Teaching Strategies in a Multicultural Classroom

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Abstract: India is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and languages in which these change not only from state to state but also at times even at village level. A multicultural classroom is one in which there is a blend of students from various cultures to form a diverse learning environment. Where culture not only includes tradition and religion but also races, language, socio-economic level, ethnicity and living conditions. To combine all these in a classroom involves lots of creativity and management skills on the part of the teachers. In the present paper various teaching strategies have been discussed namely: role playing, cooperative learning, exposure to different language culture, group discussions, community participation, knowledge of student background, moving beyond text book etc which may help teachers in a multicultural classroom setting. Therefore by creating a multicultural environment in the classroom the teacher is of advantage for diverse background students because the payoff is worth the efforts because each student learns acceptance and the importance of diversity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education is a concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality and human dignity which is mentioned in the Declaration of Human Rights and is adopted by the United Nations Organizations. It refers to any form of education that incorporates the histories, texts, traditions, beliefs and values of people from varied cultural backgrounds. It recognizes the roles which schools can play in developing the values and attitudes necessary to sustain oneself in the interdependent world of today. The education system values the cultural differences and reflects them through the students, teachers and various communities. It challenges all form of discrimination in schools and societies through the promotion of democratic principles of equality and social justice. Multicultural education is a process that involves all aspects of school practices, policies and organizations to ensure not only the highest level of academic achievement but also the all-round development of the children’s personality. It helps the students develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, traditions and contributions of diverse group of people.

2. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: INDIAN CONTEXT

India is culturally, linguistically, religiously and ethnically one of the most diverse countries in the world. The multicultural experience is represented in what is called “unity in diversity”. This includes the diversity of religious communities, languages, ethnicities and traditions and cultures of various states. Parekh (2000) while describing India’s diversity mentioned India has a common criminal law but not a civil law. To focus on the concept of “multiculturalism” is a matter of exigency for the harmonious and progressive future of India, as it is for global classrooms worldwide. Majority of classrooms in India contain students who belong to different cultures, follow different beliefs, customs and traditions, belong to different socio-economic status and adhere to different sets of ideology. In education this diversity has been viewed as both a negative and a positive challenge. The school districts, educational planners, school authorities and teachers have been hard pressed to provide quality education for all. Multicultural education requires that schools acquaint students with the rich heritage of all groups, and also that educators understand that not all children are receptive to the same educational environment.

Thus today one of the major challenges faced by teachers in the transaction of curriculum in the class is for these culturally different students. Although such students have always been a part of the Indian education system, they have not been a significant factor in the development of educational programs till as late as 2005 when National Curriculum Framework laid emphasis on it. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, designed syllabus which is child centered and friendly. It recognized that a child’s education should be stress free, full of creativity and should lead to a joyful experience of learning. NCF further recognized five guiding principles for curriculum development all centering on the child’s relationship with nature and environment. These principles are: (1) connecting knowledge to life outside the school, (2)enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks, (3) ensuring that learning shifts away from the rote method, (4)
making exams more flexible and integrated with classroom activities and (5) nurturing identity within democratic polity of the country. Besides this the NCF (2005) also promotes other educational goals that focus on human values namely: a commitment to democracy and freedom, sensitivity to other persons, a flexible and creative approach to learning and appreciation of beauty and art forms as an integral part of human life. In context of multicultural education NCF specifically lays down certain points namely:

- strengthening national system of education in a pluralistic society,
- reducing the curriculum load based on insights provided in “Learning without Burden”,
- systematic changes in tune with curricular reforms,
- curricular practices based on values enshrined in the constitution, such as social justice, equality and secularism,
- ensuring equality education for all children,
- building a citizenry committed to democratic practices, values and sensitivity towards gender justice,
- a renewed effort should be made to implement the three language formula emphasizing the recognition of children’s home language or mother tongue as the best medium of instruction.
- the multilingual character of Indian society should be seen as a resource for the enrichment of school life.

Besides this the ministry of Human Resource Development (2013) has focused on an inclusive agenda with a vision of realizing India’s human resource potential to its fullest, with equity and excellence.

3. TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

A multicultural classroom is one in which there is a blend of students from various cultures to form a diverse learning environment. To combine all these in a classroom involves lots of creativity and management skills on the part of the teachers. Therefore it is critical to make sure that teachers have access to professional development programs that teach them to integrate vital information of day to day happenings into their teachings. The teachers who are just starting to introduce multicultural content may find it difficult especially since overload might lead to discouragement from trying it at all. Here is a discussion of some teaching strategies which teachers may make use of along with other methods to supplement their teaching in a multicultural classroom.

- **Role playing**

Is a versatile activity that allows students to express their opinion in a realistic situation. In role play the students play a part they do not play in real life (eg: enacting as parliamentarians, as banker’s or a role from work of literature). A multicultural role play exercise allows students to be immersed in a social scenario that causes them to experience feelings and realities that they may not otherwise be exposed to. Hence by organizing a role play activity in the class the teacher can bring in issues of the subjects related to caste, religion, current topics or something related to history which are otherwise difficult to explain to the students in the class.

- **Exposure to different language and culture**

Culture refers to the traditions, rituals, beliefs and values that are common and shared amongst a group of people. Every individual is a part of one culture or the other. Thus the first goal of multicultural education should be to assist the children with recognizing differences as well as similarities among fellow students. Allowing students to explore varying cultures creates opportunities for them to see that even when other students have different customs, languages and traditions they also share some common traits. Students learn that people can be different and unique, yet still share a lot of common things. Such realizations help students to learn to accept differences and aid in eliminating prejudice and racism. These realizations assist students to accept and respect people from all cultures and backgrounds. Besides this children model what they see, so the teachers’ inclusion and acceptance of different ideas, customs, traditions and languages help them to learn to accept and respect fellow students.

- **Knowledge of student’s background**

For a successful multicultural classroom setting one of the most essential things is knowledge of diverse cultures. The teachers should take out time to learn the background of the class students. Knowledge of the traditions, beliefs, values, customs, food habits, economic status etc helps in understanding the students in a better way. This knowledge should then be shared with children by incorporating them in the learning experiences. The
students should be encouraged to ask questions that help them understand more about others who have a background different from their own. Teachers and other educators may learn about other cultures and then intentionally incorporate them in the learning experience. Besides this students from different backgrounds may be given opportunities to discuss and share their cultural experiences.

- **Cooperative learning**

   After making the children accepts differences and similarities among fellow students the next step for the teacher should be to encourage cooperative learning of various knowledge and skills. The environment of the classroom should help assist children from minority cultures in developing cooperation and social skills. The general idea behind cooperative learning is that making small heterogeneous group of students so that they can master the various aspects of a particular task. By doing so not only are the students motivated to learn but they also forge stronger interpersonal relationships than they would do by working alone. Cooperative groups help focus on students’ different strengths and styles. In addition, cooperative learning groups have been found to have strong and consistent positive effects on social relationships between culturally different students. Group members become more accepting of classmates who are different.

- **Group discussion**

   Group discussions stimulate thinking. It is an excellent strategy for enhancing student motivation, fostering intellectual ability and encouraging democratic habits. They provide opportunities for students to practice and sharpen a number of skills including the ability to articulate and defend positions and consider different point of views. Discussion is a perfect place to develop students’ ability to use textual evidence. In group discussions students work with multiple ideas and have to balance new ideas with their original conclusions which become a challenging task. Thus the teachers should make use of discussions on current topics which can initiate a discussion and help develop students questioning power, in depth analysis of situation and development of logical thinking.

The above mentioned strategies help in linking the theoretical knowledge gained by the students to real life situations. Besides this the teachers can also encourage community participation in the classrooms by organizing special lectures and involving the parents in the teaching learning process.

4. **CONCLUSION**

   Diversity in Indian schools is both an opportunity as well as a challenge. The nation is enriched with cultural, language, ethnic and socio cultural diversity which is clearly visible in the school classrooms. As a result whenever these groups interact there may be tension, discrimination, hatred or prejudiced attitude towards one or the other. Therefore the schools must find ways to respect the diversity of their students as well as help them to create a unified allegiance. In the present paper certain teaching strategies were discussed which may be of use for teachers in a multicultural classroom setting. Therefore by creating a multicultural environment in the classroom the teacher is of advantage for diverse background students because the payoff is worth the efforts as each student learns acceptance and the importance of diversity.

5. **REFERENCES**


