

Multiculturalism to Address the Classroom Diversity

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Abstract

In present scenario diversity is one of the topmost hurdles in achieving the goals of education. The paper presents the basic challenges of a diversified classroom and finds multiculturalism as the best opportunity to deal with them. When each and every student is as important as all and there should be no discrimination at any cost, then these idealistic dreams can't be realized through traditional approaches. Multiculturalism is the natural understanding of coexistence of diversified students based on linguistic, caste, class, religion and other grounds. This paper discloses all such barriers of Indian classroom in multicultural perspectives, which in turn facilitates the educational process to provide the capable and efficient citizens.

Keywords: Diversity, multiculturalism, linguistic, caste, class, religion

Diversity in any country is common at present scenario. Neither one can ignore nor remain untouched of this fact of diversity at any sphere of life in this global world. The cultural grounds of combination, however, may be slightly different for various countries. As far as India is concerned the linguistic, religious, caste, class, gender etc. along with other socioeconomic grounds of diversity are obvious in a classroom. The largest democracy of the world runs on democratic principle of 'equal opportunity to all' and thus in a classroom all should find their role to deliver on the basis of equality. In other countries like US, immigrants of various countries and race are the two major grounds to be included and caste to be excluded if we talk explicitly in the list mentioned earlier. As a matter of concern now a day it is the basic feature of many countries to deal the diversity as strength and opportunity rather than a challenge or barrier. Surely a diverse classroom is the ideal laboratory in

which to learn the multiple perspectives required by a global society and to put to use information concerning diverse cultural patterns. Students who learn to work and play collaboratively with classmates from various cultures are better prepared for the world they face now—and the world they will face in the future. Teaching and learning strategies that draw on the social history and the everyday lives of students and their cultures can only assist this learning process.

The broad range of experiences and perspectives brought to school by culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students offer a powerful resource for everyone to learn more in different ways, in new environments, and with different types of people. Every single person in this enormously diverse and ever-changing system has the power to serve as an invaluable resource for all others, students, teachers and the community as a whole. Rather than constituting a problem

for students and educators, the growing diversity in Indian classrooms necessitates and encourages the development and use of diverse teaching strategies designed to respond to each student as an individual.

Teachers promote critical thinking when they make the rules of the classroom culture explicit and enable students to compare and contrast them with other cultures. Students can develop cross-cultural skills in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. For such learning to take place, however, teachers must have the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to make their classrooms effective learning environments for all students. Given the opportunity, students can participate in learning communities within their schools and neighborhoods and be ready to assume constructive roles as workers, family members, and citizens in a global society.

Diverse Classroom

"A diverse classroom is a mixture of students either by race, culture, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, education, marital status, gender or other characteristics." Classroom diversity is a sensitive subject to address because it is easy to offend a student when discussing the matter. Allowing students an opportunity to learn more about someone who is unlike them is better in the long run because it gives students an understanding of others, enabling them to work together in a positive way.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the cultural diversity of communities within a given society and the policies that promote this diversity. As a descriptive term, multiculturalism is the simple fact of cultural diversity and the demographic make-up of a specific place, sometimes at the organizational level, e.g., schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities, or nations. As a prescriptive term, multiculturalism encourages ideologies and policies that promote this diversity or its institutionalization.

Multiculturalism is the phenomenon of multiple groups of cultures existing within one society, largely

due to the arrival of immigrant communities, or the acceptance and advocating of this phenomenon. Supporters of multiculturalism claim that different traditions and cultures can enrich society; however, the concept also has its critics, to the point where the term "multiculturalism" may well be used more by critics than by supporters. It could, indeed, be classified as a snarl word or a buzzword.

As such Multicultural competency is not a result of something, but an ongoing, individual internal process. A Multicultural competent person manifests increased affective, behavioral, flexibility and person – centered communication. Thus, Multicultural competency can be defined as transformation of learning and a growth process where an individual exist often implicit, knowledge is diversified to intercultural knowledge, attitude and behavior.

Multicultural Education

Banks and Banks (1995) define *multicultural education*: "Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups.

One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good." (P. xi)

Multiculturalism is the best way to address the Classroom diversity

Multiculturalism is important because the world is changing every day. We must learn to accept and get along with all cultures, races, and religions in order to become productive citizens of the world. It is our job as teachers to prepare our students for the real world, and the real world is a multicultural one. We have the opportunity to teach our students love and acceptance now, even if it is not being taught at home. Chances are, by the time the students in your classroom reach the real world it will be a

much more multicultural place than it is now and we need to prepare them for that.

Creating a Multicultural Classroom

The success of a multicultural classroom can be studied by the advancement of the educational goals of all the students, and the fostering of a supportive and respectful teaching environment. Some ways to achieve this:

Awareness of Learning Styles

Every culture has its own way of imparting knowledge which may be remarkably different from the dominant culture into which a child is thrust. Taking an example from East Asia where Students from China, Japan and Korea are used to a teacher-centric, book oriented, rote memory learning style. The students themselves are introverted and are uncomfortable with public touch and intense displays of opinions or emotions. Students from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will look to the teacher for constant guidance, and accept everything the teacher says as absolute truth.

On the other hand, students from progressive western cultures are more comfortable with asking questions, challenging information, and communicating their displeasure with the teacher or the lesson. A teacher's openness to and acceptance of the varied learning styles can make teaching in the classroom a more tolerant, inclusive and cohesive experience.

Communication Resource

As teachers, we want our children to learn in an environment where they can accomplish everything that is possible and feel loved and included while doing so. Unfortunately, in the world, discrimination and racial bias is a scarring reality. But a teacher can become a resource on a wide range of issues connected to diversity and multiculturalism for children and parents.

Parent-teacher organizations can hold meetings at times convenient for parents to attend, and they can provide translators for those who do not speak the

dominant language. A room in the school can be set aside for parents to meet and to discuss issues concerning their children's education or the school community. Teachers can visit parents in their homes, or they can use parent-teacher meetings as a time to discuss homework and discipline.

Diversity Awareness Activities

Encourage diversity rich activities in the classroom. For example: Create your own classroom library and encourage each child to choose a book that represents their country or culture. If they are too young for this, reach out to their parents. Then, take turns reading the books and have an open discussion about the content.

Plan a cultural exchange unit where students are asked to bring in something that reflects their heritage. This could be a piece of handicraft, food, traditional clothing, a song or speech recording etc. Open up a discussion, but sometimes such exchanges can become charged so administer strict rules about acceptable behavior beforehand.

Hold these awareness activities on a regular basis, especially at the start of a school year, so that what is considered different becomes something familiar and exciting. Look for creative lesson plans and activities that will enrich the student's learning experience.

Anti-Bias Education

Multicultural assimilation can begin at a very early age since kids are extremely curious and often come up with their own surprisingly creative explanations to understand the differences around them.

When we make our classrooms an anti-bias classroom, we are helping children be proud and accepting of human differences. An anti-bias curriculum will also encourage them to assess their own identities and teach them to create, live and learn in an inclusive environment. So, if a 3-year-old in your class doesn't want to sit next to a new arrival because they "talk funny" or "dress funny", intervene immediately to send a positive message and counter the hurtful effects of those statements.

Zeichner (1992) has summarized the extensive literature that describes successful teaching approaches for diverse populations. From his review, he distilled 12 key elements for effective teaching for ethnic and language minority students.

1. Teachers have a clear sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities.
2. Teachers communicate high expectations for the success of all students and a belief that all students can succeed.
3. Teachers are personally committed to achieving equity for all students and believe that they are capable of making a difference in their students' learning.
4. Teachers have developed a bond with their students and cease seeing their students as "the other."
5. Schools provide an academically challenging curriculum that includes attention to the development of higher-level cognitive skills.
6. Instruction focuses on students' creation of meaning about content in an interactive and collaborative learning environment.
7. Teachers help students see learning tasks as meaningful.
8. Curricula include the contributions and perspectives of the different ethno cultural groups that compose the society.
9. Teachers provide "scaffolding" that links the academically challenging curriculum to the cultural resources that students bring to school.
10. Teachers explicitly teach students the culture of the school and seek to maintain students' sense of ethno cultural pride and identity.
11. Community members and parents or guardians are encouraged to become involved in students' education and are given a significant voice in making important school decisions related to programs (such as resources and staffing).
12. Teachers are involved in political struggles outside the classroom that are aimed at achieving a more just and humane society.

A Multicultural teacher seeks information about students' home cultures by asking them to interview their parents about their lives as children, the

stories they remember, favorite poems, and family recipes. The results of these interviews can inform the teacher about the rich diversity in his or her classroom. The interviews also can be made into booklets and, subsequently, reading materials for the entire class to share.

These above mentioned techniques to handle the diversity are in the circle of multiculturalism. These are also to promote diversity by enjoying and taking diversity as strength. Finally it is quite clear that growing and diversified number of students in Indian classroom need Multicultural Education and Multicultural Teacher to stand morally, spiritually, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Even in other parts of world and for all the other countries' classroom it is quite common and being accepted world-wide. Multicultural Teacher and Multiculturalism in classroom is the ultimate need to address the diversity in classroom.

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