TESS+
India

Transforming teaching-learning process: developing an effective learning culture in your school

Teacher Education
through School-based
Support in India
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This School Leadership OER (Open Educational Resource) is one of a set of 20 units from TESS- India designed to help school leaders develop their understanding and skills so that they can lead improvements in teaching and learning in their school. The units are essentially practical, with activities to be carried out in school with staff, students and others. They are based on research and academic study of effective schools.

There is no prescribed order for studying the units, but 'The school leader as enabler' is the best place to start, as this provides an orientation for the whole set. You might choose to study the units in combinations related to specific themes; these 'families' of units have been aligned with the National College of School Leadership Curriculum Framework (India) key areas: 'Perspective on school leadership' (1); 'Managing and developing self' (2); 'Transforming teaching-learning process' (3); and 'Leading partnerships' (6). Key areas 4 and 5, on leading innovation and leading teams, are addressed in multiple units but not as a specific focus. Some units address more than one key area.

The units can be used by school leaders for self-study or as part of a taught leadership programme. In either scenario, there are benefits in keeping a personal Learning Diary, and in sharing the learning experience with others through discussion of the activities and case studies. The term 'school leader' is used in these units to refer to a headteacher, principal, deputy teacher or any individual taking leadership responsibility in a school.

Video resources

The icon indicates where there are TESS-India School Leadership video resources in which Indian school leaders talk about how they are enacting change in their school to improve teaching and learning. It is hoped that they will inspire you to experiment with similar practices. The video resources are intended to complement and enhance you working through the text-based units, but are not integral to them should you be unable to access them.

TESS-India video resources may be viewed online or downloaded from the TESS-India website, http://www.tess-india.edu.in/. Alternatively, you may have access to these videos on a CD or memory card.

About the TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) project

TESS-India aims to improve the classroom practices of elementary and secondary teachers in India through the provision of OERs to support school leaders and teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The 105 TESS-India subject OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school textbook in the subjects of language, science and maths. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

All TESS-India OERs have been collaboratively written by Indian and international authors to address Indian curriculum and contexts, and are available for online and print use (http://www.tess-india.edu.in/). The OERs are available in several versions, appropriate for each participating Indian state and users are invited to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.

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What this unit is about

This unit will introduce you to the dimensions and factors that impact on the culture of a school. School culture arises from agreed collective values, assumptions and beliefs. These in turn determine the relationships between stakeholders, the curriculum, the pedagogy, resources, organisational arrangements and infrastructure. All schools are situated within a community, and the values inherent to the school come from this community and in turn influence it back.

School culture has been referred to as the 'hidden curriculum' of a school (Pollard and Triggs, 1997). It forms the rites and rituals, customs, symbols, stories, and vocabulary of a school. Students unconsciously absorb codes of behaviour and expectations from the culture in their school, which therefore directly affects their learning.

Figure 1 School culture can affect learning.

Changing aspects of a school's culture is not a quick process; any actions you take may not show results for some months or even years. The existing culture and associated behaviours may be fairly entrenched, requiring a long-term, incremental sequence of changes before seeing any real differences. However, being aware of a school's culture, its impact on your ability to lead change and having a vision of the culture you want to develop is critical to leading for effective learning. This unit will support you in beginning to think about the learning culture in your own school and your leadership of it.

Learning Diary

During your work on this unit you will be asked to make notes in your Learning Diary, a book or folder where you collect together your thoughts and plans in one place. Perhaps you have already started one.

You may be working through this unit alone, but you will learn much more if you are able to discuss your learning with another school leader. This could be a colleague with whom you already collaborate, or someone with whom you can build a new relationship with. It could be done in an organised way or on a more informal basis. The notes you make in your Learning Diary will be useful for these kinds of meetings, while also mapping your longer-term learning and development.

What school leaders can learn in this unit

- What school culture is and how it impacts on learning.
- To begin to identify the culture in your school.
- Some strategies for developing a positive shared culture for learning in your school.

1 What is school culture and how does it impact on learning?

A school that is able to develop and maintain a positive shared culture knows what aspects of the culture are important in developing an effective learning environment; it *consciously* transmits these values to its students. Through collective awareness and action, culture can be used positively in order to enhance student learning and achievement, whether through small actions such as celebrating achievements in public events, or to more large-scale projects such as developing democratic processes for teachers, students and other stakeholders to contribute to curriculum reform.

While it appears to be constant , culture is a dynamic space that is influenced by laws, policies and changes of leadership. It therefore requires school leaders to be aware of what influences or changes aspects of the school culture, whether deliberately or not, and ensuring that the culture for learning and achievement are never put at risk. Research demonstrates that school leaders have a critical role in ensuring that the culture supports student achievement (MacNeil et al., 2009). But – as identified by Bulach (2001) – a leader must identify a school's existing culture before attempting to change it.

A positive school culture can be defined broadly to include (Character Education Partnership, 2010):

- **social climate**, including a safe and caring environment in which all students feel welcomed and valued, and have a sense of ownership of their school; this helps students in their moral development
- **intellectual climate**, in which all students in every classroom are supported and challenged to do their very best and achieve work of quality; this includes a rich, rigorous and engaging curriculum, and a powerful pedagogy for teaching it
- **rules and policies** that hold all school members accountable to high standards of learning and behaviour
- **traditions and routines** built from shared values that honour and reinforce the school's academic and social standards
- **structures** for giving staff and students a voice in, and shared responsibility for, solving problems and making decisions that affect the school environment and their common life
- **ways of effectively working with parents** to support students' learning and character growth
- **norms for relationships and behaviours** that create a professional culture of excellence and ethical practice.
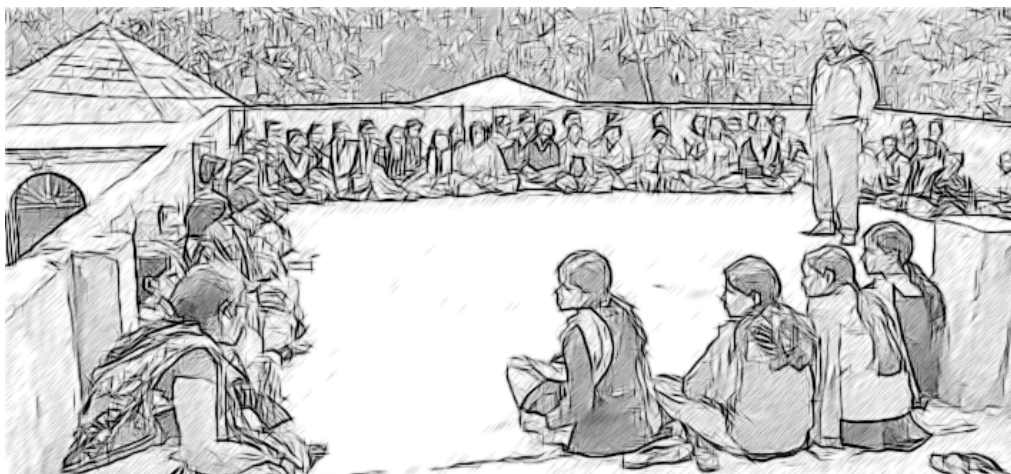

Figure 2 Does your school have a positive school culture?

This definition covers the breadth of school life, both academic and social. However, every bullet point can be seen to have a direct impact on student learning, whether it is through developing a culture of excellence, or ensuring that students feel safe and listened to. The *National Curriculum Framework* (NCF) recognises this by stating that 'schools have a major role to play in ensuring that children are socialised into a culture of self-reliance, resourcefulness, peace-oriented values and health' (2005, p. 35).

The NCF mentions the conscious creation of a culture that has a long-term, developmental impact, stating that 'children cannot wake up one morning and know how to participate in, preserve and enhance a democracy, especially if they have had no prior personal or even second-hand experience of it, nor any role models to learn from'. It specifically mentions the importance of:

- a culture of reading
- a culture of innovation, curiosity and practical experience
- highlighting students' identities as 'learners' and creating an environment that enhances the potential and interests of each student
- messages that convey interpersonal relations, teacher attitudes, and norms and values that are part of the culture of the school.

More recently, Section 17 of the Right to Education Act 2009 (RtE) is of particular significance in the context of developing a positive school culture, because it states that 'no child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment'. This calls for the school leader to focus on making the school an enabling and facilitative place for all school children, thereby providing a stress-free, child-friendly, learner-centred classroom environment, which requires redefining notions of discipline, punishment and student–teacher relationships. Further, the National Programme Design and Curriculum Framework (2014) highlights the need to empower and develop the capabilities of the school leader so that the transformed school proactively nurtures children and facilitates their all-round development.

Before understanding the role of school leaders in establishing, modelling and sharing their vision of a positive school culture, it is necessary to consider how different aspects of the culture are enacted in schools. Activity 1 will help you to consider your own understanding of school culture in relation to the Character Education Partnership (CEP) definition above.

Activity 1: Identifying examples of positive school culture

Look again at the seven bullet points listed above in the CEP definition of school culture. For each bullet point, write down in your Learning Diary two examples of how this might be reflected to your school.

For each example you have listed, justify how it would have a positive impact on student learning.

You will have naturally drawn on examples from your own experience, and will maybe have thought of examples of practice that you feel your school should aim to implement. You may notice that the examples you have thought of range from something as small as all teachers saying good morning to students as they enter classrooms, to something more substantial such as changing the classroom pedagogy .

The examples you thought of for Activity 1 are likely to be context-specific. Table 1 lists some generic ideas to help you think through the broad range of practical elements that might contribute to a school culture.

Table 1 *Examples of school culture.*

School culture definition	Examples
Social climate	Displaying students' work
	Greeting students as they arrive at each classroom
	Providing emotional support to those students who need it
	Creating a safe, comfortable learning environment, including temperature, sight lines to the teacher, comfortable seating, etc.
	Staff are not prejudiced and do not stereotype any students
	All students are included and valued, whatever their backgrounds and abilities
Intellectual climate	Celebrating success in small ways (such as verbal congratulations during a lesson) or in more grand events (such as certificates or prizes at an event with the local community)
	Setting learning goals for students that reflect their personal needs and challenge them appropriately
	Valuing a questioning, enquiry or investigative approach to learning
Rules and policies	Developing a behaviour policy jointly with students and displaying it in all classrooms
	Discussing the behaviour policy in a school assembly or other platforms, in the presence of all the school management committee (SMC) members and teachers
	Ensure all staff use the behaviour policy consistently
Traditions and routines	Have time in each assembly where successes from all aspects of school and students' home life are celebrated
	Staff and the SMC plan, organise and attend the whole range of school events (sporting, musical, prize giving, fundraising) to support their students and the school community
Giving staff and students a voice	Having time each week where staff or students can see the school leader without an appointment
	Developing a school council or student focus group to discuss issues that they want to raise with the staff
	Asking students to evaluate their experiences in subjects or courses, or over an academic year, to help make improvements

School culture definition	Examples
Working with parents	Setting up parent discussion groups to talk about issues that they want to raise with you or the staff
	Involving the parents in the SMC, as mandated by the RtE Act 2009
	Providing parents with regular updates on their child's progress, but also the school curriculum and student successes
Norms for relationships and behaviours	Students saying 'Please' and 'Thank you' to teachers but also – importantly – teachers saying them to students
	Valuing and respecting the home language of all students
	Valuing different abilities at all levels and making adjustments to that disability does not exclude students
	Respecting each other as learners (e.g. listening to each other, sharing resources politely and considerately)

Having considered the multi-faceted nature of what is meant by a school's culture, it should be clear that there is very little that does not have an impact on how staff and students experience the school and affect the learning that takes place. As a school leader, this includes the way you lead and manage the staff, how you communicate your vision of the school's development, and the relationships and interactions you have with staff, students and stakeholders.

2 Styles of school leadership

As identified by the NCF and the CEP definition, culture is established not only in actions taken but also in the relationships that are built. The next activity will help you to consider the impact of different styles of school leadership on school culture.

Activity 2: Leadership styles

Read the descriptions of school leaders in Table 2. Think of the school leaders you have known since you were a student, as well as those in your peer group. Which box in Table 2 would they go in, based on the description that fits them best according to your perspective? Think about which box you would go in too. Write your reflections of what you noticed in your Learning Diary.

Table 2 Leadership styles.

		Relationship-oriented leader	
		High	Low
Task-oriented leader	High	The leader is very interested in the growth and development of their staff and students. They are often in class, leading teaching and learning, modelling good practice, and supporting the students. They take a deep interest in their work, do it well and in time, and ensure that staff and students are involved in the decision making. Everyone feels that the leader knows and supports them to get better.	The leader is very focused on getting the work done to perfection and well in time. They feel that it is a waste of time to check whether their decisions are acceptable to staff and students, and see it as their job. If they enter a class, the leader is more interested in the time spent on a task than on supporting the teachers to get better; they often take over from the teacher, since they can teach better than the teacher can. Everyone feels that they have to prove they are better than the others.
	Low	The leader is most interested in spending time socially with the staff and students. They are very sympathetic to the difficulties they face but prefer to discuss tasks that need to be done with staff. They work with a view to getting a task completed, without much attention to detail. Everyone feels that the leader likes them.	The leader keeps to themselves, and may get the work done so that it is submitted, without any interest in the work or in the growth and development of the teachers and students. There is limited social interaction and work is done in a minimal way. Everyone feels that the leader does not know their capabilities.

Of course, this activity provides a very rudimentary understanding of different styles of leadership. In real life, the task- and relationship-oriented axes represent a spectrum, with very few people demonstrating all of the characteristics described of one zone of Table 2. However, it is useful to reflect on what implicit messages these four 'styles' of leader might give about the school's culture, as illustrated by the examples in Case Study 1.

Case Study 1: Four school leaders with different styles

Mrs Balasubramanian

Mrs Balasubramanian is well-respected by the parents, who appreciate her open style communication and the way she invites them regularly to the school for information evenings, but also to ask their opinions about changes in the school. Their children used to come home complaining about the lack of order in the school, and how some students disrupted classes.

This has improved since Mrs Balasubramanian introduced a school council and gave students responsible roles such as keeping order in the corridors when classes change. She did not just give out these roles to

the most able students, but took care to offer roles to both male and female students, different social groups, and to students who struggled with school work but worked hard. She knew the name of every student in the school and also took care to know her staff so that she could support them individually to do a good job. As a result, both the staff and students found Mrs Balasubramanian very approachable and willing to help. Because she so obviously believed in them and their abilities, they in turn did not want to disappoint her.

Mrs Balasubramanian has a high task/high relationship orientation.

Mrs Dasgupta

Mrs Dasgupta is a dedicated and conscientious school leader who carries the burden of her responsibility very seriously. She knows THAT if she wants a good job done, she will probably have to do it herself. She has a clear vision about how she wants the school to operate, how students should learn and how teachers should teach. Although her teachers respect her organisation and hard work, generally they would not describe Mrs Dasgupta as supportive. Some say that they feel she does not trust them. Staff meetings tend to consist of Mrs Dasgupta giving instructions and advice, and it is difficult to offer up ideas or alternative suggestions.

Students' experience in the classroom is variable, as some teachers lack motivation and Mrs Dasgupta seems to be quite remote – they only really see her in the distance and none of them can recall her taking any particular interest in them as individuals.

Mrs Dasgupta has a high task/low relationship orientation.

Mrs Haldar

Mrs Haldar is always careful to take on board everyone's views about the school. She will often worry a lot about how to address feedback from a parent or how to deal with a complaint by the neighbours. She was recently very preoccupied with a comment from a visiting local education officer, who remarked that the displays were a bit old and battered. She instructed every teacher to prioritise some new displays before he called again – and was disappointed that he did not even seem to notice any change.

Mrs Haldar can feel a bit overwhelmed by the demands of her staff and SMC, as she hates to disappoint and tries hard to please everyone. (This is of course is not possible, as sometimes their request conflict with each other.) Sometimes she feels that her whole day is taken up with dealing with people rather than getting on with her own teaching, or the monitoring and reporting that she needs to do.

She shows kindness and compassion towards the students, and is always ready to give her time to sorting their problems as far as she can. She feels that there is not a lot she can do to change their lives, however, as they come from such poor families and the school has only limited resources.

Mrs Haldar has a low task/high relationship orientation.

Mr Magar

Mr Magar believes that he runs a good school. He does not sit down all day – he visits classrooms regularly to ask teachers questions or call on their time. He does not have time to run staff meetings and they often get cancelled at the last minute. The motivated staff tend to organise their own support between them, sharing ideas and problems. Some feel resentful about this, as they feel Mr Magar should be helping them more – and they don't quite know what he does with his time. The less motivated staff keep themselves to themselves and one of them, who had been at the school for two terms, realised last week that Mr Magar did not even know her name.

The students lack direction and motivation in most lessons. There are a few good teachers whose lessons they value, but often the lessons are dull and repetitive.

Mr Magar receives communications and directives from the DIET and SCERT, but is never quite sure what to do about them or how he might enlist the help of others on his team; in fact, he has no idea who has skills that he might use.

Mr Magar has a low task/low relationship orientation.

Having thought about the different ways that a school culture expresses itself and the way it can be influenced by leadership style, it is now important to reflect on your own role in the culture of your school.

It is not just *what* we do, but *how* we do things that helps establish the school culture. The next activity will help you reflect on *how* you take action as a leader, and the implications of this on the school's culture.

Activity 3: The role of leadership in determining school culture

Think of two leadership scenarios where you have taken action. This may, for example, be supporting a teacher developing their practice, making a change to school policies or rules, changing the way the curriculum is structured or taught, or taking specific actions to improve female students' participation in class. Using your Learning Diary, record your responses to the following points:

- Reflect on your approach for each of the two examples you have thought about. What characterises the approach you took? Were there particular reasons for this approach?
- Consider each scenario in turn from the perspective of others who were involved (parents, staff, students, other stakeholders). What messages about school culture do you feel they took from your approach?

Discussion

You may have found it challenging to think about which characteristics would be identified by others involved in the scenario. For example, you may think that you demonstrated openness, but others' experiences of trying to organise an appointment time to see you suggests otherwise. Equally, there may have been particular circumstances about the scenario that made it challenging to act the way you would have wished. It may be that you were under significant pressure to achieve a change quickly, which led to a lack of reciprocal collaboration. However, considering how others are interpreting your leadership style as a comment on the school culture you want to establish is important. Asking yourself the following questions regularly may help:

- What types of interactions and actions am I modelling in dealing with this issue?
- What messages may others take from how I am acting or interacting?
- What opportunities does this issue give me in establishing or reinforcing the culture that we want to create?

If you feel able to, it is very useful to ask others to provide feedback to you about how they perceived your leadership, as you can otherwise only guess at this. This can take a lot of confidence, and you may decide to start by sharing the above activity with one member of staff who you feel you can trust to provide honest, fair and supportive opinions.

Figure 3 A task- and relationship-oriented school leader.

3 Identifying and analysing the culture in your school

Schools need a shared positive culture. To assess whether the culture of your school is supporting student learning, you will first need to understand and define your school's culture together with the other stakeholders. This shared exploration will help the entire school to identify and celebrate what is going well and identify areas for improvement.

During the exploration you may discover whether the outcomes that students achieve in school are being accomplished with support from the school culture or in spite of the school culture. Your exploration should provide the insights that you need to change the culture in the school so that it aligns with both your understanding of a good school and your goals, thereby increasing your effectiveness.

Planning how you and the other stakeholders would develop an understanding of the prevailing culture in the school is critical, as it will work towards the goal of making the culture explicit and measurable in terms of its desirability. At all times, you will need to ensure that a long term, developmental perspective is maintained when looking at the impact of school culture. Impact is seen over time, sometimes over years.

Finding out about the culture of your school involves having genuine, honest and exploratory conversations with staff, students and stakeholders. This may be a different type of conversation (and, ultimately, a different type of relationship) than you are currently used to having. If you want to create an environment in which you can work collaboratively with staff to explore the school's culture, you will need to focus on the following:

- **The quality of the listening:** When gathering evidence, remember to remain impassive but interested. Facial expressions and verbal reactions can inhibit others from being honest.
- **Creating a safe environment in which your staff can share what they truly think:** Keep the goal clear – understanding the school's culture, making sure that it is positive and supports the school to achieve its goals and vision.

- **Restrain your instinct to defend the practices in the school:** Ask for examples and evidence of statements of both praise and disapproval. Even unsubstantiated opinions collected are useful and can be addressed in meetings, assemblies and training programmes.

Video: School Leadership – Knowing your school

http://tinyurl.com/video-sl-knowing

Activity 4: Gathering evidence of the current school culture

Identify some of your staff who might be interested in working with you on this aspect of your school's development. Identify a range of opportunities to gather evidence and reflect on the school's culture. This might include:

- standing with you at the school gate and watch the manner in which the staff and students enter the school
- walking together around the school, looking at how the building is decorated and maintained
- watching how an assembly is conducted
- following some students as they go into their classrooms and observing how they settle in
- noticing how teachers and students greet each other
- reviewing how the school rules are enacted
- watching teachers start the first class for the day
- asking a range of staff, students and parents for their views on the school's culture
- reflecting with your staff on the evidence collected.

After spending some time collecting evidence, find a quiet space for reflection with your staff members. Listen to and talk with them about what you have all discovered concerning the school culture and its potential impact on student learning. Your conversation could be structured around the characteristics of a school culture (Character Education Partnership, 2010) that were referred to previously:

- social climate
- intellectual climate
- rules and policies
- traditions and routines
- giving staff and students a voice
- ways of effectively working with parents
- norms for relationships and behaviours.

Write your own reflections on this process in your Learning Diary.

The purpose of gathering evidence is to understand the context of your school and use the information to build a culture in which all your students value learning. Involving others in the information gathering enables you to identify how the school's culture is perceived by others, empower others to take responsibility for developing an effective learning culture and leads to a more inclusive and sustainable culture. It is necessary to set the stage for the planning process to follow. Your teachers will have experienced your keenness to proceed by now and they are more likely to be willing to plan the next steps with you.

Activity 5: Working with the team to identify areas for team improvement

Once the team of staff members have agreed to gather information on the culture of the school, ask them to start by making their own beliefs explicit. Set up a workshop in your office or in an available room after school, if your teachers agree to stay after school hours.

Prepare in advance for the workshop by creating a set of ten strips of paper for each teacher in your team. On each set of ten strips, write norms for group functioning for schools that have a mission for improving themselves. These are based on research by Stoll and Fink (1996):

- 'We all know our vision and our goals.'
- 'We are all responsible if we fail or win.'
- 'We all work together.'
- 'We are all getting better at what we do.'
- 'We are all learning and can learn.'
- 'We all try new ways.'
- 'We all find help when we get stuck.'
- 'We all feel we are important.'
- 'We talk about our differences with each other.'
- 'We all enjoy our work.'

Hand out the set of strips to the teachers and ask them to divide them independently into two categories in terms of the current school status: 'Achieved' and 'Getting there'. Do the exercise yourself at the same time as your team. Then stick all of the 'Achieved' strips onto a piece of chart paper and all of the 'Getting there' strips on another. Count how many statements you get for each list. Look for statements that appear in both lists, therefore signalling a disagreement about the current situation. Discuss your findings as a group.

Completing this activity will have enabled you to identify where the team shares understanding about the school's current culture and where there is disagreement or ambiguity. You may have found that some statements seemed to apply to certain parts of the school, but not all, or that some statements were firmly in the 'Getting there' area. This information is an important starting point for establishing priority areas for your attention. However, establishing whether the views of the team reflect wider opinion is necessary.

Figure 4 Work with your team to identify areas for improvement.

Schools that want to assess the movement toward achieving their vision build a climate of providing feedback. If you have noted that your school is a good place for teachers to improve their teaching, this is a good time to find out if the rest of your teachers would say the same thing. It would also be important to discover whether your students would describe it as a place that they like to attend because they learn what they need to know and feel confident, and whether parents would agree with the manner in which their children are learning.

The next activity will help you understand the views of a range of stakeholders.

Activity 6: Engaging with stakeholders

Make a plan with your team on how you will interview a variety of stakeholders on the culture of the school. This will mainly involve students, staff and parents, but it will be important to ask local businesses, community leaders, religious leaders, etc. The Right to Education Act 2009 (RtE) mandates that 'the school management committee shall perform the following functions, namely:

- monitor the working of the school
- prepare and recommend a school development plan
- monitor the utilisation of the grants received from the appropriate government or local authority, or any other source.

Some suggestions on the questions that might be asked are given below, although you may have specific questions that you want to ask based on the findings of your staff workshop. You may also find that you need to develop a slightly different range of questions to ask stakeholders who are not involved in the everyday activities of the school. For each area of questioning you should ask about the current culture and what they feel should be the desired culture.

- **The regular functioning of the school and how they would like to see it function**: How does the timetable link with the school's vision? What would make an ideal timetable? What activities are given importance and which ones are always put aside when there is a time crunch? What should be done in the same circumstances? Who do students speak to about their needs and interests? Who should be designated for this? Do the staff know who they can turn to if they require resources? If they require information? Who should be designated for this?
- **Qualities of the staff and the students and the qualities that they would like to see:** Which people are seen as assets to the school? Are some qualities being overlooked? What are students allowed to do? What are they not allowed to do? What should they be allowed to do? What about staff – what are they allowed or not allowed to do? What should they be allowed to do? Who are the key people in the school? What values do they represent?
- **A day in the life of each stakeholder and how each would like the day to be:** What does a day in the life of a leader look like? What does an average day in the life of a teacher or student look like? What are the sorts of reasons for which students are celebrated? What are the sorts of reasons for which students are disciplined? How are students that achieve supported? How should they be supported? How are students that struggle supported? How should they be supported?
- **Achievements and what achievements they aspire to**: What are you most proud of about the school? What would make you even more proud if the school achieved it? What is the one thing you would like to change the most? Has the school made any radical departures from its past practices? Have they been radical enough? Is there a history of innovation? Does the teaching and learning help students feel confident about their abilities? What changes in the teaching and learning would help students feel greater confidence in their abilities?

- **Approach to challenges and what should be the approach:** What is the process the school follows to find out what is going right and what is not good enough? Is there a different process that can be followed? Who is in charge of the process and who participates in it? When there is an unfavourable incident, what does the school do about it? Should the school be doing something different? What sort of issues has the school dealt with during its existence? How did the SMC deal with them? Is there a pattern in their solving problems? Does it still apply? What is the change now? Is there a better way to solve problems?

Collate the answers with your team by identifying how aspects of the school culture that emerges from these conversations supports or prevents student progress and achievement.

A cohesive organisation is one in which all stakeholders view the culture similarly and are aligned with the goals of the organisation. How far is your SMC on board with the direction in which you want to lead your school? Was this your experience when listening to the staff, students and parents? Their responses would have told you which of the aspects of the school's culture are agreed. It would also tell you which ones the stakeholders view differently and why. These areas of difference are the areas you would want to improve on.

Video: School Leadership – The learning environment

http://tinyurl.com/video-sl-learning

The next section, discusses how you can develop a positive shared culture that takes the school towards the stated vision in a conscious manner.

4 Developing a positive shared culture

You will have collected a large amount of evidence now as to the prevailing culture of your school. This will include your own thoughts about the characteristics of the school culture (Activities 1–3), observations of behaviours and actions around the school (Activity 4), the perspectives of the team you have been working with (Activity 5), and the views of other stakeholders (Activity 6).

Figure 5 A positive school culture requires an action plan.

To use this evidence effectively as a leader requires you to reflect on its key messages, share these and discuss them with others and agree a plan of action. The following activities and discussions will help you to start this process.

Activity 7: Team review of your findings so far

Along with your team, spend time reviewing all of the evidence you have collected. One model for doing this might involve dividing the workshop participants into pairs or trios, and asking them to consider one or two of the bullet points below (Character Education Partnership, 2010) in depth:

- social climate
- intellectual climate
- rules and policies
- traditions and routines
- giving staff and students a voice
- ways of effectively working with parents
- norms for relationships and behaviours.

They could then report back to the group by answering the following questions for the particular aspect of the definition that you have considered:

- What features of the current school practices are working most effectively in establishing a positive learning culture?
- What features are preventing a positive learning culture to exist?
- Have you discussed possible actions or changes that could be made to improve the situation?

Once you have considered each aspect in turn, you should – as a whole team – answer the following questions:

1. Which of the bullet points do you feel are areas of strength for the school? That is, which of the bullet points are working most effectively in establishing a positive learning culture?
2. Which of the bullet points do you feel are areas that need to be developed? That is, which of the bullet points represent aspects of school which are preventing a positive learning culture to exist?

The issues that your team identify in relation to the CEP definition and your answers to the two questions above will form the basis for you to develop an action plan to improve your school's learning culture. Activity 8 will help you begin this process, but first it is worth revisiting some of the underpinning messages of this unit before structuring your approach.

As has been discussed, changing a school's culture involves:

- being aware of *how* actions are carried out, as well as *what* is done
- understanding the importance of how cultural messages are transmitted in every interaction between school leader and staff, staff and students, or staff and parents
- slow, incremental changes over a long period of time
- every member of the school community
- sharing your action plan with the SMC and including this in the school development plan.

As a school leader, you help to establish the school's culture by modelling the behaviours, attitudes, expectations and interactions that support a positive learning environment for your students. You also help

make the culture explicit by sharing the school's vision and goals. It is through these two aspects, **modelling the culture** and **sharing the school's vision**, that barriers preventing effective learning from taking place can be addressed.

Activity 8: Plan of action

In your workshop for Activity 7, you will have identified aspects of the school culture that need to be addressed. These might include specific, identifiable tasks to aspects that you have identified as problematic but for which you have no easy solutions (such as social climate). Some may feel very urgent, and others may form a longer-term project with multiple steps to contribute to a change.

To develop a strategic view of these issues, develop a plan of action with your team, if possible. An example for improving social climate is shown in Table 3 below; a blank template is in Resource 1. Use the headings in the first column and then, for each CEP definition from the list above, define the issue, record its urgency, describe what you are going to do and how you will communicate this, show who needs to be involved, and give details about how progress will be reviewed.

Table 3 Example plan of action.

Aspect of culture (using CEP definition)	Social climate, intellectual climate, rules and policies, traditions and routines, giving staff and students a voice, ways of effectively working with parents, norms for relationships and behaviours (underline or circle which aspects relate to this issue)
Issue or issues	Creating a welcoming environment for learning
Urgency (high/short term, medium term or long term)	High (short term)
How (actions or types of interactions)	Ensuring each teacher stands at the classroom door to smile and say welcome to all children
Dissemination (how to share this action/interaction with others)	Discuss it in a staff meeting, with a reminder in the following staff meeting
Collaboration (staff, students, parents, others)	The team and principal will model behaviours around the school. The student council and parent council will discuss other actions that could contribute to this issue
Review (who, timeframe, how)	After six weeks, the school leader will walk around the school at lesson changes and hold a discussion in a staff meeting

You may have found completing this form quite challenging. Actually pinning down the who, how and when can be difficult, but this is the only way to make change happen. It is important to note that this action plan will need to be a working document with additions and changes made as new evidence comes to light; you may change the order of importance of actions, or find that staff, students or parents are highlighting different priorities to you.

It is also worth stating that this will not be 'your' action plan – it belongs to the school community. Remember that you need to share this with the SMC and seek their agreement to it. You may then decide to display it in a staff room, or share it with a student or parent council in order to keep the community involved in taking actions.

Change is easier in schools where there is a willing and explicit explanation of 'why we do things the way we do them'. To ensure that schools remain responsive and relevant, it is critical for school leaders to ensure that the culture of the school is explicitly stated at all times, and regularly revisited to re-assess the validity of the reasons for the procedures and routines followed by the school. Remember that, as a leader, you are the role model.

5 Summary

This unit has explored what factors determine a positive school culture and how, as a school leader, you can work with the staff and stakeholders to enhance the learning culture in your school. This involves working from evidence, including observation, and making an action plan for change. Periodic reviews are critical if you want your school to go on improving . By engaging others in solving problems, agreeing goals and monitoring progress, your achievement of a positive school culture becomes a shared objective, with everybody understanding their part in promoting learning.

This unit is part of the set or family of units that relate to the key area of transforming teaching-learning process (aligned to the National College of School Leadership). You may find it useful to look next at other units in this set to build your knowledge and skills:

- *Leading improvements in teaching and learning in the elementary school*
- *Leading improvements in teaching and learning in the secondary school*
- *Leading assessment in your school*
- *Supporting teachers to raise performance*
- *Leading teachers' professional development*
- *Mentoring and coaching*
- *Promoting inclusion in your school*
- *Managing resources for effective student learning*
- *Leading the use of technology in your school.*

Resources

Resource 1: Plan of action

Table R1.1 *Plan of action – blank template (see Activity 8).*

Aspect of culture (using CEP definition)	Social climate, intellectual climate, rules and policies, traditions and routines, giving staff and students a voice, ways of effectively working with parents, norms for relationships and behaviours (underline or circle which aspects relate to this issue)
Issue or issues	
Urgency (high/short term, medium term or long term)	
How (actions or types of interactions)	
Dissemination (how to share this action/interaction with others)	
Collaboration (staff, students, parents, others)	
Review (who, timeframe, how)	

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