CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION

AND CONCLUSIONS

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

The thesis is an attempt to explore and engage with the understanding of Academic Culture and through that address the ontology of school in India. The questions raised were: How can the ontology of school be comprehended? What tools can be employed in this process? Can academic culture be a conceptual tool to understand the ontology of school? How can academic culture be delineated as a normative concept? How can academic culture be nurtured in school? What is the influence of academic culture in school?

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- What is academic culture?

- What are its determinants/constituents/components?

- What are its observables?

- Can academic culture be thrust or does it evolve participatively with the help of all members of the institution?

- How is academic culture to be nurture?

- What is the influence of academic culture in school?

Subsequent to evolving the concept of Academic Culture, case study of ten schools were presented. The findings of the study are mentioned below.

6.1 THE CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC CULTURE

As a normative concept, the culture in an academic institution which is collectively created and sustained by the stakeholders consciously and/or unconsciously in their endeavour for pursuit of knowledge and which facilitates and enhances the pursuit of

knowledge as the stakeholders enjoy and demonstrate freedom, respect, equality accompanied by a sense of responsibility is academic culture.

The four constituents were delineated in the following way.

FREEDOM

Freedom in school is visualized as the existence of freedom in school for the learners, teachers and principal. This freedom may be naturally and formally existing and/or created even within the constraints of institutional rules / obligations by informal support system/s. Freedom is also delineated in the manner in which it is enjoyed by the learner, the teacher and the principal individually.

At first, it is described as manifested in specific aspects and subsequently overall freedom for each is depicted.

RESPECT

Respect is visualized on three bases: (i) the dignity of learners, teachers and principal as human beings (ii) as individuals functioning in their organization roles and responsibilities in school and (iii) as a necessary condition to nurture freedom and equality. Respect is essential and inevitable when freedom is enjoyed. Respect is essential if equality is to exist and be practiced in school. In a way it also becomes a corollary to freedom and equality as it recognizes a sense of responsibility.

Respect is to be observed in:

-recognizing the dignity of learners, teachers and principal as human beings

-recognizing and accepting the learners, teachers and principal as individuals

with their own strengths and weaknesses

-recognizing the learners, teachers and principal as independent individuals

with a   sense of responsibility

-recognizing that the decisions and actions of learners, teachers and principal

individually and/or collectively arise out of the privileges due to their

organizational roles / specific positions in school

EQUALITY

Equality in school is visualized as the existence and practice of equality for stakeholders in the different roles, responsibilities and activities of school. Equality is further delineated as equality of treatment and equality of opportunity enjoyed by the learner, the teacher and the principal. Equality of treatment deals with the identity and status of the learner, the teacher and the principal. Equality of opportunity refers to the equal consideration given to each for growth and development. Equality for learner, the teacher and the principal is described individually and subsequently the overall equality is delineated.

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

It refers to the understanding developed and displayed by the principal to orchestrate the academic endeavours for the development of learners, teachers and the institution itself. It refers to the understanding that principal is the bridge between the school and the society; and the present and the past. It relates to the sense of accountability that s/he cultivates for all the stakeholders.

6.2 MANIFESTATION OF ACADEMIC CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Academic Culture was manifested in the schools the following ways.

1   Students participated in teaching learning activities freely to a large extent. The spectrum of freedom enjoyed and exercised by students was from merely shifting one's place to get a better view of blackboard, to seeking clarification of doubts, to engaging in independent inquiry. The students also expressed their views on activities of school in general.

2   Innovative ideas were cherished by students, teachers and principals. The range of innovative ideas was: taking informal initiatives by teacher and students to formal initiatives as in introducing a school wide program or designing a curricular activity.

3   Collegial relations among teachers were observed. There was consultation and discussion among teachers on various aspects like dealing with the students, and sharing experiences informally. It was also seen as absence of 'back biting'.

4   Staff-meeting, Parent-teachers meeting, student-teacher meeting was conducted in democratic spirit. This was observed in seeking opinions (is there any other point?, what do you all feel?, using management technique of wearing different thinking hats,) and listening to the grievances (I am not clear about your presentation. Please explain to me.),

5   The interactions were marked by respect for the other in which listening was pre-dominantly practiced in classrooms, among teachers, between principal and teachers. The manner of addressing and the manner of overcoming the organizational hierarchy also reinforced respect.

6   Students had respect for their teachers in classroom and in school premises. The manifestation of this ranged from acknowledgement of the presence of teacher/s to admitting a mistake with lowered eyes.

7   Collective decision making is observed in which free flow of ideas was observed. The collective decision making was observed for finalizing the annual calendar of school, for deciding the student for 'star pupil' award and for fixing schedules of tests.

8   Students were treated equally. There were specific policies, initiatives and programs introduced for this. Programs were introduced to overcome social barriers based on gender and   social stereotypes of manual work.

9   Trustee and Principal in schools managed by private Trusts used their freedom from the government rules and regulations to facilitate development of all learners.

10   Management was transparent in their dealing with teachers and students.

11   Teachers enjoyed freedom which was variously described as 'no one breathing down the neck', 'choice in the method of teaching', 'utilization

of institutional facilities and resources'. At the same time teachers perceived that they were free but could not elaborate on it.

12   Stakeholders displayed sense of responsibility in performing their duties in the best possible manner. It was seen in students' simple acts of doing one's work in absence of teacher. The teachers also updated their knowledge and facilitated students to overcome language barriers.

13   Instructional activities of the school were conducted well and in organized manner.

14   School and community relationship has been reconfigured and re articulated for strengthening of partnership between school and community. Principals posited the school as a significant support mechanism for students to supplement their needs. This was seen in acts of 'bathing the students', 'washing clothes to demonstrate cleanliness', 'activities to win the confidence of larger community', 'school wide programs to overcome the limitations of learning resources and parental support at home.'

6.3   NURTURE OF ACADEMIC CULTURE

The process followed for nurture of Academic Culture explained the pathways undertaken for it. The pathways that emerged were: (i) Leadership: Role of Principal (ii) Alignment of vision, mission, policy, programs and initiatives (iii) Stakeholder management (iv) Management practices and (v) Continuity and change.

(i)   LEADERSHIP: ROLE OF PRINCIPAL

Principal of a school becomes the face of governance and leadership in school. Four clear choices for the Principal as leader emerged: service driven, interventionist, maintaining the standards already established and facilitating functioning of school as a fully functional school. The Principal in case 6, 9 and 10 were driven by service to community and the larger society. The Principal in case 5 adopted the interventionist role to organize the working of the school. The Principals in case 2 and case 9 faced the challenge of maintaining the already achieved standards. The challenge for

Principal of case 3 was to make the school as a fully functional school. The choices made were specific to the unique context of the school.

(ii) ALIGNMENT OF VISION, MISSION, POLICY, PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Alignment of vision, mission, policy, programs and initiatives were observed as pathways to nurture Academic Culture. Various bases for developing a distinct vision observed were the motive for establishment of school born of personal belief or in response to a particular context. In case 3 it was the cause of girls' education, in case 4 it was the personal belief of the founder trustee, in case 6 it was a distinct vision for the idea of citizenship, in case 10 it was service to a particular community and children of unprivileged background. In each of these cases the policy programs were aligned with the vision and mission. For instance in case 6 where the vision was based on a distinct idea of citizenship the programs and policy emphasized on 'Khadi', and flag hoisting every month. To achieve the distinct idea of citizenship, the school developed programs unique as seen in the semester system and the examination pattern comprising of oral test as one of the unit test. In case 3 and 10 where the profile of the learners necessitated support from school, the policies and programs provided it through financial aid (freeship,) and through provision of learning material, and infrastructure facilities /learning resources). In case 4 the founder trustee's belief in learner centered approach found expressed in the informal policy of ensuring freedom for learners.

(iii) STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

Understanding the stakeholders and enabling them to contribute to the school were two distinct ways of addressing the stakeholders. Different ways of managing stakeholders were: (i) to understand their specific milieu and present the school as a shared space for them; (ii) to enable them through professional development programs, and through supplementary enrichment programs; and (iii) to enlisting the support of the stakeholders in the functioning of the school through special platforms, forum and practices.

> (i) To understand their (stakeholders') specific milieu and present the school as a shared space for them.

This was specifically observed in case 7 and 10 where the schools were established with specific motives of serving a particular section of society. The efforts taken in this direction were maintaining close rapport with the community and extending the facility of school space for study after school hours.

(ii)   To enable them (stakeholders) through professional development programs, and through supplementary enrichment programs

Teachers were enabled and empowered by professional development programs. The nature of professional development programs was specific to each context of the school. It was sustained, residential and compulsory in case 1 and 7. Need based professional development for all the teachers were observed in case 5 and 8. In case 3 however, professional development programs were also considered a 'waste of time' in comparison to the priority of teaching and completion of syllabus. The students were through supplementary enrichment programs as in case 8.

(iii)   To enlist the support of the stakeholders in the functioning of the school through special platforms, forum and practices.

The support of parents was enlisted through formal platform of parent-teacher association which was seen dominantly in case 1 and 7. The parents were enabled through programs specially designed for them. There were also practices of 'parent tour' to build rapport with them. In addition to these, the support of parents was enlisted through various meetings. In case 8 the Parent-teacher association was also given direction for their role in the functioning of school.

(iv)   MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

It was found that in most of the schools decentralized management was practiced. There was collective decision-making and consensus building. Collective decision making and consensus building emerged sharply in case 2 though it was observed in almost all the schools. Communication strategy as a significant management practice

was observed in all the cases in general. In case 2 and 9 it was quite dominant. The management practice of setting aside bureaucratization was practiced in case 2. Involvement of the Trustee in the micro management of school was also observed in case 9.

(v) CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Various techniques of maintaining continuity that emerged were knowledge management through post-retirement appointments and voluntary association with school post retirement, long and stable tenures of leaders (Principal), successive leaders shared the trust and faith in the vision, mission, policies, programs and initiatives of school.

Case 1 and Case 6 were able to maintain continuity through post- retirement appointments. In Case 6 voluntary association with school post- retirement was also observed. Case 2, 6 and 10 saw long and stable tenures of leaders which enabled the knowledge management in terms of continuity of policies and programs. Continuity of programs also was ensured when the successive leaders shared the same trust and faith in the vision, mission, policies and programs as was seen in case 6. The continuation of initiatives in case 5 was the relative long and stable tenure of the Principal.

Replication of models led to the need for continuity. The challenges faced in replication of models were the change of stakeholders, the medium of instruction and change of milieu. In those cases where the models were replicated case 7,8,9 either the continuity was deliberately broken in view of the stakeholders or the continuity was maintained by adopting context specific strategies.

Though these processes of nurture identified are distinct it is not implied that they constitute exclusive categories. For instance, 'leadership' is very much connected to stakeholder management as well to management practices. However these categories help us to understand how Academic Culture does get nurtured in specific as well as in general sense. Further these pathways are a part of a two way process. These nurture Academic Culture and once Academic Culture gets nurtured it offers the lens to look at the larger school in itself. Thus it becomes a very organic process.

6.4 INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC CULTURE

The understanding of influence of Academic Culture is premised on the question: What does Academic Culture influence? The influence of Academic Culture collectively on the overall confidence of all the stakeholders – learners, teachers, principal, Trust and parents- is presented at first. Subsequent to it the influence on two primary stakeholders- learners and teachers- is captured. The themes that emerged to denote influence of Academic Culture are presented.

(i) CONFIDENCE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN SCHOOL

The confidence of stakeholders in a school is based on alignment of expectations of stakeholders and how these are met with. One influence of Academic Culture is to demonstrate this alignment in the manner the school is perceived. Several ways of 'looking at' school that emerge were based on: (i) quality of teaching and learning, (ii) the unique focus of school, (iii) ability of school to contribute to the development of learners and (iv) continuation of association.

> *(i)* **Quality of teaching and learning:** This included 'standard' (quality of education), 'ability to prepare students for public examination', 'confidence in teaching learning process', 'ability to nurture merit/talent , 'good education (education *accha hai)*
>
> (ii) **The unique focus of school:** This was observed as 'discipline', 'unique identity as 'strict' and 'khadi', 'confidence in school to inculcate discipline in students', ' focus on academics', 'a typical school/down to earth school', 'simplicity', 'performance oriented and exhibiting creative restlessness' and 'friendly atmosphere'.
>
> (iii) **Ability of school to contribute to the development of learners:** This was observed as 'ability of school for overall development of students'.
>
> (iv) **Continuation of association:** This was observed as in the confidence in school through admission of wards of former learners. It was seen in 'sense of belongingness'.

LEARNERS

The influence on learners emerged in four categories: (i) well-mannered and developing certain attributes, (ii) confidence, (iii) equipped with abilities for future tasks, (iv) diligence .

(i) **Well mannered and developing certain attributes:** This included being 'disciplined in the sense not misbehaving', self-disciplined to denote not destroying school property, self-discipline by comparison to learners of other school, well-mannered in interaction with other learners and teachers, well turned out, neat and clean, having 'good manners'. Certain attributes developed were cleanliness, regularity, punctuality, honesty as in not cheating. Some other distinct attributes were being restless and not exhibiting material wealth.

(ii) **Confidence:** This was observed as overcoming stage fright, oral expression, overcoming hesitation and thus by contrast confident, voicing disagreement, participation in teaching learning process. Confidence was also observed as being bold and sometimes outspoken.

(iii) **Equipped with abilities for future tasks:** This was observed as becoming competent and enabled with skills to grasp and perform well any task in future, take up any activity after schooling, 'ability to do work properly'.

(iv) **Diligence:** This was seen as being 'positive', interested in studies, enthusiastic, serious, due diligence to task, and doing allotted work properly.

TEACHERS

The themes that emerged for influence on teachers were: (i) Commitment, (ii) Competence and (iii) Collegial.

(i) **Commitment:** This was seen as teachers being hardworking, devoted, teaching well, guiding students, providing support to students, doing the task/working diligently, completing the tasks with attention to details, taking care of 'weaker' students. It was also observed as a sense of

belongingness, feeling proud of social recognition on being a teacher of the particular school, feeling of ownership. It also got reflected in being energetic and in being well-mannered. It was also seen as being caring for the students.

(ii)   **Competence:** This was seen as knowing the latest trends (in education), being equipped with skills, confidence to handle any situation (in school), due diligence in doing every aspect of task well and highly competent.

(iii)   **Collegial:** This was seen as being cooperative colleagues, in consultations and discussion and in tones of conversation and being friendly and caring.

6.5   DISCUSSION

The pathways to nurture Academic Culture in school that emerged are: leadership; alignment of vision, mission, policy, programs and initiatives; stakeholder management; management practices; and continuity and change.

These pathways have been indirectly suggested as leading to excellence in school. Ahuja (2007) supports a well-crafted mission, shared decision-making, open communication, close collaboration and collective efficacy for excellence in urban pedagogy. In the management of stakeholders professional development of teachers has been recommended by Peterson (2001). An engagement with the community and parent partnership is suggested by Davidson (2007) as one of the essential characteristics of leader for the twenty-first century. The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) also high lights a two-way traffic between school and community. In citing qualities of effective leader, Davidson (2007) indicates effective communication and Donna (2005) indicates optimism and care.

The management practices of shared decision-making, close collaboration, collective efficacy, collegial decision making have been cited by Peterson (2001). These were observed as pathways to nurture Academic Culture in schools.

The influence of Academic Culture observed in school was in the following ways. The influence on the overall school was the 'way of looking at school' as (i) quality of teaching and learning, (ii) the unique focus of school, (iii) ability of school to

contribute to the development of learners and (iv) continuation of association. The influence on teachers was: (i) Commitment, (ii) Competence and (iii) Collegial. The influence on students was: (i) well-mannered and developing certain attributes, (ii) confidence, (iii) equipped with abilities for future tasks, (iv) diligence. These findings are supported by the study of Cheng (1993) and Fynas and Martin (1990). Cheng found that teachers experienced higher job satisfaction and increased productivity while Fyans and Martin indicated an increase in student achievement. The German Conference titled 'School is a House of Learning' indicates the possible effects through its mission statement for school. One aspect the mission statement was: A place for intensive work and where it feels good to learn. This was observed in one of the findings with respect to teachers and learners. The influence of Academic Culture on teachers as commitment to school and diligence correlates with it.

Also, Academic Culture, its manifestation and its influence is interlinked. What may be its influence can also be its manifestation. Spirituality as distinct from religion was observed in case 9. Where the principal reprimanded the boys for leaving school to offer Namaz dusing school hours. Here also it emerged largely as a sense of responsibility.

The democratic tradtion of India and the task of nation building requires citizens to be tolerant respectful of differences, innovative and creative citizens. Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) has recommended 'training of character to fit the students to participate creatively as citizens in the emerging democratic social order.' NPE, 1986 has recognized 'education as a forceful tool for inculcation of values needed in view of culturally plural society, education to foster universal and eternal values orientation towards the unity and integration of our people and the emphasis on national goals'. A humanist development of all individuals and the globalized world with its plurality and need to respect individuality is pre requisite in the contemporary world. Academic Culture in school based on Freedom. Respect, Equality and A sense of responsibility will develop students with values to be citizens contributing to the development of society nation and the world.

6.6   IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has major implications for new initiatives in policy making in education sector, for innovation in teacher education and for introduction of new management practices in schools.

POLICY INITIATIVES FOR SCHOOL

The development of school through policy initiatives depends on a nuanced understanding of what a school means in a contemporary context. Also, this includes as to how the institution of school is evolving that needs to be understood. Further, such an understanding will pose policy challenge in terms of these questions:

> What type of schools are needed in our country which follows democratic traditions?

> What type of schools are needed in the contemporary world especially in the urban setting?

> How does the political economy dictate the new objectives for schools to serve the

> service oriented economy on one hand and the demands of the knowledge society on the other?

This will directly impact the expenditure on school. It also needs to be seen if alternatives to schools exist or can be created.

INNOVATIVE TEACHER EDUCATION

One of the major implications will be for teacher education. The pre-service teacher education can be designed to develop teachers for child centred education. The teachers can be empowered to nurture the value of freedom, respect, equality and a sense of responsibility in schools.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

Leadership in school, professional development of teachers, and management practices can be geared on the constituents of Academic Culture. Developing vision,

collective decision making, collective efficacy can be major management practices for development of educational leaders.

6.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A different perspective can be adopted to evolve the concept of Academic Culture as it emerges from the field.

There can be an exploration of alternative epistemological perspectives to understand a school.

In immediate sense, a tool to measure Academic Culture in schools can be developed to give a better handle over the metrics that govern school as an institution.

A tool kit for the nurture of Academic Culture in schools can be developed to ensure that appropriate policy and management practices are in place and it could enable more nuanced criteria for evaluation and risk management.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This study explored the concept of Academic Cultures and four constituents of Academic Culture are Freedom, Respect, Equality and A Sense of Responsibility. In all the cases under study prevalence of all the four constituents was found in different ways. The manifestation of all the four constituents was context specific.

The pathways to nurture Academic Culture in school that emerged are: leadership; alignment of vision, mission, policy, programs and initiatives; stakeholder management; management practices; and continuity and change.

The influence of Academic Culture observed in school was in the following ways. The influence on the overall school was the 'way of looking at school' as (i) quality of teaching and learning, (ii) the unique focus of school, (iii) ability of school to contribute to the development of learners and (iv) continuation of association. The themes that emerged for influence on teachers were: (i) Commitment, (ii) Competence and (iii) Collegial. The influence on students was: (i) well-mannered and developing certain attributes, (ii) confidence, (iii) equipped with abilities for future tasks, (iv) diligence.