

Alternative Education: A New Emerging Approach**Dr. Beena Indrani**

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Abstract

Alternative education is a blanket term encompassing many different pedagogical approaches differing from that of the mainstream pedagogy employed in a culture (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>). Alternative education is education in a different setting and style. It is not an alternative to education. Every student enjoy education success and is entitled to educational achievement (<http://www.alternativeeducation.tki.org.nz>). Alternative education is more of a perspective than a program. It is built upon the beliefs that there are many varied ways to become educated, many types of educational environments and different structures. Alternative educator **Emmanuel Pariser** says the “most powerful influence on students is friendly attention in a supportive atmosphere” (<http://www.iusd.org>).

The term alternative education describes different approaches to teaching and learning other than state-provided main-stream education, usually in the form of public or private schools. It is often innovative curriculum and a flexible programme of study which is based on a large extent on the individual student’s interests and needs (Raywid, 1988; Koetzsch, 1997; Aron, 2003; Carnie, 2003). In the broadest sense, alternative education covers all educational activities that fall outside the traditional K-12 school (including home schooling, special programmes for gifted children and school dropouts, charter schools, etc.). Although this term is often used to describe programmes serving vulnerable youth who are no longer in traditional schools (Aron, 2006).

This paper discusses the historical background and concept of alternative education, types or models of alternative education, some pedagogical approaches in alternative schools and attributes of high quality alternative education programmes.

Key Words: Concept, types or models, pedagogical approaches and attributes of alternative education programmes.

Alternative Education: A New Emerging Approach

Alternative education will broadly refers to schools or programmes that are set up by states, school districts or other entities to serve young people who are not succeeding in a traditional public school environment. Alternative education programmes offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities, behavioural problems or poor attendance, an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning methods. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programmes, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios and modified curricula (White, 2003).

Historical Background of Alternative Education: Alternative education grew up in response to the establishment of standardized and compulsory education over the last two to three centuries. Educators including Jean- Jacques Rousseau, Swiss humanitarian Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi; the American transcendentalists Amos Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau founders of progressive education, John Dewey and Francis Parker and educational pioneers such as Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner believed that **education should cultivate the developing child or many levels: not only intellectually, but also morally and spiritually, emotionally and psychologically and physically.** After world war 2nd an alternative Reggio Emilia approach to early-childhood education was developed in Italy, introduced by Loris Malaguzzi (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>).

In India, from the early 20th century, some educational forms of education. Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharti University, Sri Aurobindo's Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideal of Basic Education, Krishnamurti schools and the Peepal Grove School are prime examples. In recent years, many new alternative schools have been formed (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>).

Ron Miller (2008) has identified five elements common to educational alternatives: respect for the person, balance, decentralization of authority, non-interference among the political, economic and cultural spheres of society and a holistic worldview.

Concept of Alternative Education: Alternative education is a blanket term encompassing many different pedagogical approaches differing from that of the mainstream pedagogy employed in a culture (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>). Alternative education is education in a different setting and style. It is not an alternative to education. Every student enjoy education success and is entitled to educational achievement. The ideal destination for alternative education students is a successful return to mainstream education, either at a school or tertiary institution. Engagement in the alternative education programme itself may be an excellent first goal that may assist in strengthening the students' perception of themselves as successful learners. If a return to mainstream schooling is not an identified goal in the individual education plan, students may plan to go from the alternative education programme to an appropriate community based course, a trade programme or other tertiary education, or employment opportunity (<http://www.alternativeeducation.tki.org.nz>).

Alternative education is more of a perspective than a program. It is built upon the beliefs that there are many varied ways to become educated, many types of educational environments and different structures. Further, alternative education recognizes that everyone can be educated and it is in society's best interest to ensure that all are educated to at the minimum a general high school education at the mastery level. To accomplish this requires that we provide a variety of strategies and options. Each student can find a "path" that is comfortable to facilitate individual learning and progress. **The heart of alternative education is the teacher.** Students involved in alternative education schools involved in alternative education schools indicate that the **most important characteristic of teachers is that they**

care for students. Alternative educator **Emmanuel Pariser** says the “most powerful influence on students is friendly attention in a supportive atmosphere” (<http://www.iusd.org>).

Some types or models of Alternative school: There are 5 types of alternative schools are present around the world. These are-----

(i) **Montessori School:** Researches of Liillard, 1996; Kahn, Dubble & Pendleton, 1999; Seldin and Epstein, 2003 show that these schools pursue an educational philosophy and methodology. These schools have some characteristics, these are as follows:-

- a special set of didactic materials,
- multi-age classrooms,
- student- chosen work in longer time blocks,
- a collaborative environment with student mentors’
- absence of testing and grades,
- and individual and small group instruction in academic and social skills.

(ii) **Waldorf School:** Waldorf schools also known as Steiner schools (Petrash, 2002; Clouder & Rawson, 2003; Masters, 2005). These schools are based on educational ideas of the philosopher Rudolf Steiner. Waldorf education is currently practiced in Kindergarten and schools in 60 countries.

Waldorf education together with Montessori education, the predominant form of alternative education around the world. Waldorf education aims at developing children and adolescents into free, moral and integrated individuals through integrating practical, artistic and intellectual approaches into the teaching of all subjects.

(iii) **Round Square Schools:** These schools of which there are currently about 50 on all five continents are based on concepts of experiential education developed by Kurt Hahn (Tacy, 2006). They believed that schools prepare students for life by experiencing it in authentic learning situations. And these situations are generated by work projects, community services, leadership training, international exchanges and different forms of outdoor exploration and adventure. All Round Square schools emphasize learning through doing with the aim of developing every student academically, physically, culturally and spiritually, through a process of self-confrontation environment of a schools community.

(iv) **Free or Democratic schools:** These schools are organized around the principles of autonomy and democracy (Lamb, 1995; Gribble, 1998). The oldest democratic school, Summerhill, a boarding school in Southern England was founded in 1921, by Scottish teacher A. S. Neil. Sudbury Valley School, radically democratic school in Massachusetts or USA, has served as a model for many subsequent democratic schools.

Today, around 100 schools around the world describe themselves as free or democratic schools. Since 1993, free schools have formed a loose network. While official rules about the organizational principles of democratic or free schools would contradict the schools’ independent spirit. They share many common characteristics: decisions about the schools

are taken by a self-governing school body, in which each student and each teacher has one vote in a majority voting system.

- (v) **Escuelas Nuevas:** Escuelas Nuevas are alternative schools based on the idea of improved rural and urban basic education for children from low-income families. These schools are started in 1987, there are now more than 20,000 Escuelas Nuevas in Columbia as well as in 14 other Latin America countries, the Philippines and Uganda- schools that have proven to be effective according to World Bank and UNESCO, among others.

The schools' pedagogy emphasizes respect for the rights of children and is based on innovative educational projects involving a range of educational materials that encourage collaborative, participatory and personalized teaching methods. Schools are organized as community schools, involving the wider community as well as students' families who are invited to play an active role in school activities and their child learning.

Pedagogical Approaches in alternative schools: Alternative pedagogical approaches may include different structures, as in the open classroom, different teacher-student relationships, as in the Quaker and free schools, and or differing curricula and teaching methods, as in the Waldorf and Montessori schools (Encyclopedia Britannica). There are numerous individual alternative schools are scattered around the world. They show the variety of **pedagogical approaches**. These pedagogical approaches are as follows: ----

- (a) In 1969, the Indian philosopher and educator Jiddu Krishnamurti founded **Brockwood Park School**. The school has a strong ethical base and focuses on both academic excellence as well as spiritual development through exploring between freedom and responsibility, meditation freeing from self-centered action and inner conflict as well as appreciation and conservation of nature.
- (b) In 1922, American educational reformer Helen Pankhurst developed the **Dalton Laboratory Plan**, which enables students to work independently on the basis of a contract, within the public school system. Today **Dalton Schools** exist in Australia, The United States, Japan, Russia, Central Europe, England, Germany and the Netherlands.
- (c) Schools modeled on the pedagogy of French educator Celestin Freinet (Acker, 2007) see the child's interest and natural curiosity as a starting point for learning and attempt to use real experience of children as authentic opportunities for learning. Children are encouraged to learn by cooperatively making products or providing services. In **Freinet schools**, students are familiarized with democratic self-government to take responsibility for themselves and for their community. Today, Freinet schools exist mostly in Franc, Belgium and Germany, often as alternative schools within the public school system.
- (d) In 1927, Peter Petersen's Jenaplan-Schule (Hansen-Schaberg and Schonig, 1997) founded as a **Progressive education project**. This project is based on three core ideas:
- Autonomous student work,
 - Living and learning in a community,
 - And students and parent participation in school life.

Learning takes place in mixed-age groups. A typical school day consists of a 100-minute block, in which students work on an interdisciplinary project, autonomous student work on self-chosen project as well as ritualizes of deliberation, play and celebration. Today, schools modelled on the original Jenaplan exist in Germany and the Netherlands but do not form an organized network.

While most alternative education models described so far are rooted in the progressivist education movement of the 20th century. Two recently founded alternative schools are the Swiss Institut Beatenberg and the Canadian PROTIC. They serve as an examples of 21st century models of alternative education which are based on constructivist theories of learning. These schools are -----

The Swiss Institut Beatenberg School: Institut Beatenberg focuses on the organization of student self-efficacy and meta-cognition, thus laying a foundation for lifelong learning. Students learn alone or small groups on self-designed learning projects coached by teachers. They evaluate their work aided by rubrics and document learning processes and results in portfolios. 'Intensive training sessions' and 'special learning days' offer structured opportunities for skill development and knowledge acquisition in small-group-settings.

PROTIC School: PROTIC is an alternative school within a state school in Quebec City, Canada. This school was founded in response to parent demand for modern constructivist forms of learning. It organizes the development of social, cognitive and meta-cognitive competences through ICT-supported interdisciplinary learning projects. In small groups, students solve interdisciplinary problems by means of active research, investigation and experimentation, complementary group work and the presentation of results. Self and peer evaluation using rubrics and portfolios serve to develop meta-cognitive skills seen as a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

A broad outlook at the universe of alternative education programmes immediately reveals a wide variety of models. Early and Middle College High schools, Career Academies, Diploma Plus, College Gateway Programs, Experiential learning environments and Twilight Academies are just some of the alternative models that school districts and community-based organizations operate, either as charter schools, contract schools, or independently. Many well-established and stable national alternative education programs are also helping vulnerable youth. Some of the better known ones include Job Corps, Youth Build, the Center for Employment and Training (CET), and Youth Service and Conservation Corps.

Attributes of High Quality Alternative Education Programmes: In the following section we show the key characteristics of alternative education programmes. These attributes are -----

- **Academic Instruction:** Successful programmes have clear focus on academic learning that combines high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction and a culture of high expectations for all students. Learning must be relevant and applicable to life outside of school and to future learning and work opportunities. Applied learning is an important component of the academic programme. This is often where employers can play important roles as partners. The curricula address the education and career interests of the students. The curricula are academically rigorous and tied to state standards and accountability systems. Learning goals are known by students, staff and parents. Students have personalized learning plans and set learning goals based on their individual plans. There are opportunities for youth to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills. A mixture of instructional approaches is available to help youth achieve academic objectives.

- **Instructional Staff:** Instructors in successful alternative programmes choose to be part of the programme, routinely employ positive discipline techniques, and establish rapport with students and peers. They have high expectations of the youth, are certified in their academic content area and are creative in their classrooms. They have a role in governing the school and designing the programmes and curriculum.
- **Professional Development:** Successful alternative programmes provide instructors with ongoing professional development activities that help them to maintain an academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, and develop alternative instructional methods. Staff development involves teacher input, work with colleagues and opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other settings.
- **Size:** Many alternative education programmes are small with a low teacher/student ratio and have small classes that encourage caring relationships between youth and adults.
- **Facility:** Effective alternative learning programmes are in clean and well-maintained buildings (not traditional school house) that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety.
- **Relationship/Building a sense of community:** Successful alternative education programmes link to a wide variety of community organizations (cultural, social service, educational etc.) and the business community to provide assistance and opportunities for participants. Through partnerships with the business community, alternative education providers are able to provide their students with job shadowing and internship opportunities, guest speakers and company tours and receive valuable input into their curriculum and project development. Connections with community organizations can provide health care, mental health services, cultural and recreational opportunities for youth in their schools.
- **Leadership, Governance, Administration and Oversight:** Many studies highlight the need for administrative and bureaucratic autonomy and operational flexibility. Administrators, teachers, support services staff, students and parents should be involved in the different aspects of the programme. This autonomy builds trust and loyalty among the staff. A successful alternative education programme has a strong, engaged, continuous and competent leadership, preferably with a teacher or director administering the programme.
- **Student Supports:** Successful alternative education programmes support their students through flexible individualized programming with high expectations and clear rules of behaviour. They provide opportunities for youth to participate and have a voice in school matters. Structure, curricula and supportive services are designed with both the educational and social needs of the student in mind. Many schools do daily follow-up with all students who are absent or tardy and develop reward systems to promote attendance and academic achievement. Programmes are both highly structured and extremely flexible. Rules for the school, which the students help create, are few, simple and consistently enforced. There are processes in place that assist students in transitioning from school to work and from high school to post-high school training.

Conclusion: In this paper author discussed the concept of alternative education, the models of alternative school, pedagogical approaches in alternative schools and attributes of alternative education programme. Through these attributes we can improve our alternative education programme and enhances the quality of alternative school. In this paper we must said that these models of alternative

education are primarily fostering an intrinsic motivation to learn. Different types of alternative schools provide a considerable range of freedom to their students within reasonable limits of appropriate behaviour. Montessori schools encourage students to move about freely in classrooms. Dalton, Freinet, Jenaplan, Steiner and other alternative schools encourage active learning in partially or fully self-directed activities. Students are encouraged to select their own work and to continue work on chosen projects over spans of hours, days, weeks and sometimes months.

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