A holistic, inclusive school for India: Prakritik Parisar

by

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Abstract

Education in India is still exam oriented, where life outcomes for learners are influenced by performance on standardized tests. The purpose of this project was to develop a curricular structure for a proposed school, challenging the status quo by minimizing focus on sorting learners by percentages and maximizing a 21st century student-centred model that emphasizes learning. In Sanskrit the words *Prakritik Parisar* mean the natural environment. Adopting this name for the proposed school communicates the embodiment of a traditional, organic Vedic atmosphere in which contemporary teaching is fused with noted Indian philosophies. The goal of Prakritik Parisar School is to offer curriculum for learners to explore their abilities, discover their strengths, and fervently pursue their interests.
Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to all learners in India with the aim of introducing joyful learning so that their school lives will be happy and memorable.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Traditionally, education emphasized standardized tests that judged students, like “sorting” machines (Ritchhart, 2015, p. 23) from which the educated and qualified were determined by the highest percentage of recollected knowledge (Jain, 2015). Dialogue and creativity were disregarded and devalued (Thapan, 2015). Learners followed teachers’ directions to memorize by rote from textbooks, significantly limiting students’ personal time (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015; Ranipeta, 2017). This teacher-centric structure (Ritchhart, 2015), in which India has remained (Thapan, 2015), is based on learners receiving information in a “banking education” model (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Students were not encouraged to think independently; creativity was not valued in classrooms (Thapan, 2015). Ritchart (2015) questioned why students are measured by numerical qualities and probed the value of schools where standardized examinations determine learners’ rankings. Parents focused specifically on their children attaining high scores on standardized exams in order to access reputable post-secondary schools (Deb et al, 2015). Success has continued to be determined by test results, a remnant from British colonization (Jain, 2015), even though the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) (2005) in India released a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) that recommended schools adopt learner-centric, inclusive educational curriculum. The framework freed schools to choose curriculum that suited learners’ interests, countering overemphasis on standardized examinations. Thirteen years later, many schools promised to deliver the recommended changes yet took no action, while others made some changes and commercialized their ventures (Thapan, 2015).

Conversely, Thapan (2015) noted that shifting out of teacher-centred practice and away from rigid standardized test-based curriculum requires an intentional focus on learner well-being,
not the commoditisation of education. Since Indian schools were permitted to choose learner-centred curriculum, a few sites have emerged that follow a 21st century educational approach, such as those in the town of Auroville as well as the schools operated by Krishnamurti Foundation India (KFI) (Batra, 2015). Adoption of the NCF has been slow, therefore progressive school development is essential.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project was to assemble an enhanced curriculum for an inclusive private school in India where learners experience autonomy and choice, within a holistic environment, preparing them to be self-actualized learners for the future.

This project recognized that augmenting curriculum for a proposed school begins with the ideal and moves toward the practical. Shifting a learning environment from teacher-centred to learner-centred requires time, resources, and considerable planning. With this lens, an examination of curricular components for the proposed school begins with the “Backward Design Process” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 9).

**Justification of the Project**

In India, there are public and private schools; public schools are government sponsored, whereas private schools are independent entities. This project focuses on a private school opportunity where operational freedom exists. Both systems follow relatively the same teaching curriculum as well as the examination pattern; both are supervised by national or state Boards of Education (Thapan, 2015). National examinations are still required for entrance to college and universities, resulting in a highly competitive atmosphere where fear of failure (Deb et al, 2015) is notable. If students fail examinations, they view themselves as failures instead of learning to make
mistakes from which they will grow. Learning is about preparing self-aware students for lifelong exploration, not about instilling fear (Rossatto, 2004).

Developing schools where learning is joyful, and students are comfortable studying requires reorientation of the exam-based system. The NCF (2005) calls for schools to be places where children stretch their potential and inspire creativity. As a result, minimizing fear of school-based examinations is vital.

Notable author and Indian Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, penned the ethos “where the mind is without fear” (Tagore, 1920, p. 31), connecting thought and emotion. Interpreting this for schools means developing places where children learn without fear, shifting them toward self-actualization and autonomy to discover personal passions, interests and career options while exploring all aspirations. Establishing a pilot school for India, with a non-threatening environment, is harmoniously based on the writings of Tagore (Gupta, 2016), as well as Indian activist Mahatma Gandhi and Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. Their collective wisdom, with a focus on self-sufficiency (Richards, 1995), results in a holistic balanced learning approach (Krishnamurti, 1953). In this school, a child would walk free from fear “head held high” (Tagore, 1920, p. 31).

The proposed school will be affiliated to two autonomous Boards of Education: Certificate for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) established in 1968, and The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), created in 1986. Both affiliations have a wide variety of curricula. Within the proposed holistic school described in this project, students will encounter extensive opportunities for exploration in learning based on individual preferences, building a cohesive personal plan for the future. After all, self-actualization is described by Maslow (1943) as a need to be satisfied, “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a
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poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy” (p. 382). The development of a curriculum that supports this holistic approach to self-autonomous learning is the focus of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions was proposed for this project: What are the enhanced aspects of curriculum that can add value to students’ educational lives? In what context can autonomy and choice be integrated to include all students in actualizing their learning?

It was hypothesized that this study would identify: (1) specific themes in the literature relating to the focus and theoretical foundations of Indian schools, and (2) contemporary global practices to shift learning from teacher-centred to student-centred in order to inform a holistic school model.

Overview of the Project

The proposed school will serve students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 once fully operational with the youngest learners welcomed at age 4 to a primary school section that includes learners from Grades 1 to 5. A middle school section will serve learners from Grades 6 to 8, with a secondary school section comprised of students in Grades 9 and 10, with higher secondary school students with Grades 11 and 12. Prior to Grade 10, prescribed (core) curricula such as Languages, Math, Sciences and Computer Science will be augmented by learners’ interests, based on choices from Performing Arts, Visual/Fine Arts, Textile Creation, Horticulture and Agricultural, Animal Care and Aquaculture, Food Science, Sports and Athletics, and Technical Studies.

Two mandatory national examinations, in Grade 10 and 12, will be accommodated alongside the two curricular frameworks associated with CISCE and NIOS.

With a school campus situated in natural surroundings and away from crowded cities, the atmosphere will honour the ancient Vedic Gurukul system of schooling (Sharma & Sharma, 2004)
with specialized classroom designs. Additionally, teachers will use the campus grounds as natural learning spaces regularly connecting their students with nature. Theatre and practice studios will be integrated into the design with options to open the structures to the outdoors for theatrical, musical and artistic performances. Land plots specifically suited to farming and animal husbandry will coexist with other site facilities for culinary and food science, as well as a catering and marketing spaces.

Assessment for learning techniques will be infused throughout the Kindergarten to Grade 10 years even though learners will be required to write mandated examinations, as determined by the Ministry of Education (Ghosh, 2015). The results of those exams can be viewed very differently so that the goal of such standardized tests is a separate requirement and not a personal value statement about the students’ abilities. The proposed vision is to develop learners who are prepared with such strong skills that they will be ready to face any challenge in life. This is the cornerstone of education. Therefore, while nurturing their interests in life, students need to be prepared to face systems and structures that have specific mandates. Learners will complete these standardized tests with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008). The ethos of the school is to prepare learners to embrace any challenge in life.

Interdisciplinary studies will be encouraged by organizing various events to showcase students, learning, and achievements. These events will be multidisciplinary, interactive as well as performance-based. In this way students will learn from each other and simultaneously develop respect for other disciplines. They will learn to work in groups rather than study in isolation. They will be taught that there are many paths in life and that every person chooses their direction, working cooperatively to help one another realize goals, rather than basing life on competition. The proposed school will promote learner choice from an early age and foster the development of interests and
passions. Their instructors will be guides, mentors and facilitators accompanying them throughout the learning journey.

There will be a special focus on teaching ancient wisdom, Indian spirituality as well as global values. Similar to the ancient Vedic education system (Sharma & Sharma, 2004), students will be taught the importance of meditation and values. A holistic approach will be followed in teaching children the importance of integrating the physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects of their beings and work towards balancing them in the pursuit of wholeness (O’Sullivan, 1999).

Experiential learning (Kolb, 2015) will play an important role in the curriculum. Children will be taught hands-on job skills for a self-sustaining, autonomous life. For example, students will plant crops and plants, sell their produce in the school market, and with teacher guidance, operate a campus meal preparation program, served in the school’s cafeteria. Likewise, all product-yielding sections of the school, will be taught hands-on job and marketing skills to offer their items for sale locally. In the Performing Arts, local touring of theatrical and musical shows will expose learners to live stage venues. Assessment will be an integral part of each experiential component of the school.

Summary

In the 21st century, taking a holistic approach to education, where children learn to follow personal interests and pathways for life, while pursuing academic curriculum, nurtures flexible, prepared learners. As educators, moving children towards self-actualization and autonomy will enhance their comfort with required studies. The development of a curriculum that supports this holistic approach to self-autonomous learning is the focus of this study.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

The focus of education in the 21st century has changed from teacher-centric to child-centric as described by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2012). In India, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (National Council of Educational and Research and Training, 2005) issued school guidelines promoting learner-centred education that would be inclusive and focus on bringing out the best in learners, rather than preparing them for standardized tests. Instilling students with a joy of learning was also articulated by giving them freedom to learn in conducive environments. Despite these advances, schools in India continue to follow colonial era standardized curriculum and take very little note of learners’ wishes (Ghosh 2015).

Indigenous education flourished in India in ancient times as it was based on the needs of society (Ghosh, 2015). When colonizers arrived in India, they overthrew this indigenous system of education in favour of their western curriculum, which suited the imperial needs of the empire to produce obedient labourers (Ghosh, 2015). The westernized colonial curriculum was too rigid and focused on textbook knowledge and standardized examinations, which Indian education continues to value (Ghosh 2005). In opposition to this direction, Indian scholars Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore promoted an education system that would help the people of India reconnect with their roots, based on societal needs (Batra, 2015). Both Gandhi and Tagore believed the colonizers introduced western curriculum that failed to respond to the needs of the people of India. In response, each proposed their own school philosophies based on the desire to return to the roots of Indian culture (Batra, 2015). Gandhi introduced a basic education system focused on craft-based learning, which was grounded in the concept of self-sustenance (Batra, 2015; Richards, 1991). Tagore introduced a school that centred on overall development of
children within a school called Shantinekatan (Batra 2015; Gupta 2016). Prominent Indian educator Jiddu Krishnamurti (1953) had his own educational philosophy focusing on creating a fully-integrated learner through self-discovery and connection to the world.

India had a rich educational legacy from ancient wisdom, until it was replaced by colonizers. Examining the timeline of Indian educational history in this chapter provides an understanding of the ethos behind traditional education affording insight into new possibilities of schooling, post-colonialism.

**Ancient Vedic Education (before 600 BC)**

Ancient Vedic education in India was organic in nature, since it was embedded within natural surroundings and was in sync with natural cycles of the earth (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). Schools were called Gurukuls as they were headed by the Gurus, meaning teachers. Gurus were sages, who had attained such positions by mastering discipline through meditation and rigorous studies of ancient Indian scriptures, the Vedas. They were held in high regard by everyone. The Gurukuls were totally autonomous with no interference from any governing body (Sharma & Sharma, 2004; Jayapalan, 2005). Education was mainly based on recitation and understanding of the Vedas, dominated by religious studies and scripture-based literature, along with the science of astrology and study of logic (Jayapalan, 2005).

The Gurukuls were residential in nature, where at a certain age children were left completely under the care of Gurus who fulfilled the parent role. Learners followed disciplinary training in total obedience. They cooked, cleaned, tended cattle, and completed daily chores under the supervision of the Gurus and their helpers. Instilling the discipline of doing one’s own work and encouraging self-dependency were the goals (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).
Meditation was an important aspect of education at Gurukuls where Gurus trained learners in the art of mediation with the incantation of Vedic chants followed by periods of silent meditation. This was done deliberately to help learners connect with their inner selves and help them attain self-liberation from the material world since attaining the moksha (liberation) was the ultimate aim of human existence in the Vedic era (Sharma & Sharma, 2004; Jayapalan, 2005). The curriculum was based on studying the Vedas, learning character-building moral values and focusing on ones’ vocational aptitude. A societal caste system was followed where each learner was trained in the profession of their caste (Scharpe, 2002).

**Buddhist Influence (600 BC – 1400 AD).** Education in the Buddhist era was still dominated by religious schools. The main tenant of education during this period was to help pupils walk on the path of attaining Nirvana, or salvation (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). Emphasis was placed on religious and moral education while higher education was established with universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda and Ujjain, where subjects like math, science, art, literature, politics, economics, astronomy, architecture, law and music were being taught (Sharma & Sharma, 2004; Jayapalan, 2005).

**Islamic Influence (1500 AD - 1800 AD).** After the Mughal invasion in 1526, much of the Buddhist legacy was replaced when Islamic religion was introduced by Mughals. Thus, Islamic schools, or Madrasas, were established, mainly in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. They, too, had advanced curriculum with heavy emphasis on religious studies (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

**Colonial Influence (1800 AD – 1947).** British merchants and traders went to India and soon became colonial rulers. They wanted their empire to spread throughout the country and modernize India to suit their imperial needs since they found the locals to be too naive and
backward for their inclination (Ghosh, 2015). However, they found it impossible to teach the masses of people in the country as it was a herculean task. As a result, they decided to educate the wealthy individuals of society with their modern, anglicized school curriculum to create a subservient aristocratic class, who would be ready to serve the empire with obedience (Thapan, 2015). Development of a “cultural dependency” (Carnoy, 1974, p. 100) ensured that the indigenous people would rely on the colonists, reducing the risk of revolution and conflict (Thapan, 2015). This colonial power was responsible for introducing the standardized examination system to India (Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

Educator Franklin Bobbitt (1918) promoted curriculum designed on scientific and technical principles, valuing little within historic Indian education and considering those methods inefficient. Believing that education was meant to prepare for specific duties in life, he designed curriculum to develop skills based on industrial efficiency. Six years later, Bobbitt (1924) explained that education should prepare children for 50 years of adulthood, not for 20 years of childhood and youth. He stressed the use of school curriculum from the viewpoint of adults; he aimed to prepare learners for industrious efficiency focusing on their future adult work without considering learners’ aspirations.

**Gandhi’s Influence.** An emphasis on basic education and self-sustenance was promoted by Gandhi; he wanted education that was available to all and practically useful in daily life (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). Gandhi envisioned education to reach the masses that was both informative and self-sustaining, irrespective of class or creed, (Batra, 2015; Sharma & Sharma, 2004).

The basic education aspect of his approach focused on compulsory education for all children until the age of 14 years, firmly believing that it should meet the needs of the people
(Richards, 1991). Gandhi wanted people to return to their roots and know their culture. Education, for him, was not just about receiving degrees but teaching character development focused on responsible citizenry and the values of peace, non-violence, honesty, hard work, justice and welfare for all (Sharma & Sharma, 2004; Richards, 1991).

Gandhi valued enabling students to learn while earning a living. Using a vocational model, he taught the value of self-sufficiency based on learning practical crafts that infused options for lifelong earnings (Richards, 1991).

**Tagore’s and Krishnamurti’s Influences.** Tagore was a poet, artist, musician, dramatist, philosopher, educator, and the 1913 Nobel Prize winner for literature (Samuel, 2011, p. 1163). His philosophy of education was based on developing individuals who are at peace with themselves and their surroundings (Samuel 2011; Gupta, 2016). Similarly, Indian philosopher Krishnamurti (1953) envisioned education as building harmonious balance between learners’ inner and outer worlds. Both Indian philosophers believed that education should not manufacture mere scholars, trained to be efficient workers, but socially responsible citizens (Krishnamurti, 1953; Gupta 2016).

Tagore and Krishnamurti strongly urged structuring education from the child’s perspective, viewing enjoyment of learning as essential. They believed that education helps learners build strong values-based character while acquiring industrial proficiencies (Krishnamurti, 1953; Samuel, 2011; Gupta 2016). Krishnamurti (1953) further stated that the function of education is to develop relationships, in addition to acquiring technical knowledge, so that learners are able to discover their identity, free from imposed ideology.
Contemporary Educational Reforms

After obtaining independence from Britain in 1947, the newly formed Indian government established systems to organize various sectors but lacked political will to adjust the education sector that continued to follow colonial curriculum (Ghosh, 2015). Attempts were made to implement Gandhi’s basic education approach, without success, as it held no industrial appeal for the developing nation (Batra, 2015). The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established in 1961 to oversee school-based matters in India but struggled to institute reform as the government lacked vision that considered the needs and aspirations of the people (Ghosh, 2015). A first attempt to initiate uniformity in nationalized curriculum occurred in 1986 when the Ministry of Education of India published the National Policy on Education. This step forward was poorly implemented resulting in schools that continued with standardized testing (Ghosh, 2015). Finally, in 2005, NCERT released the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) setting a direction toward learner-centric, inclusive and needs-based education that considered students’ aspirations (Thapan, 2015). Although India’s NCF was not implemented, its essence was reflected elsewhere. In two Canadian provinces, as well as Finland, student-based and inclusive designs for learners were enthusiastically reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a global research body.

National Curricular Framework (NCF). Mainly formulated to move away from the rigid standardized test system and into a child-friendly learning one, the NCF (2005) highlighted the following principles: a) apply learning to life, b) discourage the practice of rote learning and content memorization, c) extend curriculum beyond textbooks and, d) adapt examinations or assessments to be more flexible (p. viii). This framework focused on education that featured
questioning, curiosity, inquiry and dialogue. Schools were advised to arrange curriculum and examinations in accordance with pupils’ interests to harness creativity and potential. Mechanically writing examinations that serve no purpose, and drain joy from learning, disconnects it from life.

**Organisation Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).** Through extensive research, exploring the essence of learning with the lenses of “cognition, emotion, and biology” (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2012, p. 6), the OECD articulated principles of learning for developing 21st century skills. The seven principles of learning are: “1) learners at the centre, 2) the social nature of learning, 3) emotions are integral to learning, 4) recognizing individual differences, 5) stretching all students, 6) assessment for learning, and 7) building horizontal connections” (Dumont et al, 2012, pp. 6 - 7). Intended to inspire good practice in schools, these principles guide teachers to improve learning and maximize students’ time in preparation for the future. Both formal and informal learning spaces that are designed on these principles honour flexibility and teacher adaptability (Dumont et al, 2012).

**British Columbia Ministry of Education.** The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2015) supported teachers to redesign school curriculum to increase its relevance for learners in the rapidly evolving, demanding world. With goals of developing good literacy and numeracy foundations in students, the revised curriculum focused on developing good thinkers and communicators, ready to face all challenges in an ever-changing world (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018). Planning curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners motivated the redesign process (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015) where personalized learning (Pane, Steiner, Baird, Hamilton, & Pane, 2017) is prominently featured.
Ontario Ministry of Education. Emphasizing each student’s unique way of learning, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2018) curriculum focused on considering their needs, aspirations and gifts in preparation for graduation and life. Embedded in the curriculum are specialized choice courses, in which students combine knowledge and workplace learning for hands-on experience in professions of interest. The province introduced courses in Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) and Cooperative Education to assist learners in choosing career options while completing secondary school requirements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018).

Finnish National Agency for Education. In Finland, focus is placed on cultures of learning over cultures of examination. Teachers have freedom to teach in a manner they feel is best for learners, in alignment with the national core curriculum. Learners obtain a basic education between the ages 7 to 16 years, after which they choose between a general or vocational strand, based on their strengths and passions. Both strands hold equal importance in Finnish society where learners are guided by teachers to choose a strengths-based profession (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018).

Contemporary Practices

Learning in the 21st century is based on learner-centric approaches which accommodate the diverse needs of students. Extensive research identified the following innovations in teaching practices and strategies.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL provides a framework for creating curriculum that is personalized and child-centric (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). This framework is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) Constructivist Theory where the work of learning has three basic elements: recognition of knowledge to be acquired, application of knowledge-processing strategies, and engagement in learning. The UDL framework uses these elements to
provide learners with multiple ways of identifying knowledge, using varied gathering approaches, for numerous access points to engage (Meyer et al, 2010). As a result, this framework is effective for designing curriculum that is flexible enough for a wide range of diverse learners.

**Inclusive education.** Respecting student diversity, by integrating novel approaches, enhances learning opportunities by placing their needs at the core (UNESCO, 2015). Inclusive education (UNESCO, 2015) emphasizes that each learner should have quality education, based on their strengths and interests, within a learning environment that is inclusive and differentiated in structure (p. 17). Providing equal learning opportunities to all students, in their diversity, irrespective of their backgrounds is the essence of inclusive education (Moore, 2016).

**Differentiated learning.** Meeting students’ needs requires a differentiated approach. Tomlinson (2014) articulated two considerations that must be included when planning for learning: curriculum, as well as, variety in learners. In differentiated classrooms, learners’ interests are the basis for planning, a major shift from the traditional concept of homogeneous approaches to teaching (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 4). Differentiation is conditional on students’ preferred way of learning and lessons that are responsive to those needs (Cash, 2011). Incorporating multiple learning strategies and innovation into lessons, keeps learners engaged (Cash, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014).

**Personalized Learning.** Recognizing individual learner needs and designing responsive curriculum, is the basis of personalized learning (Pane, Steiner, Baird, Hamilton, & Pane, 2017; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). In a personalized learning environment students are “co-authors” of their learning (Campbell, Robinson, Neelands, Hewston, & Mazzoli, 2007, p. 138); they choose what and how they want to learn (Campbell et al, 2007; BC Ed Plan, 2015).
Personalized learning acknowledges that students learn in different ways, at varying paces, and in a number of locations, within collaborative partnerships that support students’ plans, along with contributions from school staff and families (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011; Pane et al, 2017).

**Holistic learning.** In holistic learning students discover knowledge by making connections in relation to the world around them (Miller, Cassie & Drake, 1990). Teaching students to maintain balance, integrating their inner self with the outer world, informs their understanding that both worlds are integral to one another (Krishnamurti, 1953; O’ Sullivan, 1999; Miller 2007). Knowledge cannot be acquired by isolating school subjects, with compartmentalization, but rather by linking them to uncover their interconnectedness in life (Krishnamurti, 1953; Miller et al, 1990).

**Experiential learning.** Hands-on experiences to solve problems is called experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). Children learn when textual knowledge is infused into actual experiences (Chan, 2012). Dewey (1936) emphasized that learners learn better through experience. Kolb (2015) explained that learning occurs in four cyclic stages where learners: actively experience an activity, reflect on the experience, theorize their observations, and test them. Knowledge is reinforced by learning through experiences (Kolb, 2105). In experiential learning, teachers play a mentoring role and learners are motivated while being immersed in the experience, impacting their learning outcome (Dumont et al, 2012).

**Cooperative Learning.** An effective student-centred tool that can be applied to any subject or grade level is cooperative learning in which learners, under the supervision of teachers, work in small diverse teams to solve problems (Kagan 1994; Jacob 1999). Five principles focus cooperative learning: “Positive Interdependence, Face-to-Face Interaction,
Individual Accountability, Interpersonal Skills, and Group Processing” (Kagan, 1994, p. 5:9). This activity-based learning approach features dynamic groups with daily lessons planned and executed on the basis of differentiated learner needs. Jacob (1999) demonstrated that cooperative learning effectively increased learner achievement, promoted healthy peer relationships and raised self-confidence.

**Project based learning.** Engaging learners in problem-solving, focused on project design, involves identifying, researching, and formulating conclusions after which results are shared in the form of a project, model, or artifact (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt, 1997; Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, & Palincsar, 2011, p. 372). In project-based learning, students make a real-life connection to theoretical knowledge through engagement in solving problems (Blumenfeld et al, 2011).

**Play-based learning.** Children learn through play activities under the supervision of teachers (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013); this is play-based learning. Knowledge is gathered through playful interaction, helping learners improve mental and social abilities (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2010; Lillard, 2013). Shipley (2002) explained that learning should be centered on play activities which help learners to discover and explore concepts through hands-on actions with their world. Learning can take the form of free play which is spontaneous and flexible, or guided play which occurs under the supervision of a teacher (Fisher et al, 2010; Lillard, 2013).

**Self-Regulated Learning (SRL).** Students actualize self-regulated learning (SRL) when they are proactive, supported by individually-established goals (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2010), and sustain their efforts toward achievement by self-monitoring, along with peer and teacher feedback (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2010; Cash 2011).
Professional Learning

Teaching is a complex job in which multiple avenues compete for attention simultaneously: teaching lessons, assisting students, managing individuals with behavioural challenges, quelling parent apprehensions, navigating unanticipated situations, attending development programs, and implementing new practices. Adaptability is required for these demanding circumstances (Collie & Martin, 2016). Planning meaningful “professional learning” (Timperley, 2011, p. 4) for teachers to skillfully adapt within their roles is essential for effective classroom development. Timperley (2011) reported that professional learning programs should support teachers to absorb new learning and fuse it with current knowledge to maximize learning for students as well as themselves. Professional learning has enormous potential in developing teachers, optimizing learning outcomes in classrooms (Earl, as cited in Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

Summary

Traditionally, India had a flourishing indigenous education system that acknowledged the needs of learners. After the advent of colonial powers, the value-based indigenous teachings were replaced systematically by the colonizer’s western curricula. Efforts were made by Indian educators to restore customary teachings with limited results. In the meantime, contemporary reform continued with 21st century pedagogy that offered a plethora of approaches to promote child-centric learning, identifying specific practices for developing teaching and learning. In order to transition Indian schools from a model of considerable colonial influence to a contemporary model that enhances student learning, educators require the acquisition of skills and knowledge that embrace the learner within a school curriculum that is constructed on core studies and offers choice for learners. In Chapter 3, the design of a proposed school, with an enhanced curricular structure, is explored.
Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methods

The Design Process

In order to establish an understanding of the foundations and evolution of educational practices in ancient India, a review of literature was conducted. Impacts of colonization were noted as well as philosophical influences of the Indian educators Gandhi, Tagore and Krishnamurti whose writings were based in the country’s ancient indigenous roots. Contemporary research was examined to determine current practices and concerns about school curriculum.

For further insight about contemporary educational reform, various Indian national education policies were reviewed, with specific attention to the NCF (2005) curricular framework. A methodical examination of curricular documents was conducted of global systems where learners were demonstrating success, based on a selection from OECD (2015) research. The national practices of Finland as well as the provincial curricula of British Columbia and Ontario, Canada, were selected. Specifically noted was a focus on the development of 21st century skills. Collective inspection of the curricular documents highlighted aspects of valued Indian practices that were absent despite being an important basis of society.

Contemporary pedagogical approaches in developing 21st century skills along with identified aspects of traditional Indian practice that are absent from contemporary curricula, were studied to propose a balanced educational combination. An investigation of current innovative and child-centric pedagogies included: universal design for learning, inclusive education, differentiated learning, personalized learning, holistic learning, experiential learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, play-based learning, and self-regulated learning. As well, the value of supports for teachers were examined in relation to professional learning.
An ideal school arrangement in which to teach the proposed curriculum for this project was envisioned with a graphic representation (*Figure 1*) designed to represent specialized locations within the site. Nationally required subjects of study (core), balanced with a spectrum of choice-based subjects, were represented on Tables 1 – 12 in grade clusters. Specific curricular details were developed for the middle school section (Grades 6 – 8) as an initial step to pilot the proposal for learners prior to writing the required national examinations.

**Rationale for this project**

This project was designed to enhance four aspects of student life: limited skills and awareness of careers after Grade 12, absence of joy in learning, self-perceptions of failure, and parents’ perceptions of career opportunities. These aspects were identified by the present researcher after 15 years of teaching within a mechanistic school system where students learned from books yet experienced little enjoyment and faced limited prospects for their futures. Pressure from families was guided by a national examination system that resulted in learners’ self-perceptions of failure.

In Chapter 4, an enhanced school curriculum is proposed for a new school in India that will offer core studies along with choice studies, based on learners’ interests.
Chapter 4 – School Design

Introduction

Currently, all students attending Indian schools are required to complete examinations at the end of Grades 10 and 12 as articulated by two of the autonomous Boards of Education: Certificate for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) and The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). This project honours their mandates in its design as a holistic, inclusive school, so that every child will have the opportunity to earn certification prior to commencing university or work. The project, Prakritik Parisar School, at full implementation, will host children from Kindergarten to Grade 12, with initial phase-in ending at Grade 8, and eventual extension to Grade 12 will occur once affiliations with Boards of Education are approved.

Prakritik Parisar School Values

Prakritik Parisar School will be an inclusive setting welcoming all learners, embodying a culture of learning versus a culture of testing, in an environment of autonomous self-discovery; choice in learning will be central. Amid a natural, semi-rural space, surrounded by greenery honouring the ancient Vedic learning environments, this school will be established on holistic values. Additionally, learner engagement through inclusive, experiential learning activities will be featured with a connection to community and self-sufficiency, as supported by the writing of Gandhi, Tagore and Krishnamurti. Mentored in a holistic approach to learning, students will be trained to integrate all aspects of learning, reflect themselves as part of the world and honour traditional teachings in daily meditation and self-awareness.
School Organization

Prakritik Parisar will be designed and built using sustainable building materials, with ten structures; two buildings will accommodate grade-based classrooms and eight buildings will host specialized choice subjects. The grade-based buildings, for teaching core subjects, will include classrooms, laboratories, meditation centres and an auditorium for gathering. The choice subject buildings will feature learning spaces suited to their respective specializations, ranging from stables to loom studios to culinary facilities. The choice subjects will be taught in specialty learning centres designed to align with their specific disciplinary needs. These specialized buildings will encircle the secondary school section, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. School Layout. This figure illustrates building placements at Prakritik Parisar School.
Primary School Section

Focus within the primary section of the school will be developing learners’ creativity, independence and social skills. Learning will be play-based and hands-on, using cooperative learning strategies that value team work and learner diversity by emphasizing respectful interactions with others. Project-based learning will be prominent, where students resolve problems, both individually and in groups. Language acquisition, literacy, numeracy skills along with physical development will be daily essentials. Activity-based learning, such as dance, music, art and craft, will be infused throughout the day for integrated joy-filled experiences. Learners will be introduced to areas of choice with increasingly prominence during each school year (see Table 1 for Kindergarten to Grade 5 curricular focus).

Table 1

Summary of curricular focus for Kindergarten to Grade 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Learners will…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play-based Learning</td>
<td>✓ experience play-based methods with hands-on activities, that focus on joyful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Craft, Song and Dance</td>
<td>✓ be engaged in various art, craft, music and dance activities to develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>creative skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>✓ be able to read and write for functional communication in three languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy Skills</td>
<td>✓ be able to work on simple computational and numeracy skills relating to life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Thinking and Group Work</td>
<td>✓ be encouraged to work in groups, and independently, to foster self-respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and respect for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation and Yoga</td>
<td>✓ train to practice meditation and yoga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to areas of Personal Interest</td>
<td>✓ be introduced to hands-on activities in a variety of personal strength/interest areas to pursue in Grades 6 to 8.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle School Section: Grades 6 to 8

Learners will study core subjects of math, science, computer, languages, humanities, physical education, yoga, meditation, value-based learnings, and social outreach, as proposed by the CISCE and NIOS Boards of Education. Additionally, the curriculum will be enhanced to accommodate a wide variety of choice subjects from which students will select one to pursue in-depth until the end of Grade 12. This augmented curriculum will offer a broad spectrum of choice subjects such as: Performing Arts, Visual / Fine Arts, Textile Creation, Horticulture and Agriculture, Animal Care and Aquaculture, Food Science, Sports and Athletics, and Technical Studies (see Table 2 for Grade 6 to 8 curricular focus).

Students will self-select their choice subject, based on individual interest, wherein they will develop a pathway of learning that is personalized. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach will be followed in planning for choice subjects, infused with experiential, hands-on, and project-based learning experiences that focus on development of self-regulation.

A typical routine will begin with yoga, meditation and silence, channeling students’ energies for the day. Thereafter, learners will work together in classrooms studying core subjects until lunch. In the second half of the day, learners focus on studies of choice in dedicated buildings, designed for specialization. As learning occurs it will be correlated to the morning lessons.

Amongst the various choice subjects, interdisciplinary learning will be emphasized to instill a spirit of connectedness. Respect for each of the choice disciplines will be modeled and infused in students’ learning, supported by small weekly forums, hosted by pupils’ where they will explain their area of study and showcase progress. This will also give each specialty an opportunity to get feedback from peers, as well as teachers, to assess their progress. Most
specialized sections of the school will generate funds, through product sales or ticket sales for productions, and direct those resources to subsidizing school infrastructure development.

Table 2

*Summary of curricular focus for Grade 6 to 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle School Section</th>
<th>Grades 6 to 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> To discover and explore personal potential.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core Studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Choice Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Math</td>
<td>• Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sciences (Physical, Biological and Environmental)</td>
<td>• Visual / Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Languages</td>
<td>• Textile Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Humanities</td>
<td>• Horticulture and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Animal Care and Aquaculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sports and Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technical Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Computer</td>
<td>• Self-awareness - yoga and meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical Education</td>
<td>• Value-based teachings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Value-based teachings</td>
<td>• Social outreach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Choice Studies**

Within the school curriculum, choice studies includes a range of unique strands for learning that are called specialty areas. To further clarify the content of these strands, specific subsections are identified to align with learning intentions.

**Performing Arts.** Students will explore their abilities while learning about performance, creative writing, dance, music, as well as set design, sound production and film/stage production (see Table 3). An overview of each performance aspect will be explored after which learners will choose a specialty with the goal of using teamwork to produce in-house and touring shows.

*Performance* will include training in acting for the stage as well as film.

*Creative writing* will include stories, scripts, songs and poetry for the school production team in addition to contributions for the school magazine.
Dance will focus on learning a variety of dance forms, contemporary and traditional.

Music instruction will explore vocal and instrumental strands.

Set Design will involve designing and producing sets for film and stage production.

Sound Production will require digital sound manipulation and recording for production.

Film/Stage Production will work to assemble and execute productions.

Table 3

Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Performing Arts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performing Arts</strong></td>
<td>• stage regular in-house performances, musical and dramatic, as well as tours for the community and beyond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Acting and Drama</td>
<td>• produce magazines, bulletins and write scripts for plays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Creative Writing</td>
<td>• design and create stage sets required productions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Set Design</td>
<td>• learn contemporary and traditional dance forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Dance</td>
<td>• learn vocal and instrumental strands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Music</td>
<td>• explore studio music recording with appropriate equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sound Recording</td>
<td>• host in-house film and stage productions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Film/Stage Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working Spaces: Amphitheatre
Auditoriums
Music studios
Dance studios
Open space classrooms amidst natural surroundings

Visual/ Fine Arts. Learners will study drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, computer animation and graphic design (see Table 4). They will explore the technical as well as aesthetical aspects of specific disciplines.

Artists, sculptors and photographers will design and create work for exhibit in the school gallery as well as community venues.

Computer animators/graphic designers will work in teams to develop original animated films and prepare interactive learning materials for the school, in collaboration with the music and sound production teams.
Table 4

*Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Visual/Fine Arts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual / Fine Arts</strong></td>
<td>• create art, sculpture and photographic works for exhibitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing and Painting</td>
<td>• design interactive school learning programs to be used in classroom teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>• create original animated movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Animation/Graphic Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working Spaces: Art and Sculpture Studios, Computer Labs

**Textile Creation.** Teaching hand and machine sewing, as well as basic loom operation and fashion design, will be the focus of this area (see Table 5).

*Sewing* will train students in basic needlework, followed by tailoring after Grade 7.

*Embroidery* will focus on the cultural importance of embroidery design and knitting.

*Weaving* will introduce basic loom operations, both manual and automated.

Learners will ultimately complete clothing repair and alterations, garment production, as well as woven creations, serving public needs from a school-based kiosk.

Table 5

*Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Textile Creation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textile Creation</strong></td>
<td>• learn hand stitching, machine sewing, and basic fashion design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing</td>
<td>• learn embroidery and knitting, from basics to patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery</td>
<td>• work on basic loom operation and production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working Spaces: Fashion Design Studios, Sewing Stations, Weaving Environments
**Horticulture and Agriculture.** This specialty area will include developing gardening and farming skills (see Table 6).

*Gardening* will include working in greenhouses and fields. Learners will establish plant nurseries in the greenhouses and maintain school gardens.

*Farming* will focus on teaching basic cultivation skills, seeding school plots, tending and harvesting vegetation, as well as collaboratively learning from local farmers. Students will be introduced to crop market dynamics within local and commercial practices, economic trends and price mechanisms. Ultimately, learners will be coached to sell their produce in the school cafeteria as well as the local markets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture and Agriculture</td>
<td>• learn the science of gardening: field and greenhouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• plant nurseries of various flowering and exotic ornamental plants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• learn gardening, agricultural and farming skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• work in collaboration with local farmers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• establish kiosks for selling produce for the campus nutritional program as well for marketing locally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• study the economics of marketing in wholesale as well as retail markets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Horticulture and Agriculture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working spaces:</th>
<th>School farming areas and collaborative venues with local farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gardening plots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green houses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Animal Care and Aquaculture.** This specialty area will involve raising animals for their products, as well as skill development for apiculture, pet care and aquaculture (see Table 7).

*Animal rearing* will teach care and milking of bovines, particularly cows and buffalos.

*Apiculture* will focus on tending bee hives and harvesting their honey yield.

*Pet care* will include small scale training of local dogs, their care and exercise.
Aquaculture will include raising fish in school ponds for consumption and breeding exotic fish to sell to aquarium owners. Products from this specialty area, such as milk, honey, and fish, will be sold in the local markets and used in the campus nutritional program.

Table 7

Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Animal Care and Aquaculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animal Care and Aquaculture</strong></td>
<td>Learners will…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-based</td>
<td>• raise and care for animals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Livestock rearing</td>
<td>• milk the bovines and produce butter and cheese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Apiculture</td>
<td>• maintain bee hives for honey production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Domestic care and training</td>
<td>• train pets and learn basic pet care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic</td>
<td>• breed aquatic livestock for consumption and exotic production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Fish farming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Species breeding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working spaces:</td>
<td>Stables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ranches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pet farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish ponds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aquariums</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Food Science. This specialty area will focus on the nutritional needs of students through the campus cafeteria, as well as training in culinary arts, baking, and nutritional science (see Table 8).

Nutritional Program will provide snacks and healthy meals in the school cafeteria.

Culinary Art will focus on training learners to prepare meals and healthy snacks for students.

Bakery will include the production of baked goods, available for purchase by students and staff as well as local markets.
Nutrition Science will focus on the nutritional needs of preparing wholesome and balanced meals. Formulating and monitoring campus food as well as menu preparation, catering and hospitality skills will be featured.

Table 8
Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Food Science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Science</td>
<td>• operate school nutritional program in the cafeteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Nutritional program</td>
<td>• prepare meals and other healthy snacks for school cafeteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Culinary Art</td>
<td>• produce baked goods for sale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Bakery</td>
<td>• study nutritional science, menu design, and catering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Nutrition science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working spaces: Kitchens, Bakery, Cafeteria, Kiosk

Sports and Athletics. This specialty area will focus on learners choosing an athletic pursuit matching their inclination, with special facilities, and equipment. Learners will prepare for participation in sporting events and games at various championship events (see Table 9).

Table 9
Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Sports and Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports and Athletics</td>
<td>• pursue sporting events and receive formal training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Track and field events</td>
<td>• study and practice physical fitness and yoga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Indoor and outdoor games</td>
<td>• aim to excel in one sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Water sports</td>
<td>• prepare for competitive sporting events and games at district, state, and national levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Gymnastics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working spaces: Track and athletic fields, Field pitches and courts, Pools, Gymnasiums
Technical studies. Studying computer science, as well as entry-level robotics and basic electrical installation, will be the focus of this specialty area (see Table 10).

*Computer Science* will teach software programming and repair/assembly of computer hardware.

*Robotics* will introduce basic knowledge assembling simple robots with computer programs. Demonstrations of student creations will be shared publicly on a regular basis.

*Electrical installation* will focus on training learners to make repairs to common household electrical appliances as well as learn household wiring skills.

Table 10

**Summary of curricular focus for Specialty Area: Technical Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Areas</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Technical studies** | Learners will… | study computer programming.  
|                  |                        | acquire computer software and hardware skills.  
|                  |                        | develop skills to manipulate robotics.  
|                  |                        | participate in technical exhibitions and competitions.  
|                  |                        | learn electrical repair and wiring. |
| Computer science |                        |                                                                 |
| Robotics         |                        |                                                                 |
| Electrical work  |                        |                                                                 |

Working spaces: Computer and Robotics Labs  
Electronics Lab

Secondary School Section

Learners will continue to pursue their specialty area, with shortened hours, in secondary school since their program will have an increased academic focus (see Table 11). Grades 9 and 10 students will learn to minimize and manage stress while preparing for national examinations from the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) or the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).
Table 11

Summary of curricular focus for Grades 9 and 10

**Secondary School Section**  
Grades 9 and 10

**Goal:** Preparing learners for CISCE or NIOS exams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Studies</th>
<th>Choice Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences (Physical, Biological and Environmental)</td>
<td>Visual / Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Textile Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Horticulture and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Animal Care and Aquaculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Food Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness - yoga and meditation</td>
<td>Sports and Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-based teachings</td>
<td>Technical Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Outreach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Higher Secondary School**

In Grades 11 and 12, students will be counselled and guided in selecting a career they want to pursue after Grade 12. Based on this decision, they will choose one strand of core studies from three disciplines: science, commerce, and humanities. Alongside these disciplines, students will continue to learn from choice studies (see Table 12).

Table 12

Summary of curricular focus for Grades 11 and 12

**Higher Secondary School Section**  
Grades 11 and 12

**Goal:** Preparing learners for CISCE or NIOS exams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Science Strand</th>
<th>Core Commerce Strand</th>
<th>Core Humanities Strand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice Studies</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual / Fine Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile Creation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture and Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Animal Care and Aquaculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sports and Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers

At Prakritik Parisar School teachers will play a pivotal role in learner development. Within their teaching assignments, they will serve as facilitators and mentors to learners, valuing their holistic development and honouring inclusive practices. Hiring and assembling the staff will require considerable research to find a selection of individuals who understand and emulate the school’s values. Teachers will need to work in close collaboration with one another to communicate clear connections between lessons, core studies and choice selections. Demonstrating applications to daily life from school teachings, will be an essential skill for Prakritik Parisar teachers. Ongoing professional learning will play a critical role in enhancing teachers’ skills, reinforcing their work within teams and supporting each other in the smooth operation of the school. Effective communication, too, will be of paramount importance for teachers to coordinate daily activities and link to community as well as families. Professional learning will focus on four areas: acquiring new teaching strategies, procuring ongoing assessment practices, enhancing communication skills, and deepening their understanding of collaborative team work.

Summary

This project describes the vision for Prakritik Parisar School, hosting an enhanced curricular structure with core and choice studies. Welcoming diverse learners, opportunities are embedded to offer self-selection for learning, based on individual interests. Each child will have a personalized learning experience mentored by teachers to actualize their goals within a holistic environment. Students will be taught the value of interconnectedness in their work and within their relationships. Fundamental to the school’s direction is the continuous development of respect for others while harmoniously working toward personal and collective goals.
Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion

Schools in India, overemphasize standard curriculum, further complicated by required examinations, leaving very little scope to nurture learners’ interests and aspirations. This project aims to alleviate this problem with the design of an enhanced curriculum, within which learners are offered choice studies based on personal interests, integrated with core studies in an inclusive, holistic proposed school setting. Accommodating a wide spectrum of choice studies with flexibility to learners is proposed within a student-centred site where teachers facilitate learning toward goal attainment. The augmented and enhanced curriculum introduced in this project accommodates the needs of children, honours the demands of parents by retaining examination requirements, and allows educational staff to pursue learning in partnership with students in a broad, community-based context.

Contemporary school models in British Columbia, Ontario and Finland were examined to determine the elements that make them uniquely successful, according to the OCED. The aspirations of learners are central to these models. Diverse learners are honoured within inclusive settings, where activities are personalized, and goal setting is valued. The elements of these education systems guided the formulation of the proposed curriculum, for an Indian context. Using the curricular design tool, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), to guide the curriculum development process ensured that experiential learning was infused in the choice studies components of the model.

Limitations

This pilot project was designed to reduce overdependence of standardized tests that restrict teaching in Indian schools. The proposed enhanced curriculum offers an alternative
pathway from Kindergarten to Grade 12 that accommodates nationally mandated examinations yet emphasizes a broad educational experience for learners, strengthening their preparation for life by including choices throughout the years. Limitations in this design focus on secondary and higher secondary sections, where learners are required to complete required benchmarking exams in Grades 10 and 12, restricting the time during which students can experience change or exploration.

Parents’ readiness to embrace a different curricular pathway for their children is another limitation that can be foreseen. Currently families deeply value the competitive, examination-based school system, pursuing private school enrollment whenever possible. Influencing their selection of schools is a considerable limitation to the implementation of this study.

Considerations

In preparation for the opening of the proposed Prakritik Parisar School, considerable education is recommended for parents, well before registration opens. Informing families about the benefits of educational change for their children is a key action required to shift a long-standing tradition of school choice. Awareness campaigns, open houses and workshops for parents are considerations for investigation.

The government in some Indian states recently announced increased autonomy for schools in designing curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs of learners. This would allow increased flexibility to design enhanced curriculum for the secondary sections of schools, including the proposed Prakritik Parisar School. Further study is recommended in this regard.

Plan of Action

This pilot project describes a proposed school for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, with a curricular structure that offers more choice than most schools in India. Since this project is
a novel approach, the school will be opened in three phases. The first phase will be operational from Kindergarten to Grade 8. The second phase will be initiated, receiving Grades 9 and 10 students, once the Boards of Education issue permits. The third phase of the school will be open once affiliation is granted to enrol Grades 11 and 12 students. The phase-in schedule is expected to take four years ensuring learners have continuous registration to the end of Grade 12.

A phase-in implementation model allows for staff professional learning, family orientation to the unique model for their children, and student introductions to their new learning community. As each phase unfolds, there will be opportunities to adjust the infrastructure and operations, as needed.

Conclusion

Schools in India focus only on academic approaches to learning, measured by standardized tests, which promote a culture of rote learning based on textbook knowledge. Globally, this model is shifting from teacher-centred to learner-centred to provide students with 21st century skills to navigate rapid change. Learning requires personalization within an inclusive environment to promote holistic development in children. Broadening the curricular structure of school infuses opportunities for learning in a range of specialty areas.

Prakritik Parisar School, the proposed project of this study, will be a place where learners are given choice to pursue their studies and interests while being mentored in autonomous decision-making. Learning will focus on the development of self-regulated learners through play-based, project-based, and cooperative learning activities, with reduced focus on examinations and increased attention to self-actualization. This will be the school where learners are not judged by their performance on exams; they will be valued by their personal growth.
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