.

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11.3.2.2 Effects of Gender on Schooling

Free primary school education is a Constitutional provision in India. We also know that in spite of this, rate of illiteracy in India is very high. In fact female illiteracy is much higher than male illiteracy. There are many reasons for higher illiteracy among women. Boys and girls are socialized differently in most societies. From the beginning girls are reared and trained to play a subservient / inferior role in life. Research has shown that drop out rate is high among girls. While poor economic condition of the family is a major reason for most children dropping out of school, there are gender specific factors that increase the drop out rate among girls we have discussed earlier. The following four are the gender specific reasons.

- Non availability of lady teachers;
- Priority of household work for girl;
The Learning Environment

- Coeducational schools;
- Difficulty in finding a bridegroom for a literate girl.

The reasons cited here reflect the attitude of the parents that is rooted in the social construction of gender differences. So, from the beginning, the girl child is at a disadvantage and socialized to underplay abilities that are related to schoolwork. Therefore, if there are limited resources to be spent on education, then the preference is given to boys' education. Thus boys and girls are socialized early into behaving differently.

Do children experience gender bias in school? Do teachers treat boys and girls differently? Do boys and girls differ in their ability? Is difference due to biological predispositions or socialization in early years of life? Does gender bias affect the students' learning? Let us examine these issues.

Studies have shown that there are gender differences in cognitive abilities. In some areas girls outscore boys and on other tests boys do better than girls. Boys seem to do better in spatial ability and mathematical reasoning while girls perform better on verbal ability and memory tests. Why these differences in cognition exist, no one knows for sure.

Teachers demonstrate different behaviours towards boys and girls. For example, in a classroom, most teachers seem to tolerate the boisterous behaviour of boys while they remind the girls to follow decorum. It is often observed that boys are punished more severely than girls. Is there any particular educational reason for the teacher to behave differently with boys and girls? If not, it means that the teacher behaviour is gender biased. Such teacher behaviour is probably the result of their own gender socialization. Most people are gender socialized to view girls as better behaved and boys as aggressive, hence the differential treatment. How does gender bias affect the school performance and career choice of students? Gender conditioning in schools reinforces the idea that certain type of subject and course is more appropriate for one sex than the other. If the student’s self-concept is based on stereotyped gender roles, the choice of the course will reflect this. It is observed that home science courses are seldom chosen by boys. On the contrary, most girls will be encouraged by teachers to take up home science courses, suggesting that they need these skills as women are expected to run the home. Effects of gender conditioning is reflected in classroom interactions. Girls who strongly conform to the stereotypical female role find it difficult to express their thoughts before male classmates. This may seriously affect their participation in classroom activities. We have already mentioned the reluctance of parents to send girls to coeducation schools and schools without lady teachers.

11.3.2.3 Influence of Culture on Learning

In Unit 2, we have discussed cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget was criticized for overlooking the effects of sociocultural environment on cognitive development. The stages of cognitive development observed by Piaget are not necessarily “natural” for all children because to some extent they reflect the expectations and activities of the children's culture (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Vygotsky’s theories of cognitive development suggest that our cognition is a function of both social and cultural forces. People use psychological tools (language, signs, symbols etc.) to master the functions of perception, memory, attention and so on. Each culture has its own set of psychological tools and situations in which these tools are appropriated (Kozulin, 2003). In a monocultural environment the effect of culture on learning may not be visible as the psychological tools used are common and appropriated in common situations. However, this has implications for multicultural classroom situations, as children growing up in different cultures use different cognitive devices and procedures to understand the world around them.
Cross-cultural studies of children demonstrate the effects of the child's culture and social group on learning. For example, children of pottery-making families in one area of Mexico learn conservation of substance earlier than their peers in families who do not make pottery (Ashton, 1978). Classification is a basic concrete operation children learn early in life. If you are given a group of objects like, plate, knife, apple, grape, cucumber, and potato and asked to create groups, you would probably put plate and knife in one group, apple and grapes in another group, and cucumber and potato in a third group under the labels utensil, fruits, vegetables respectively. Will people from another culture classify these objects into the same group as you did? Couldn’t these objects be grouped as plate, knife and fruits together? Yes, they can be grouped in different ways. Studies have shown that even basic operations like classification may not be so basic to people of another culture. For example, when African Kpelle people were asked to sort 20 objects, they created groups that made sense to them— a hoe with a potato, a knife with an orange. This was not how the experimenter expected the objects to be classified. Therefore, the experimenter tried to get the Kpelle people to change their categories. But they insisted this is how a wise man would do it. So the experimenter asked, “Well how would a fool do it?” The Kpelle people promptly created the categories the experimenter had expected—food, tools, and so on (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989). This example demonstrates that the experimenter’s and the Kpelle’s idea of the basic operation classification is different from the other. The experimenter and the Kpelle think and act differently because that is what is required of them in their cultural system (such as school, home, community).

Language is one of the psychological/cultural tools that has a profound effect on classroom learning. Lee (2003) who has conducted a longitudinal study of cultural modeling (that explicitly links deep disciplinary knowledge and funds of knowledge of students, especially students of colour, students who speak language other than academic English, students from the periphery) on speakers of African American Vernacular English argues that:

... the knowledge and concepts and strategies that AAVE speakers use in their everyday talk are largely tacit. Because this knowledge is tacit, when confronted with analogous problems in school-based literature classes, the students do not draw on relevant schemata to attack problems of interpretation that share meaningful attributes with the kinds of language interpretation and production in which they engage outside school (p.397).

People learn many basic operations without going to school or any other formal setting of learning. Weavers who create intricate designs of ikat, pochampalli, and Kanjeevaram saris and such other clothes in multiple colour combination learn those skills from their sociocultural settings. Weaving skill involves concepts of math, physics, chemistry etc. (for example, dimensions of design involves calculation, dyeing of cloth requires the knowledge of thermodynamics and chemicals). Another example is the mathematical ability displayed by children (who may not have been to school) who sell objects on the street.

The various examples cited during the discussion suggest that culture influences learning and people from different cultures may respond differently to similar situation. Different cultures teach different social behaviour to children. For example, cultures that prize cooperation and sharing teach these skills early, whereas cultures that encourage competition nurture these abilities in their children. In a multicultural classroom, depending on the cultural orientation of the child and the classroom culture, the child experiences the classroom environment as conducive for learning or not.

Environment and Learning
Check Your Progress 3

Note: Write your answers in the space given below.

1) Identify the behaviour by which you reinforce gender conditioning among your students.

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2) Identify curriculum areas that interfere with learning acquired through cultural tools. Describe steps to modify curriculum transaction to accommodate the cultural knowledge of your students.

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11.4 CREATING CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

We have discussed so far different kinds of environment and their effects on learning. We have learnt that while some environment offers many advantages for learning, others may have some disadvantages that affect learning adversely. Is it possible to change the environmental disadvantage to advantage? It is true that teachers cannot change the socioeconomic status of the students, their family environment or make substantial difference to their physical well being. But they can still do a great deal to create a positive, conducive learning environment in the classroom for all children. What kind of a classroom environment is conducive for learning?

11.4.1 Classroom Environment

Throughout this block we have emphasized the point that the school environment has two aspects, the physical and the sociocultural. Classroom environment also has two aspects: the physical and the sociocultural.

Physical Climate

The question may arise whether teachers can make any difference to the physical environment of a classroom. It is true that teachers cannot change anything about the physical environment that includes the classroom building and the furnishings. But there is another dimension to the physical environment that can be created by the teacher in a classroom. It must be stated here that better physical environment does not guarantee higher academic achievement, but it would definitely create a facilitative environment for learning. Research does not provide conclusive evidence that the physical features of a classroom affect actual achievement. It does suggest that the physical features including the classroom's spatial arrangement affect student attitudes and behaviour (Weinstein, 1979). Another study suggests that the physical arrangement can influence the teacher's behaviour, which in turn influences the student's learning (Arlin, 1979).

While there are certain aspects of the classroom's physical environment that cannot be changed by the teacher, there are some aspects that impact the learning climate and can be controlled and created by the teacher. Let us discuss how a teacher can create a positive physical climate for learning.
There are minimum amount of material resources needed for the teaching-learning activity in the classroom. For example, a teacher must ensure that things like chalks, charts, models and equipments needed for demonstration etc. are available. How these materials are used and presented to the learners determine whether the learning environment is facilitative or not. Accessibility to the resource materials should be ensured for all learners by the teacher. Teaching-learning activities conducted in the classroom should be visible and audible to all learners. To achieve the goals of accessibility, visibility and audibility, the teacher must look into the spatial arrangement of the classroom.

Disability

Children with disability may need special attention regarding the spatial arrangements you create for them in the classroom. For example, a student with low vision will need to be seated close to where the teacher conducts the activities and there is proper light. A student with hearing impairment should be placed at an angle where he/she can easily observe the lip movements and actions of the teacher. Children with locomotor disability may also need special spatial arrangement in the classroom. You would agree that the physical aspects are by and large teacher oriented and not difficult to achieve.

Sociocultural Climate

We have already discussed at length the impact of socio-cultural environment on learning and achievement. In unit 8, we have used terms like Pygmalion effect, self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher behaviour to underscore how teacher expectations affect students’ performance. Let us now discuss how teachers can create a conducive sociocultural environment for learning. A research study shows that teachers indeed can make a positive difference to children who are environmentally disadvantaged. The study was conducted among urban low-SES African American students in grades 3 through 5. The study found that students who liked school the most and found their classroom experiences to be the most satisfying described their relationship with their teacher as caring and supportive one. Supportive teachers showed an interest in students by talking to them about their personal problems and providing emotional support (Baker, 1999). Other researches have shown that high levels of achievement for low-SES students are associated with the following attitudes and approaches among teachers:

- Teachers’ high but realistic expectations for their students
- Mastery goals
- Never accepting low-quality work

11.4.2 What can a Teacher do?

What can a teacher do to create a conducive learning environment? Let us consider the following points.

Resist labelling of students

Often we act on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes which have no rational base. Teachers should not prejudge students' ability based on their culture and social class. Teachers should understand and manifest in their behaviour that cultural difference is not cultural deficit. It would be a good idea if teachers audit themselves to identify their sociocultural biases and prejudices. After identifying the sociocultural biases, the teacher must make conscious efforts to guard against them. The teacher should also dissuade the dominant sociocultural peer group in the school from such biased practices.
Disability is not handicap

Do not approach disabled learners with a prejudged notion of deficiency. Disability per se is not a handicap, it becomes a handicap when society does not create a favourable environment. Therefore, teachers must create an inclusive environment in the classroom for the disabled.

High expectations and realistic goals

Teachers must have high expectations of all students and set realistic and achievable goals for individual students.

Using instructional techniques to suit each learner

Teachers should use a variety of instructional techniques to include the different sociocultural characteristics of learners that influence their learning. Use instructional strategies and techniques to suit the learning needs of the disabled and children with learning disability. Select instructional methods (peer tutoring, cooperative learning, mastery learning etc.) to include different learning styles.

Understanding the sociolinguistics

Lack of understanding of the sociolinguistics of students by the teacher may lead to misunderstanding and communication break down in the classroom. Classroom communication is based on its own set of rules such as when, how, to whom, and in what manner to use language. When the sociolinguistic skills of students do not meet the expectations of the teacher it creates a barrier to communication. Therefore, knowledge of the sociolinguistic skills of students will help the teacher understand why the communication breaks down.

We have discussed some points regarding how to create a conducive learning environment. In brief, we can say, for creating a conducive or positive environment the teacher must respect his/her students, know his/her students and organize learning experiences for them to meet high expectations and achieve realistic goals.

11.5 LET US SUM UP

There are different kinds of learning environment. Each learning environment is characterized by its physical and sociocultural aspects. In this unit, we tried to understand the effects of different kinds of environment on learning and school achievement. We did it by examining the different aspects of learning environments. Lack of easy accessibility to school is a deterrent force in creating a proper physical climate for learning. Schools that have appropriate infrastructure facility create a positive physical climate for learning. A resourceful physical environment at home enhances school achievement. Children from low-SES families are at a disadvantage due to the poor learning resources at home compared to the middle-class and high-SES children. Non-supportive physical environment at home and school has adverse impact on the academic achievement of the disabled. We, then, discussed the effects of sociocultural environment on learning and school achievement. Poor financial condition of the family is a major cause for children dropping out of school. Other possible explanations of the effects of low-SES and low school achievement can be found in factors like; living conditions; family environment; child rearing styles; low self-esteem; learned helplessness; resistance culture, and tracking/streaming. The socially constructed idea of gender has its effects on schooling. Boys and girls are early socialized into behaving differently. In many Indian families, early on girls are reared and trained to play a subservient role in life. Gender conditioning in schools reinforces the idea that certain subjects and courses are more appropriate for one sex than the other. Next we described the effects of culture on learning. Cross-cultural studies on children have shown that the child’s culture and social group influence his/her learning. Therefore, people from
different cultures may respond differently to similar situation. Lastly, we examined the
issue of creating conducive learning environments for all children in classroom learning.

### 11.6 UNIT END EXERCISES

1) Observe a classroom and describe the features that impede and promote learning.

2) Describe the social environment of your classroom. Identify the social class
factors that influence the learning behaviour of your students.

3) What measures would you take to minimize the impact of teacher related
factors (e.g., Low expectation, tracking/streaming) on your students’ learning
behaviour?

4) Describe the instructional strategies and techniques you would choose to teach a
particular topic to students who subscribe to different learning styles.

### 11.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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