

SCHOOL ETHOS, CULTURE AND PROCESSES

INTRODUCTION

1. SCHOOL ETHOS (CORE VALUES, BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES) AND CULTURE (SHARED VALUES, TRADITIONS, COMMON BELIEFS/ATTITUDES)

The school culture embodies collective concepts—presumptions, principles, and convictions—that define an institution's character and establish a standard for anticipated conduct. These notions are deeply entrenched within the organization and largely function on an unconscious level. They become so deeply rooted that they are often treated as assumptions. The school environment/ethos represents the hidden curricula. It is determined by the school philosophy, mission, rules, procedures, relationships, working conditions, expectations, etc.

The values which a school decides to promote must permeate the daily life of the school through its rules, codes, curricular activities within the classroom and outside, policies and procedures, symbols, relationships and so on. The first important factor is that the physical part of the school should be safe, clean and accessible to all its stakeholders. Research suggests that working conditions that are comfortable, safe and accessible contribute to achievement and motivation of staff and students. Safety - both physical through infrastructure (boundary walls, to safe classroom furniture and other school facilities) and psychological safety through the learning environment. The legislation and Policy of the Country (RTE Act 2009, RPWD Act 2016 and National Education Policy 2020) mandate an accessible and barrier free learning spaces and buildings promoting learning for all.

1.1 Inclusion, Diversity and Respect for all

Today, the responsibility of providing for an enabling learning environment rests largely with the service providers. Therefore, it is important to mitigate barriers and promote structures, systems and processes within the school in a seamless manner, facilitating an inclusive learning environment for all children including children with disabilities.

It is a recognized fact that children with disabilities face multiple challenges and are often at the risk of exclusion. Therefore, specific efforts must be put into place to realize their Right to Inclusive Services.

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to

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educate all children (UNESCO, 2005). In particular, four key elements have tended to feature strongly in the conceptualization of inclusion. The four elements are as follows:

- Inclusion is a process
- Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers.
- Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students.
- Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement

1.2 Concerns and Needs of Children with disability

Research and experience indicate that there is a higher percentage of children with disabilities who are either early dropouts or have never been to school and therefore do not reach secondary education.

Some of the environmental reasons for a high dropout rate of children with disabilities are lack of:

- Accessible Infrastructure
- Care giver support in schools
- Transport/escort where required
- Sensitive and accepting attitude/ culture
- Reasonable accommodations and other supportive measures
- Inaccessible curriculum

Children with disabilities, are not a homogenous group of individuals and vary in their specific needs. Like all other children they vary in their strengths, abilities, interests, needs, background, learning style, learning level, pace of learning and success. Teachers and other facilitators of the learning process will need to understand the specific needs of children with disabilities.

Reasonable accommodations, individual support systems, curricular adaptations, career counselling become imperative for a child with disability to be successful and retained in the secondary education.

Children with disabilities and children from vulnerable environments lose out on opportunities that enhance self-development and socialization. These are intrinsic elements in a schooling process. It is critical for the growth and development of children to focus on these elements of schooling. Psycho-social maturity including skills in decision making, analysing social situations and taking responsibility for one's action, must be part of all

curricular transactions.

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Peers, teachers and significant adults in the learning process must understand the implications of “Diversity”. Children experience diverse learning abilities/styles/achievements, and the pressures of success/failure. These could rise to feelings of inadequacy/supremacy and children may not know how to deal with these feelings that isolate many and promote homogenous groups. This is detrimental to an inclusive environment. Teachers need to be equipped with skills and strategies to reduce the disabling environment and promote an inclusive culture.

Opportunities for increasing citizenship values and upholding the values of justice, equality and dignity, initiated in the elementary period must be continued through the Secondary Schooling too.

The next section on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is important for all children including children with disabilities.

1.3 Social and Emotional Learning (Under CASEL Framework)

Social and Emotional Learning in the school context plays a crucial role in fostering students' holistic development. SEL refers to the process of acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help individuals understand and manage their emotions, establish and maintain positive relationships, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate empathy, and make responsible decisions. SEL is particularly relevant in the school context as it provides students with essential life skills that contribute to their overall well-being, academic success, and positive behavior.

SEL encompasses a spectrum of skills and competencies categorized into five core components. The first is self-awareness, involving the recognition and comprehension of one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. This includes the ability to engage in self-reflection and accurately assess emotional states. The second is self-management, which concentrates on regulating emotions, controlling impulses, and establishing and achieving goals. This component encompasses techniques like stress management, self-discipline, and effective time management. The third component is social awareness, encompassing the comprehension and empathy towards others' emotions, perspectives, and backgrounds. It actively promotes respect for diversity and inclusivity. The fourth is relationship skills, revolving around proficient communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Building positive relationships, teamwork, and maintaining constructive interactions are pivotal in this aspect. The final core component is responsible decision-making, emphasizing ethical and social considerations in choices. It accentuates critical thinking, problem-solving, and the evaluation of potential consequences.

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The significance of SEL within the school context is multifaceted. Research indicates that students engaging in SEL programs exhibit enhanced academic performance due to better stress management, goal focus, and the establishment of a positive learning environment. SEL equips students with the tools to handle stress, anxiety, and negative emotions, contributing to improved mental well-being and reduced behavioral problems. Additionally, SEL fosters the development of empathy, self-control, and responsible decision-making skills, leading to decreased instances of bullying, aggression, and disruptive behaviors. Furthermore, the acquired skills are transferable to real-life situations, equipping students to tackle challenges outside the classroom and into adulthood. Effective communication, active listening, and conflict resolution skills derived from SEL enable students to cultivate healthier relationships with peers, teachers, and family members.

Implementing SEL can be accomplished through various strategies. Schools can integrate SEL into their existing curriculum, seamlessly embedding these skills into subjects such as language arts, social studies, and even mathematics. Many educational institutions introduce dedicated SEL programs or initiatives, providing targeted lessons, activities, and resources to enhance students' social and emotional competencies. Educators can receive training in SEL strategies to effectively model and teach these skills to their students. Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment is also crucial, with school policies, interactions, and physical spaces all contributing to the development of social and emotional skills. Furthermore, involving families in SEL initiatives encourages consistent reinforcement of these skills both at home and within the community. As SEL gains recognition, its implementation continues to evolve, driven by advancements in educational technology, research, and pedagogical approaches.

1.4 Holistic Development & Well Being

Promoting holistic development and well-being within a school ethos requires a multifaceted approach that integrates theories from psychology and education. By incorporating elements from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, positive psychology, Self Determination Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory, educators can create an environment that fosters not only academic excellence but also emotional intelligence, self-awareness, resilience, and a strong sense of community. Prioritizing students' holistic well-being not only benefits their immediate educational experience but also equips them with lifelong skills for personal fulfillment and success.

The school ethos plays a crucial role in shaping students' comprehensive growth by fostering an environment that nurtures their well-being and development beyond academics. Embracing a holistic approach to education entails recognizing the interconnectedness of

various facets of a student's life and striving to cultivate their overall potential. This involves not only achieving academic excellence but also encouraging critical thinking, emotional

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intelligence, physical health, social skills, and values. A holistic school ethos emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence, aiding students in understanding and managing their emotions effectively while nurturing empathy and healthy interpersonal relationships.

It also prioritizes physical well-being through encouraging regular physical activity and promoting healthy dietary habits. Building social skills, teamwork, and positive relationships is another integral aspect, while character education instills values such as responsibility, compassion, and integrity. To promote well-being, the ethos emphasizes mental health support through counseling services, mindfulness practices, and creating a positive school climate. Involving parents, caregivers, and the community reinforces the holistic development process, while balanced assessment methods evaluate a range of skills and talents. Ultimately, a school ethos centered on holistic development and well-being prepares students to thrive academically, emotionally, socially, and morally, equipping them for a successful and fulfilling future.

1.5 School Safety and Security

School safety and security are paramount considerations in the educational environment, contributing to the overall school ethos by creating a conducive atmosphere for learning, personal development, and well-being. Ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and staff members is not only a legal obligation but also a reflection of the school's values and commitment to providing a nurturing and secure environment.

1.6 Community Engagement

It is important that the teachers and other facilitators understand that child is an integral member of the family and that children and families are integral members of the larger community.

child and family

child family and school

**child family school and
community**

Children experience the impacts of processes within family/community, both positively and

negatively.

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Therefore, the teacher must understand the Needs of the individual child holistically and develop an understanding of:

- Background and context of the child: members of the family, its resources, strength, needs, family processes, impact of significant adults/siblings on the child etc. and its influence on child's learning and growth.
- Knowledge of the specific impairment and its impact on learning. Strategies to enhance learning and use of specific accommodations to promote participation in all learning activities.

Power hierarchies between Teachers and Parents will need to be addressed and both Parents and teachers will need to recognize the role that each one plays in the process of education of children specifically children with disabilities. As active partners in the process they can have a huge positive impact on the child's learning and growth.

Stigma, discrimination, abuse, exploitation are seen as part of the community processes which impact and permeate into family processes affecting the child negatively. Schools and education are part of the community. Many processes like cultural events festivals, have the potential to be facilitators too.

Lack of proper information on disability and its impact, lack of positive role models, lack of accessible infrastructure, lack of visible inclusive services etc perpetuate negative attitudes, stereotypes, minimal expectations which are huge barriers to inclusion.

Schools must promote community events, activities and campaigns that lead to a positive social change. Education of communities through these activities can challenge the existing myths, practices, norms that are oppressive and create a more accepting, sensitive and an enabling society.

Schools can also enhance the participation of children in their communities and its activities. All children, including children with disabilities must be able to access community resources and be visible as active consumers of the resources. Community resources, on the other hand, must be able to see children as active citizens and promote a sense of community ownership and safe processes for children to participate in. Safe community resources, practices will help develop meaningful life experiences for all children, job opportunities and develop healthy relationships.

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1.7 Learning of Life Skills

An education system focussing on academic curriculum does not equip children to navigate through life's experiences and respond in a manner that enhances ones own quality of life while contributing positively to the environment around him/her.

For children with disabilities this situation is compounded by the lack of opportunities, negative attitudes and physical barriers.

NEP 2020 promotes the integration of life skills in the curriculum aiming for an all-round development of the child.

The life skills program, as an integral part of the curriculum will enable all children, especially children with disabilities to:

- Develop a positive identity. They will be able to acknowledge diversity and understand the multiple roles that they play. Disability is not their only identity.
- Develop skills to manage their emotions and relationships.
- Develop skills in communication and negotiating life situations.
- Develop skills in independent and supported decision making
- Develop an understanding for accessing support and appreciating positive situations and supports.
- Develop skills in contributing to home, community and other causes -
- Develop skills in financial transactions
- Develop skills in using technology
- Develop skills in accessing information (written, print or digital)
- Develop skills in citizenry

The life skills program can be divided into two sections. Respecting the individuality of the student/learner the program can be transacted through individual /group sessions.

The first part of the curriculum will include basic Skills which all children including children with disabilities will acquire. Children will be on different stages on the continuum of learning which needs to be understood and accepted.

Part I: The Basic Skills will include

- Communication skills ranging from simple conversations to complex communication with strangers, building relationships, managing stress and communicating, handling different difficult situations. Managing own behaviour and developing positive healthy communication styles. It must be stressed that communication could be through vocal, written or using an augmentative an alternate communication methods like sign

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language or using a digital communication software or using a communication book, gestures, symbols etc.

- Mobility: Mobility enables us to look after self, access resources, lead a fulfilling life. Independence in movement is one of the prerequisites for leading a self-determined life in adult years. Disability often imposes a restriction in movement/mobility and creates dependency, isolation and compromises the quality of life of children with disabilities. These restrictions in movement have an additional impact on physical and mental health of children leading to secondary impairments.

Skills to develop independence in movement; movement enabled through aids and assistive devices; with support of personal assistants is of critical importance for children with disabilities.

Independence in movement allows to gain confidence and ease to acquire other life skills.

While teaching skills in mobility teachers must ensure that the skills are applicable in home settings, community settings, different terrains and the child also acquires all the safety procedures linked to movement/mobility. Children, particularly children with disabilities in secondary classes must also be aware of the utility of aids/assistive devices; knows how to take care of them; and have information and skill to get them repaired.

The ultimate aim of teaching mobility skills is to enable the child to access community resources – school, playground, parks, market places, metros, cinema halls, work places, community places, visit friends, relatives and lead a fulfilling life.

Self-Care: Self-care activities are often taken for granted and it is assumed that the children/children with disabilities learn them during the process of growth and development. A person well-groomed exhibits confidence; gains respect and are

essential for physical and mental health. It also provides a positive self-image for the person.

Managing self-care activities plays an important role for a child with disability. Independence in communication skills is essential for a person to gain skills in self care.

Depending on the impairment additional aids/equipment may be necessary for maximising independence. If a care giver is required for assistance, ensure that the

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care giver is trained appropriately and that the planning, communication and control is in the hands of person with disability.

The ultimate aim of teaching self-care activities is that the child with disability is able to participate in activities in school, work places, homes, community settings, cultural events, functions and festivals with dignity. She/he is able to use public facilities, communicate needs, seek support wherever necessary and take care of self in a dignified manner.

Apart from the basic self-care activities and grooming the program must also include personal care for boys and girls including shaving/menstrual hygiene, a healthy development of understanding needs of all peers and respecting gender differences. All children including children with disabilities must be equipped with skills to look after ones health through ensuring physical comfort, and healthy life style, managing ones health, following seeking health advice, being aware of substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases, be aware of risks and potentially hazardous situations at home, school and in the community and strategies to look after self.

- Basic Literacy/Numeracy including digital literacy and financial literacy.

Part II: Application of Basic Skills to acquire skills in:

- Skills required for domestic life. Some of the skills that all children including children with disabilities need to learn includes: preparing simple to complex meals; cleaning washing utensils/clothes; budgeting/shopping; managing hired services; taking care of plants/animals; managing repair/maintenance at home. Hiring services for the same; assist family members/self; acquire a family space for rent; furnish a place as per requirements; run and manage a house independently/with support etc.

Parents and family members are most often worried about their adult children taking care of themselves. In order to build the skills for later adult hood preparation must

be done much earlier.

Children with disabilities must be given opportunities to learn the varied tasks to run a home. The tasks must be graded according to age and ability and must be given the information and skills to understand and contribute according to abilities.

Parents/family members and teachers must work together to provide the opportunities for learning and help children with disabilities the essential skills required for domestic life.

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- Skills in Organization and Management include planning a single to complex tasks independently/| a group/with support; following daily routine with guidance/independently; managing changes in routine; using public transport independently or with guidance; managing ones time effectively etc. Children pick up skills in organizing and managing self/environment from a early age. For children with disabilities, sometimes, these skills have to be focussed upon and provided with opportunities. Very often children with disabilities are not viewed as contributing members, the expectations are much lower and the need to build the skills for later adulthood is often ignored. Therefore, teachers must pay specific attention to building these skills.
- Skills in pursuing Higher Education: Children with disabilities often get left out of career counselling and future plans. Parents, adolescents member with disability, teachers must discuss the career options available, interests of the child with disability and appropriate measures must be put in place for a career plan.
- Skills for Work/work readiness: It is important to prepare adolescents and young adults for future life. In a fast-changing world the individuals need to be prepared to understand the work expectations from the field and prepare oneself accordingly. For people with disabilities it is important to realize and build readiness skills for work.

Teaching of the skills necessary for work has to realistic, job oriented and as far as possible in real life situations.

Skills for participating in social, civic, political, and community activities: Education about active citizenship and role of a citizen is absent in general education processes. It is an essential component for all people and especially for people with disabilities who are not, today, acknowledged as citizens of the country of the country.

It is essential that all the active citizenship education includes rights as well as responsibilities of all citizens including people with disabilities.

Activities/Strategies for teaching citizenship roles must integrate all the skills imparted (communication, management, organizing, decision making etc.)

The aim is for the individual person with disability is to understand her/his own rights, participate in civic, political activities and contribute to community building/nation building.

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2. SCHOOL PROCESSES

2.1 Adaptations/Universal Design for Learning

Addressing diversity in the classroom can be quite challenging to the teacher. Universal Design offers to the teacher a flexibility in teaching and learning thereby benefitting all students including students with disabilities.

Universal Design was first coined by Ronald Mace in 1980's applied to physical spaces. When applied to Learning and Education, UDL (Universal Design in Learning) applies to both physical and learning spaces.

UDL offers flexibility to the teacher and the learner. The three main principles of UDL are: 1. Multiple means of engagement: teachers use different ways to motivate students and offer multiple opportunities for children to participate. 2. Multiple means of representation: Teachers provide information in multiple formats. 3. Multiple means of action and expression: students are provided multiple ways to interact with material and are encouraged to give their responses using different ways of expression.

These must be incorporated in the development of the new curriculum. This curriculum must meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century. Universal design in learning for classroom teaching is already available and would need to be adapted to Indian context.

2.2 Teacher Preparation and Capacity Building

NEP 2020 has outlined various provisions for teacher training both at Pre-Service and In Service levels.

NEP 2020 emphasizes on Inclusive Education at all levels. Therefore, the teacher training for all General educators/subject teachers must include the following components to strengthen Inclusive Education at Secondary and Senior Secondary levels of education. - Orientation to Inclusion

- Teacher's role in promoting inclusion
- Specific skills in translating curriculum to promote inclusion
- Specific skills in pedagogy to promote inclusion
- Specific skills in individualized and group assessments and plans
- Specific skills in understanding impact of impairment on learning, developing skills to address the same and accessing support systems for students with disabilities to participate, learn and complete secondary/senior secondary education.
- Skills in monitoring progress of inclusive education addressing all elements of inclusion including individual progress made by all children including children with disabilities.

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Apart from the general education/ class teacher /subject teachers there are other people in the school who impact the successful learning outcomes of a child with disability. These are the school administrators, support staff, all children including children with disabilities, all teachers including class teachers, subject teachers, Art/ music/ sports and other teachers, laboratory attendants etc.

- An orientation program to understand basic principles of inclusion and their role in creating a safe and inclusive environment must be inbuilt in the school processes.
- The teacher training programs for Special Educators, both at In-Service and Pre Service levels, must include cross disability and an approach that promotes Inclusive Education.
- Inservice training of members of SMCs, PTAs, MTAs and members of community groups, civil society groups must all be oriented to the ethos and culture of Inclusive Education. An inclusive language and code of behavior must be developed for all members of the school must be developed.

2.3 Effective Planning and Management

Adequate financial planning towards implementation of Inclusive Education is critical for its success. Therefore, the financial needs of Inclusive education must be integrated with overall Education budget.

Some of the areas that need focussed budget allocations are:

- Infrastructure: Accessibility in built environment is an important area to be included in the budget heads. Components of expenditure will include – Building/vehicles which

are accessible; Playgrounds/recreational spaces/Resource centre/Libraries/Toilets/Drinking water facilities/Communication/Technology will require specific allocations to make these services accessible, safe and hygienic.

- Teacher Training: CPD for general and special educators to be planned in such a way so as to cover all areas of training covered under NEP 2020 and listed in the previous section. A detailed calendar of activities and an individual tracking system to gauge the levels of training covered by teachers over a period of time will adequately cover the gap in human resource available for Inclusive Education.
- Human Resource: Adequate funds to be allocated for recruitment of new teachers, para teachers, support staff/care givers for children with disabilities, community based IE professionals, rehabilitation staff etc.
- Quality education, incentives, schemes governed by National/State Govts etc will require additional resource allocation.

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- Identification of all school drop outs, especially children with disabilities, after middle school/Secondary school, and providing adequate resources and services for completing secondary schooling with career guidance facilities.
- Intense preparatory phase to be provided for children with disabilities:
 - Transport to reach school and all other services
 - Escort where required
 - Aids and adaptations to increase independence and participation
 - Bring children from Home Based education to Inclusive education program
 - Communication material in text, large print, Braille, Tactile communication, accessible multimedia, audio, human reader, and augmentative and alternate modes. Sign language interpretation where required etc.

2.4 Governance, School Leadership and Monitoring Progress of Inclusive Education

NEP 2020 emphasizes on School leadership to transform education processes. Therefore a major focus is on developing school leadership to develop the ethos, culture and processes in schools that promote a safe, accessible and inclusive environment for learning and growing. The school leadership development program must include modules in Visioning for Inclusive Schools, Culture and Practice.

Another aspect of School Leadership Program must be to evaluate Inclusive Education, promote self-reflection and course correction and be accountable to Inclusive practices. School leadership must be able to track progress on all areas of Inclusion.

School leadership could be involved in developing their own Index for Inclusion and develop

mechanisms for periodic evaluations to understand the trends in Outputs/Outcomes of Inclusive education.

NEP 2020 also addresses the issues related to Governance seriously. The emphasis on Inclusive Education and Good Governance must be addressed together. The technical and administrative structures required to promote inclusive culture including accessible infrastructure, identification of school dropouts, teacher education, technology, pedagogy, building a network of resources etc must be integrated into the new administrative, management and technical groups as envisaged in NEP 2020.

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