Full Length Research Paper

Multicultural Education: The Gap in Teacher Training Programme

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Globalization demanded changes in teacher education preparation programs, as schools of education realize that tomorrow’s teacher will be teaching a broader diversity of students than ever before. Teachers must be trained in terms of philosophy, pedagogy and curriculum to deal with the challenges of an increasingly diverse population. Here is the necessity to include multicultural education in teacher education curriculum. Education that is multicultural creates an environment that reveals various cultures positively. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explain the term multicultural education, its various dimensions and to highlight the missing link in teacher education curriculum. Instructional strategies that can be adopted in a multicultural classroom is also traced here. The paper is concluded by highlighting the need to link the gap of multicultural education with teacher education curriculum.

Key words: Changing school context, Teacher education curriculum, Diversity, Multiculturalism, Equity Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought a tremendous change in the educational sector. The convergence of cultures worldwide has forced educators to redefine and redesign multicultural education. The increasing cultural diversity in educational institutions call for the adoption of qualitatively different approaches to teacher training. Today, teacher education should include an awareness of social and cultural diversity. The classrooms of today have students from multiple backgrounds, cultures and races. Within these variations, there are individual differences among the students. There may be students from different social classes. The situation to handle different children in various cultural backgrounds and social classes emphasize the need to include multicultural education in teacher education curriculum. The National Curriculum Framework, 2009 has emphasizes the need of access to education to all. Here the access is not meant merely normal education but quality education is emphasized. The Right to Education Act, 2009 has made it compulsory to give free and compulsory education to children from 6-14 years of age. The inclusion policy made the access of education to all. In this context, the teacher has to handle students from different backgrounds, abilities and culture in a classroom. The training programme that we are giving to prospective teachers is thus subjected to re-examination.

While analyzing the present teacher education curriculum, is it sufficient to train the prospective teachers to perform well in actual classroom after their training? Are they able to handle a multicultural classroom after their pre-service training?

Meaning of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a philosophical concept with more practical components also. When one is asked to define the term multicultural education, one may state that it deals with different cultures. Others may say that it is merely to promote human relations and to make students to feel good about them. But the primary purpose is to promote education and achievement of all especially traditionally underserved in our education system. It accepts differences in caste creed, language, culture and socio-economic background. It envisions a society with equal opportunities for all.

"There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people."

- Thomas Jefferson

Generally the term equality means the state or quality of being equal. When we are considering about equal
opportunity in educational institutions, it should be examined in two views:

(i) Equal access to educational institution view
(ii) Equal benefits view.

Equal opportunities in education means providing equal access to the learning experience regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, social background, and academic ability, and applies to all groups of communities including ethnic minorities, seekers of various needs, and those with disabilities or learning difficulties. Equal Opportunities within an institution ensure that everybody has the right to learn, teach or work in a secure and supportive environment.

Secondly, equality exists only if there is an equal opportunity to benefit from education, and not merely access to educational institution itself. Equal benefits view focuses on the benefits received by students from education. It states that merely the existence of an educational institution without sufficient human and material resources is not enough to achieve equal opportunity in education. This view highlighted the point that all learning institutions must be roughly equal in staffing, infrastructural facilities and instructional materials.

Multicultural education with its foundation in pluralism and diversity is also rooted in the principles of democracy, equality and justice. It is a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. It helps students to develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse
groups. Thus, teacher education curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguism, and religious intolerance.

**Perspectives of Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education can be observed in two perspectives:

(i) Assimilation or melting-pot perspective and
(ii) Global perspective.

In the assimilation perspective, there is only one cultural identity. The identities of other cultures are merged together into one. The main purpose of this perspective is to develop a national unity. But the reality is that the multicultural identity is not reflected in this macro culture. The macro culture fails to reflect the cultural diversity within the nation.

The global perspective is a mixture of four major interactive aspects namely, multicultural competence, equity pedagogy, curriculum reform and teaching for social justice. It is seen in the following figure 1:

Let us analyze what each concept means.

**Multicultural Competency**

By multicultural competency it means to understand and appreciate one’s own culture as well as to respect other cultures. In a classroom this competency can be developed by adopting the following measures:

- Evaluate the methods, books, and curriculum you use. Find out whether you have incorporated different perspectives in your lesson plan.
- Engage the students in the learning process and explore their different perspectives.
- Critically evaluate historical views from different perspectives. Relate concepts to the students’ daily experiences.
- Understand the various cultures of students in your classroom.

**Equity Pedagogy**

Equity pedagogy means that strategies which help students from diverse backgrounds to attain the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to function effectively in a society. It helps students to become reflective and active citizens in a democratic society. It alters the traditional active role of teacher in a classroom; whereas it creates an environment in which students can acquire, produce knowledge and envision new possibilities of the acquired information for societal changes.

**Curriculum Reform**

As there are different meanings of multicultural education, there are different conceptions about the approaches to be adopted in multicultural curriculum. The first step in any multicultural transformative process is to examine the issues, biases, prejudices, and assumptions that a teacher carries into the classroom and infuse it with the curriculum. Generally followed approaches are discussed below:

The Contribution Approach: This approach reflects the least amount of involvement in multicultural education approaches. This is incorporated by selecting books and activities that celebrate holidays, heroes, and special events from various cultures.

The Additive Approach: In this approach content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure. This approach does not change one’s thinking ability, instead it will add to the existing knowledge.

The Transformation Approach: Content based on this approach is designed to enable students to examine the issues from a variety of perspectives. In this approach, the surrounding reality of the child is taken into consideration. As students look at a problem from a variety of angles, they gain an enhanced concept of the reality or the time being studied.

The Social Action Approach: This approach puts the transformative ideas into practice for social change. Students are not only instructed to understand and question social issues, but to also do something about important about it.

**Teaching for Social Justice**

Teachers should make students aware about the injustices that exist in our society. Then train them to respond to the social issues. To teach students to participate effectively in a democratic and pluralistic society, one needs to respond to the needs of various groups within our classes as well as to individual students.

**Present Scenario of Teacher Training Programme**

Teacher educators continue to assume that teacher trainees will acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them teach classes of socio-culturally diverse students without any direct instruction and planned experience. Some issues will arise in our mind after analyzing the present curriculum and practice...
of teacher education programme. Whether there is a link between the pre-service and in-service teacher training?
Are the teachers are able to see the gaps in the knowledge base when they taught about gender, caste and class?

Why in Indian context we need diverse teachers?
Are the teachers competent to teach in an inclusive classroom?
Are they able to adopt equity pedagogy in their classroom?
Are they able to teach in both rural and urban schools?

The above stated issues throw light on the necessity of a changing perspective in teacher education curriculum. The curriculum which is in the course race of teacher education curriculum is suited to the traditional handling of classrooms. With the introduction of 'Education for All', Right to Education Act, No Child Left behind Policy and Inclusion policy, the diverse nature of Indian classroom is increasing. It also manifested the necessity to include various dimensions of multicultural education. What are the dimensions of multicultural education?

The first dimension is related with content integration. Generally we think that subjects like humanities and language will deal with contents of multiculturalism. But this is a wrong notion. Even a mathematics teacher can tell about the contributions made by various mathematicians belonging to various cultures in their classroom.

The second dimension is link with knowledge construction which is a process that moves to a different level. This is because here teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and perspectives of the discipline they’re teaching.

The third dimension is related with prejudice reduction. All teaches irrespective of subjects should work to reduce prejudice in the classroom. The preconceptions that are developed in home and community should be shaped in a positive way.

The last dimension deals with empowering the school culture. Here the nature of students and the curriculum alone is not taken into consideration. The attitude of teachers and higher authorities towards the diverse culture in school set up must also be examined. The empowerment should come from all sides.

Prospective teachers need a well-developed program to introduce them into the field of teaching that is challengeable. One of the biggest challenges a teacher faces is crafting pedagogical opportunities that will meet the needs and interests of all students.

Furthermore, the goal of helping every teacher develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach a diverse student population becomes problematic for those who expect to teach children very much like themselves and who have little experience with children who are.

How can the Prospective Teachers be moulded to make fit in a Multicultural Classroom?

1) Prospective teachers have to become reflective. Reflective teachers are able to apply observational, empirical, and analytical skills to assess their own teaching practices. Through teacher education, they develop awareness of their own cultural perspective, thus gaining insight into the cultural assumptions underlying their expectations, beliefs, and behavior.

2) Prospective teachers must appreciate the value of student diversity. They have to understand the meaning of diversity and its reflection in schools.

3) Prospective teachers need to be able to examine the nature of teaching, which include various dimensions and philosophies, knowing what and how these philosophical underpinnings influence their teaching. They have to be able to self-evaluate their own teaching practice, and use feedback from others.

4) Prospective teachers must learn the significance of language and culture of students. Diverse cultures should be incorporated into curriculum, enhancing understanding of various cultures among students. They should adopt a learning style that suit to meet the demands of a diversified classroom.

5) Finally, the attitude of teachers towards the diversified classroom set up should be examined. During practice teaching whether they are able to develop an egalitarian relationship with their students. The relationship between teacher trainees and teacher educators has its impact during practice teaching. This relationship must be based on mutual respect and value the personal attributes, language background, and orientation of both the pre-service teacher and the teacher educator. Such experience is important because people who have had positive relationship with mentors in teacher preparation are more likely to establish a rapport with students.

CONCLUSION

It can be stated that multicultural education attempts to offer all students an equitable educational opportunity as well as to critique society in the interest of social justice. Teacher education programmes play a crucial role in determining teachers’ attitudes toward diversity and the accommodation of that diversity within their teaching. It is necessary to understand the cultural background of students, their socio-economic status and abilities. By adopting a culturally responsive curriculum the gap in teacher training programme can be reduced.

REFERENCES


