

THE MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS APPLICABILITY IN INDIAN CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: India is a culturally diverse country. Multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. While teaching, for example, teachers may modify or incorporate lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students in a particular class. In many cases, “culture” can be defined in the broadest possible sense, consisting of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionality (a term applied to students with specialized needs or disabilities). Classroom learning environment may generally be understood as the supportive as well as inhibitive environment in a class which affects students’ learning outcomes in a directed manner. It is very essential to create such a climate in a class which can facilitate students’ learning in an effective manner catering to the needs of different students belonging to different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education is founded on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of culture, and it strives to remove barriers to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. In a class, texts and learning materials may include multiple cultural perspectives and references. Teachers and other educators may learn about the cultural backgrounds of students in a school, and then intentionally incorporate learning experiences and content relevant to their personal cultural perspectives and heritage. Educators may intentionally scrutinize learning materials to identify potentially prejudicial or biased material. Multicultural education is generally based on the principle of equity, i.e., that the allocation and distribution of educational resources, programs, and learning experiences should be based on need and fairness, rather than strict equality. Thus, it is the need of the hour to incorporate the principles of multiculturalism in Indian schools to make classrooms more convenient places for efficient learning.

IndexTerms - Classroom learning environment, Multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

India is culturally diverse. The concept of multiculturalism refers to a broad array of theories, attitudes, belief systems, societal norms, customs or practices and policies that seek to provide public recognition of and support for accommodation of non-dominant cultural groups (Iverson; 2011). Multicultural approach is quite different from social and cultural diversity, as it goes beyond the purview of basic civil and political liberties associated with liberal citizenship for bringing a differentiated citizenship, that allows groups to express their identities, customs and practices (Iverson; 2011). On the other end, multicultural education refers to any form of education, instruction or teaching that incorporates the histories, text-materials, values, beliefs and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. In practice while teaching, say for example, teachers may modify or incorporate and extend the lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students in a particular classroom. In so many cases, ‘culture’ may be defined in its broadest possible sense, consisting of races, ethnicity, nationality, languages, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation and exceptionality (it is a term applied to students with specialized needs or some kinds of disabilities).

Classroom learning environment or learning environment can be understood as the supportive as well as inhibitive environment in a class which affects students’ learning outcomes in a directed manner. It is quite desirable to create such a climate in a classroom which can facilitate and enhance students’ learning in an effective manner by catering to the needs of different students belonging to different cultural, social and religious backgrounds. The very foundation of multicultural education is based on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of their culture and it strives to remove such barriers to educational opportunities and success for students coming from different cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism has now become the central topic or idea of modern social and political theory in particular and in the field of contemporary social science in general. Some people point out that multiculturalism is precisely the way to recognize the felt conflicts, sufferings, pain of minorities, immigrants and indigenous groups and unravel the suitable or right path for them. Some other people opine that it should be discarded altogether. As multiculturalism is not a phase or a concept alone, the attitudes, belief systems and practices are associated with multiculturalism and discarding multiculturalism altogether is a quite difficult task for the modern societies. For a class, to be more inclusive and dynamic, it should include texts and learning materials of multiple cultural perspectives and references to suit every type of learner in that class.

The appropriate management of existing cultural diversity within a state has now become an increasingly prominent issue not only in developed countries but also in developing countries like India. Diversity and heterogeneity used to be the defining characteristics of our social and cultural settings. In its true sense, India consists of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society and having these multitude diversity, India provides an interesting context to study and practice multiculturalism. The two major religions of the world i.e.,

Hinduism and Buddhism, had originated in this land while other religions, such as Christianity and Islam, though came from outside, has remained and developed in it for more than a thousand years. The great profusion of linguistic, religious and other customs and usages was associated with a multitude of castes, communities and tribes, each of which was bearer of a particular sub-culture and in some cases even sub-sub-culture which is transmitted or transferred from generation to generation (Beteille; 2003). In Indian context, multiculturalism encompasses some pertinent factors such as; language, caste, creed, community, religion and socio-economic factors. Since, India is a multi-ethnic, multi-language, multi-caste, multi-religion country, therefore, the inclusive growth of the country very much depends on the development of these different minority groups and this type of inclusive growth asks for all social groups to get equitable and facilitative access to educational services and opportunities for economic as well as social development. Any kind of marginalization of these groups or perceived lack of advantage of these groups is a threat to India's diversity and multiculturalism which may result in the conflict only that may prove as a hurdle to the development of India.

MULTICULTURALISM AND LEARNING

The main purpose of education is to groom and modify learners in such a way that they become capable enough to shoulder the responsibilities of their whole life with confidence and comparative ease. Every educational system relies on the learning outcomes and to achieve this proper infrastructure is required. In a class, the language used by teacher and students as well as methods of teaching act as a medium of instruction on the one hand and as a means of establishing rapport or relationship with the learners on the other. The language usually helps to develop thoughts that need to be presented with due integrity and compactness. The relationship between thoughts and language is not erratic, but governed by rules. Communication is not only passing out of information, but involves conceptualization of concepts and experiences, of identification and classification, of argumentation and assertion through the correct language (Pattanayak; 1981). Therefore, the task of every educationist or teacher should be to develop an aesthetic sensibility and desirable attitude in their pupils towards the fellow beings and the whole world, so that they would be able to live a healthy social life and may contribute meaningfully to the society they live in with their treasure of learning. In the year 2012, the learning forward foundation which is situated in Texas had developed seven standards for the purpose of professional learning that increase teachers' effectiveness and achievement results for all students. These standards are provided here just to assess its practicability in Indian context as follow:

- **Learning Communities:** Some effective groups of teachers may be created who are committed to continuous improvement, shared responsibility and collective goal alignment. This group could include the families of various communities, community members or specific mentors in the field.
- **Leadership:** Selection of skilful leaders may be done with the help of appropriate means, which can develop capacity, advocate and create support systems for professional learning and consider the concept of distributed leadership that draws on the strengths of the many and aids in developing creativity among the practitioners.
- **Resources:** To promote professional learning prioritization, monitoring and coordination of available resources may be undertaken. It should be followed by the notion of thinking outside of the four walls for new, different and multicultural ideas to promote multiculturalism in learning.
- **Data:** The use of a variety of sources and types of learner, educator and school system data to plan, assess and evaluate professional learning must be encouraged in educational practices. Seeking the help from outside professionals in the field of multicultural education to assist with curriculum development, especially from the primary level is the way out to eliminate the lack of resourcefulness in an institution.
- **Learning Designs:** Integrating theories, research and models of human learning to achieve intended outcomes. Present ideas with new thought perspectives to invoke a different response.
- **Implementation:** Applying research and sustained support for implementation of professional learning to foster long-term change. This is what will have the most positive effect on the students — building trust and strengthening the relationship.
- **Outcomes:** Aligning outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards. The fact is, classrooms are more diversified than ever and the long-term outcome can be nothing but positive.

The above standards can be more narrowly focused on multicultural education and used in specific ways in Indian context too. Always be purposeful with the professional development of teachers and taught both. While drawing out strategies and formulating policies one should be intentional and seek specific goals to be achieved, be determined and open to new ideas as well. It should always be understood that the students are worth the extra work and dedication which will pave the way forward for educational growth and multiculturalism in India and the world.

NEED OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Generally the term 'culture' refers to the traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values that are shared amongst a group of people. Every person is a part of at least one culture but some families participate in several cultures at a time. Multiculturalism thus refers to the sharing of many cultures. The impact of culture on learning and behavioural pattern of a person is natural and should be recognized through inclusion of appropriate activities and knowledge of a learner's cultural background (Kendall; 1983). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, says that these systems start with what is closest to the learner and has the most impact and expands outward to include or encompass the global environment and time (Bronfenbrenner; 1974). If properly taken care of a sound multicultural education model manifests an acceptance of the respect for all cultures in our pluralistic society. It then fosters positive self-regard in one's own culture as well as, develops positive attitudes toward the culture of others. While during the process of

exploring similarities and differences among cultures, it tries to develop an understanding and appreciation of one's own cultural heritage and that of other cultures too. It enhances the ability of a person to function harmoniously and productively in a multicultural society like ours. The principles of multicultural education promote intimate working relationships among the school, home and community in order to provide consistent expectations and mutual support among different societal groups. The effective and efficient use of positive role models or iconic figures from amongst the different communities is an integral and valuable component for promotion of multicultural education in the Indian classes. Here, it is important to note that the diversity of cultures, ethnic backgrounds and races of children in schools is an asset for a nation (McCracken; 1993).

From the above discussion, the support of various research works, theorists and experience we can infer that the inclusion of multiculturalism within classrooms would make perfect sense of the learning to be undertaken. It can be applied by providing young learners with endless opportunities and exposure to beautiful traditions, music and rhythms, instruments, celebrations, books, people, homes, art, etc. This will make learning more joyful, vivid and colourful.

INTEGRATION OF LEARNING AND MULTICULTURALISM

Every classroom is a cultural community reflective of the picture of true India, comprised of different students of different backgrounds, and the teachers with different ideologies and belief. One can argue that successful learning requires an intercultural approach where students are responsible for learning to understand both the perspectives of others like peers, faculty and for understanding their own perspectives and how they acquired them. Students can come to understand that learning is about the generation, mutual reflection, and critiquing and expanding of ideas and concepts, and that this is most effectively done in a collaborative and non-competitive environment of learning to gain maximum benefit.

One effective approach to this challenge is to attend to the variety of learning styles in any college classroom. Understanding multiple learning styles allows one to focus on individual students' own learning styles; sub-groups within a classroom community; and the class as a learning community.

Even in the most transformed classes, however, teaching faculty are often unaware of the variety of pedagogies that can produce enhanced learning for students and faculty and that can facilitate growth in intellectual complexity and capacity simultaneously. One useful resource is the analysis of learning styles by David Kolb. He suggests a four-step model of learning, a movement through four phases: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. To this model, a parallel concept drawn from the work of Patricia Hill Collins can be added. Collins suggests a pattern of learning from one's own daily concrete experience and then moving to an expanded consciousness of multiple perspectives, and finally to effective social action that makes use of knowledge in collaborative efforts to create a more equitable society. Each of these phases in the learning cycle is associated with particular "ways of knowing" and of constructing judgments. Here Teachers can make students explicitly aware of how they and others learn; they can discuss pros and cons in various learning methods. Teachers can also help students develop capacities in all four learning styles regardless of individual preferences for some styles over others.

On the other hand, Students can take a "Learning Styles Inventory" and study their own individual results as well as a class summary that elaborates where all members of the learning community are located in this model. Using this device, students can reflect on such concepts as "the dominant culture" and its influence; on the existence of "minority cultures" within a larger culture; on similarities and clashes between and among cultures; and on the necessity to use multiple learning methods to achieve a more complete understanding of complex problems.

Students can also learn that there are patterns of values, speech, preferences, and behaviours associated with different cultures, and they can learn that there are as many differences within cultural groups as there are across different cultures. With the help of such practice, break down of cultural stereotypes in the society as a whole would get promoted. Using these methods, students learn that they each may have a unique learning pattern and this realization of their own "multiple subjectivities" can help them understand the multiple and interlocking identities in the people and groups around them. The classroom then becomes a living laboratory for negotiating individual and group differences as well as for negotiating ideas about the content and concepts of the class. The work to listen and to learn across both similarities and differences can only produce better and more effective learning for all students in a multicultural world.

To have a proper integration between learning and multiculturalism in Indian classroom there should be appropriate programme with supportive ingredients. According to the suggestions of the Child Care Education Institute situated in Georgia, the first goal of a multicultural program should be to assist children with recognizing differences, as well as similarities, among all people. By allowing children to explore varying cultures creates new opportunities for them to perceive that even when people have different customs and traditions, they often share some common traits, as well. Children may learn that people can be different and unique, yet still they have much in common. Such types of realizations will help young children learn to accept the differences and aid in removing prejudices and racism. Such realizations by the children will assist them with accepting and respecting people from all cultures, ethnic backgrounds etc. The second most important goal of a multicultural educational programme is to encourage cooperative social skills among learners. As we all know that, children learn to accept differences and similarities among people, so they can work and get along with others in a better way. The learners in this system begin to see and observe other's viewpoints and individuality. The multicultural classroom allows and assists students from minority cultures in developing cooperation and social skills in a framework that may be unfamiliar to them. The self-esteem of the minority students is boosted as they are recognized well and accepted for their individuality. They feel good about themselves as other students recognize the worth of their traditions and customs resulting in their

moral boosting. The early childhood care program that is culturally sensitive can build up the self-confidence of its children by integrating the cultures of all the children into the common learning experiences.

If we talk about the inherent ingredients of the above mentioned programme then the first ingredient for a successful multicultural program is the classroom teacher's knowledge of diverse cultures. The teacher should take time to learn the backgrounds of his/her students, as well as the populations represented in a particular geographic area. Teacher should educate himself/herself on their beliefs, values, foods, and customs. Share those with the children as teacher to incorporate them into learning experiences. Teacher may also encourage children to ask questions that help them understand more about others who have a different background from their own. Teacher must try to learn the various traditions of each child of classroom, i.e., holidays observed by them, their parenting styles, their favourite foods and family traditions to name a few. The second ingredient of the programme is that a teacher must have to successfully implement a culturally diverse classroom environment to create an attitude of acceptance and respect for other cultures. It requires an open mind that accepts and respects differences. Children use to model what they observe and see, so the teacher's inclusion and acceptance of different ideas, customs, and traditions helps them learn to accept and respect. Helping children to compare, contrast, and learn about other cultures without making judgments about them requires this attitude of acceptance and respect. As teachers lead children to respect others who are different, they will begin to appreciate individuality. As children grow and mature with these attitudes, they will have social skills that not only accept, but also applaud individuality. The third critical ingredient for the above mentioned programme for a teacher's success in implementing a culturally diverse classroom is the ability to add a multicultural perspective into curriculum planning and classroom management skills. This requires careful consideration of children's cultures and traditions, and necessitates planning to help other children experience them in learning centres and activities. To know how does this program "measure up" as a multicultural environment, one has to possess multicultural materials. It should also be checked whether diversity is accepted and applauded or not. All the communities must be checked for whether they are well represented or not? Having children of differing cultures in the class can offer firsthand experiences and insight. The customs and traditions of their cultures should definitely be represented in the learning environment. Remember that providing the children with a multicultural program helps boost self-esteem and teaches them about acceptance and diversity. A multicultural programme in future will help learners understand and work well with the others, as they grow-up and mature.

CONCLUSION

The teachers and other educators may learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students in a school and then intentionally the teachers can incorporate learning experiences and content relevant to their personal cultural perspectives and heritage. Educators may intentionally scrutinize learning materials or contents to be taught just to identify potentially prejudicial or biased material and may remove them as early as possible. Multicultural education is generally based on the very principle of equity i.e., that the overall allocation and distribution of educational resources, programmes and learning experiences should be based on need and fairness, rather than on the basis of strict equality. From the point of view of the teachers and educators, the classroom learning environment must be made so that learners can feel safe to express their feelings about the surroundings and do interact enthusiastically in class without any hesitation or pressure. This feeling of active participation among minority students must be inculcated in them from their early schooldays well in advance. And further if we take student's point of view, then, they should try to grasp the things or inputs very positively in its original form without altering the actual meaning of the told lectures or classroom teaching. Thus, to fulfil the dream of growing and shining India as a country representing unity in diversity now it is the need of the hour to incorporate the principles of multiculturalism into practice in Indian schools to make its classrooms more convenient and vivid places for efficient learning.

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