

Addressing the need of culturally responsive pedagogy in India

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Abstract: As more and more students from diverse background populate 21st century classrooms, and efforts mount to identify effective methods to teach these students, the need for pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive intensifies. Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, languages, economic status, abilities and many other characteristics (Gollick & Chinn, 2002). The objective of this paper is to emphasize that to meet the challenge of diversities in classrooms; teacher must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. The paper stresses upon the need that the teacher must create a classroom culture where all students regardless of their cultural, social, economics & linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn.

Introduction:

Teachers have a responsibility to all their students to ensure that all have a opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability. If instruction reflects the cultural and linguistic practices and values of one group of students then the other students are denied an equal opportunity. Instruction that is culturally responsive addresses the need of all learners. The education system plans the curriculum for schools, and the teachers as their "institutional agent" transfer the prescribed content to their students. This daily contact with students provides teachers with a unique opportunity to either further the status quo or make a difference that will impact not only the achievement but also the lives of their students. Indeed, teachers must recognize their

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“power” and use it wisely in teaching other people’s children (Delpit, 1988). Although the curriculum may be dictated by the school system, teachers teach it where the curriculum falls short in addressing the needs of all children, teachers must provide a bridge where the system reflects cultural and linguistic insensitivity and teachers must demonstrate understanding and support. In short, teachers must be culturally responsive, utilizing material and examples, engaging in practices and demonstrating value that include rather than exclude students from different backgrounds. By so doing, teachers fulfill their responsibility to all their students.

Education

“Education is a conscious as well as unconscious, deliberate or non deliberate process of balanced, harmonious and maximum development of innate powers of the individual, aesthetic, cultural, emotional, intellectual, physical, religious, social, spiritual and vocational according to the individual and social needs”.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, “By education I mean all round drawing out of the best in child and man body, mind and spirit.”

According to Pestalozzi, “Education is the natural, harmonious and progressive development of man’s innate powers”.

The sole responsibility of producing sensible and responsible citizens is on education so that educational system should be such that it provides a platform to the youth to nourish and explore their potential

and innate abilities and make efforts towards the achievement of national goods.

The National Policy of Education 1992, has emphasized, “Education is fundamental to our all round development, material and spiritual.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates and supports the achievements of all students. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered content, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured and utilized to promote student achievement. Culturally responsive pedagogy comprises three dimensions: (a) institutional, (b) personal and (c) instructional. The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policies and values. The personal dimension refers to that cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension includes material, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. All three dimensions significantly interact in the teaching learning process and are critical to understanding the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy.

For many students, the kind of behaviors required in school (e.g. sitting in one’s seat and only speaking when called on) and types of discourse (e.g., “Class what is the title of this book?”) contrast with home cultural and linguistic practices. To increase students’ success, it is imperative that teachers help students bridge this discontinuity between home and school (Allen & Boykin, 1992). Moreover, a culturally responsive instructional environment minimizes the

students alienation as they attempt to adjust to the different "world" of school. (Heath, 1983, Ladson-Billings, 1994).

India – the land of cultural diversity

India is a land of diversity in race, region, caste, language, mate, landform, flora and fauna and so on. From ancient time till day India has repainted this diversity from very ancient time. Nature has shaped the country so. Rightly this land has been termed as "the epitome of the world." The fundamental diversity in India is gleaned from the following.

Geographical Diversity:

India is a vast country with great diversity of physical features. Certain parts in India are so fertile that they are counted amongst the most fertile regions of the world while other are so unproductive and barren that hardly anything can be grown there.

The regions of Indo- Gangetic Valley belong to the first category, while certain area of Rajasthan falls under the later category. From the point of view of climate, there is sharp contrast. As Minoo Massami has said that, "India has every variety of climates from the blazing heat of the plains, as hot in places as hottest Africa-Jacobabad in Sindh- to freezing point (the Arctic cold of the Himalayas).

The Himalayan ranges which are always covered with snow are very cold while the deserts of Rajasthan are well known for their heat. The country also does not get uniform rainfall. There are certain areas like Cherapunji in Assam which get almost 460" of rain -fall per year which is considered to be world's highest record on the other hand, Sindh and Rajasthan get hardly 3 inches of rainfall per year. This

variety in climate has also contributed to a variety of flora and fauna. In fact, India possesses richest variety of plants and animals known in the world.

Racial Diversity:

India possesses a rich variety of races. In view of this variety Prof. V.A. Smith says, "From the human point of view India has been often described as an ethnological Dr racial museum in which numberless races of mankind may be steadied."

"The vast population of India consists of the jungles tribe (Hence Bhils, Kols, Santhals), the Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushanas, the Hunas, the Mongolians, the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans etc. The physical features and color of the Indian people also differ from region to region- While the people of Kashmir are handsome and fair in complexion, these qualities are missing among the habitants of Assam.

Linguistic Diversity:

India not only possesses racial diversity but also linguistic diversity- It is said that almost 400 languages are spoken in India. Some of the prominent language recognized by the constitution includes, Assamese Bengali, Gujrati, Hindi, Kannad, Kashmiri, and Malayalam. Marathi, Or Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Terrill, Telgu and Urdu. In fact it is commonly believed that in India the language changes after every four miles. There is not only variety of languages but also variety of scripts in India some of the popular scripts in ancient times were Pali, Kharosthi Devnagri, etc. What is really striking is that almost all these

language- possess their own literature which differ a great deal from each other

Religious and social Diversity:

In the religious sphere also India possesses great diversity. Almost all the principal religions of the world like Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity are found here. Most of these religions are further sub-divided into various sects and divisions.

For example, Buddhism is divided into Hinayana and Mahayana; the Jainism is divided into Digambaras and Sthetambaras and the Brahmanism is divided into the Vaishnavas, Shivas, Shaktis, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj etc. In addition the primitive men have their own peculiar cults which are quite distinct from these major religions. Thus we can say India possess completely diversity on religious sphere.

In the social sphere also the general customs and manners of the people greatly different. People of different regions use different types of dresses. Their eating habits and customs are also quite different. Certain people are quite civilized while other are yet backward in their customs. Thus we find as Radhakumud Mukherjee has put it, "India is a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures, faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems.

Political Diversity:

The diversity in culture, races, language, religion etc. greatly stood in the way of political unity in India. As a result from the earliest times, India has been divided into several independent principalities. The rulers of these principalities were always engaged in wars with each

other for supremacy. This disunity and friction was fully exploited by the foreign invaders to bring India under their subjugation.

No doubt certain rulers like Chandra Gupta Maurya, Ashoka, Samudra Gupta, Ala- ud- din Khiliji and Akbar had subjugated these principalities and established strong empire but they were only handful of the rulers who could accomplish it. For most of the time India presented the spectacle of a divided country. Even under this mighty rulers a real unity could not be established both due to the lack of means of communication and transportation as well as national consciousness. In short, we can say that, really speaking India could never be united politically.

In this way diversity pervades on the whole of Indian subcontinent. This diversity is so much so that a foreigner will simply stare at this. Anyway, such diversities are not the hallmarks of Indian culture. The main theme of this culture is unity which absorbs all the diversities.

Only Education can bring harmony

Education is responsible for the overall growth and development of the human beings. Education provides a common platform where the persons from different background can come together and do collective efforts for the achievement of inmate potential and abilities. When the children belongs to the different caste religion, community & place come & sit together in classrooms, they learn how to accept and appreciate the differences existed among the individuals. Education inculcates tolerance among the students and teaches the children how to express their emotions and feelings in a social and civilized way. With the help of curriculum taught to the children in the school, the children get to know the different life styles, customs, traditions and

languages. The spirit of brotherhood & belongingness is encouraged in the educational institutions.

Apart from educating the children of diverse cultures under one roof, the education also put forwards the spirit of working together towards the upliftment of society.

From the above discussion, a very important aspect of education is emerged that is 'learn to live together in peace & harmony'. Only education provide the environment where such kind of universal values can be inculcated which bring respect & tolerance for each other differences & preferences. The spirit of social responsibility which includes working for eradication of major social evils and disparities can be brought among the young generation through education.

Following are the goals of education for peace and harmony:

- To develop love for human kind and the environment;
- To creates awareness of the importance of living in harmony with each other and with the environment;
- To develop in individuals the skills of interpersonal communication in order to promote understanding, acceptance and tolerance;
- To create an awareness of the solidarity of human kind irrespective of race, religion, creed and culture;

- To promote active participation in all aspects of social life and to ensure freedom of expression belief and worship;
- To enhance the quality of human relationship through a sense of dignity and equality, mutual trust, and an appreciation of other's beliefs & cultures.

Right to Education: An Initiative in India.

The Indian Govt. has notified Right to Education in 2009 to provide free and compulsory education to children of 6 to 14 years of age. The act provides for the compulsory & free 8 years of elementary education. Behind the formulation of RTE 2009, the basic purpose of the govt. is to promote social inclusion and equality. Following are the main feature of RTE 2009,

- Free & compulsory education from 6-14 years of age ;
- 25% reservation for the children belonging to the weaker and disadvantaged sections of the society in all schools;
- Non-detention policy till 8th class;
- Age appropriate admissions will be done;
- Special training will be given to teachers so they can identify the needs of all children including EWS and plan the teaching strategies accordingly;
- Corporal punishment in prohibited;
- Provision of the schools in the neighborhood and support for obtaining admission in the school will be provided so the

children may not suffer due to lack of any supporting documents & parental awareness;

- The school buildings should have all the facilities including separate toilets for boys & girls, playgrounds, safe drinking water, libraries etc.

For the purpose of bringing cultural harmony and social equity, the Central govt. has included the clause 12 of the RTE Act 2009. Under the clause 12, all the schools (govt. , govt. aided & private unaided) are required to reserve 25% seats for the economically weaker children in the entry level classes. Under the RTE, the school and the local authorities are required to provide all the support & guidance to these children & their parents for the purpose of seeking admission. The rationale behind this clause is social inclusion and equality of opportunities. The clause 12 brings all the children belonging to the diversified social & economic status on a common platform for learning and development. Irrespective of their social, cultural & economic backgrounds, they will receive the common instructions & learning experiences.

So RTE 2009 is a comprehensive and well-conceived act for achieving cultural harmony and equality of opportunity for all in India. But the desired goals of quality education for all will be achieved only when all the stakeholders that are parents, school authorities, locals authorities, teachers and the govt. dedicate themselves towards the implementation of all the provisions of RTE.

For achieving quality education for all in India, the teachers & the school authorities have to give place to culturally responsive pedagogy in the most important educational institutions that are schools. As in

India cultural diversities in terms of language, customs, traditions, festivals and the social inequalities in terms of regions, religion, income, education, gender, caste & class are vast & complex. So the teaching fraternity has to take the step forward towards making the educational system sensitive to the cultural & social diversities. The most important factor in the whole educational process is the teacher. The perspective, attitude and skills of the teacher play the crucial role in achieving the goals of teaching-learning process.

Teacher- the most important institutional agent

Teachers must reflect on their actions and interactions as they try to discern the personal motivations that govern their behaviors. Understanding the factors that contribute to certain behaviors (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism) is the first step toward changing these behaviors. Teachers need to explore their early experiences and familial events that have contributed to their understanding of themselves as racial or nonracial beings. As part of this process, teachers can conduct informal interviews of family members (e.g., parents, grandparents) about their beliefs and experiences regarding different groups in society. Teachers must recognize and acknowledge their affiliation with various groups in society, and the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to each group. It is important that teachers learn about the lives and experiences of other groups in order to understand how different historical experiences have shaped attitudes and perspectives of various groups. It is important that teachers get to know their students' families and communities by actually going into the students' home environments. This allows teachers to relate to their students as more than just "bodies" in the classroom but also as

social and cultural beings connected to a complex social and cultural network. Teachers need to learn about successful approaches to educating children from diverse backgrounds. By actually visiting classrooms of successful teachers of children from diverse backgrounds and/or reading authentic accounts of such success, teachers can gain exemplary models for developing their own skills. To be effective in a diverse classroom, teachers must have an appreciation of diversity. They must view difference as the "norm" in society and reject notions that any one group is more competent than another. The educational system has historically fostered the achievement of one segment of the school population by establishing culturally biased standards and values. The monoculture values of schools have promoted biases in curriculum development and instructional practices that have been detrimental to the achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teachers need to participate in reforming the educational system so that it becomes inclusive.

Instances of cultural insensitivity in India

Cultural insensitivity in India can be observed in the low performing govt. schools where the teacher and the school authorities are insensitive towards the educational and cultural needs of poor children. Due to irresponsible behavior of the teachers and school authorities, the children lack the ability to read and write even in the 2nd and 3rd classes. Job security and lack of monitoring by the administration are responsible for the pathetic attitude of the teachers. As far as their job is secured they don't bother about the learning achievements of the children. And most of the parents of the poor children are unaware and illiterate so they eventually dropout and get marginalized. 5 lakh sanctioned teachers posts remain vacant and 6.6 lakh in service teachers are untrained. Around 37% primary schools have a pupil teacher

ratio adverse to the national norm of 1:30. Teachers are routinely engaged in non-academic duties. The percentage of private players is continuously increasing in India which are business oriented and not at all interested to serve all the sections of the society under their roof. If the teachers are not trained and sufficient to handle the overcrowded class of India where pupils from different culture, class, caste and creed come, quality education is quite impossible to achieve.

Besides the dearth of teachers, the cultural insensitivity comes in the form of discrimination and neglect, abuse and corporal punishment within the schools, which pose a threat to retention and performance among children from vulnerable sections. A more recent study by the MHRD acknowledged the widespread prevalence of discrimination inside schools and classrooms. According to RTE forum Report 2013-14, the Mid Day Meal Program which intends to facilitate retention and inclusion of poor children is proving a tragedy for them. In Dharmasti-Gandaman village in Saran district in Bihar 16th July 2013 23 children died of food poisoning. The instances of insects in the mid-day meals are very common. The norm of reserving 25% seats for EWS children is ignored by most of the schools in all the states and if they are admitted under pressure, they are being discriminated and segregated continuously. According to a study conducted in Udaipur Rajasthan, the EWS children are not allowed to attend the morning assembly, their Tiffin's are checked for quality, they used to sit on the back benches and their parents are not invited for the PTMs. According to a national newspaper, hair cut of children is done in Bangalore for identification as EWS. Under these circumstances culturally responsive pedagogy is completely ignored and the future of the poor and disadvantaged children does not seem to be brighter.

For achieving quality education for all, culturally responsive pedagogy is must in India.

Education is responsible for the full achievement of the innate potential & abilities. Education provides the avenues where the hidden talent and capacities of the human beings can be taken out and

flourish. India, after the independence, committed through the various constitutional provisions to the educational opportunities for all. The complex and vast nature of disparities & diversities existed in Indian culture is a crucial issue in the path of achieving the equality of educational opportunities in India. For a big educational system which cater the needs of one of the largest democracy of the world i.e. India, quantity & quality of education are the major concerns. Here quantity stands for the availability of educational opportunities for all irrespective of the caste, class, creed, gender, culture and region etc.

By securing almost 100% enrolment in primary education, India has done substantially well but as far as enrolment in higher education, literacy in rural areas, dropouts rates in girls, enrolment & dropout rates among SC's & ST's are concerned they are still very alarming & a hindrance in achieving education for all. The another aspect is quality which stands for whether the education system is sensitive towards the different & individual needs of children coming out from different cultural & social backgrounds.. For ensuring quality in education, the educational system should be culturally responsive, where the school authorities & the teachers identify & respect the diversities, should evolve the teaching & learning strategies compatible to the needs of all the students. Quality in education can be evaluated in terms of learning outcomes. To deal with the diversities in social & cultural context, the teachers have to develop culturally responsive pedagogy, so that all the students learn together in a harmonious and compatible environment. The schools authorities should take a supporting attitude towards the parents & their children by addressing the individualistic & cultural needs. Various programs by local authorities can be organized so that more & more interaction

happen between the people & strong community relations build up. If we want the dream of quality education for all comes true, our educational system & all the stakeholders have to be culturally responsive so that all the students feel to be well attended & accepted and their opportunities of learning & growth are not hampered in terms of different cultural, social & linguistic barriers. All the students should receive the instructions in the best compatible manner to ensure their bright future.

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CONCLUSION

The need of culturally responsive pedagogy for achieving quality education is well-accepted in all over the world. Many eminent thinkers have worked on how to make the curriculum culturally sensitive. But the theoretical framework will bear the fruit of success only when the teachers dedicate themselves towards making the teaching learning process culturally sensitive. To ensure optimum learning, the teachers are required to be well-equipped and desirous of adopting culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers can change the ground reality but the govt. has to provide them the required institutional and administrative support through advanced training.

So there is an emergent need in the era of urbanization & modernization of a culturally responsive pedagogy in the classrooms and this can happen only when the educational system is sensitive towards the cultural & social needs of children. Mere policy provision will not do a lot, ground reality will change only when the perception, attitude and capacity of the whole educational system transformed and the most important actor of the learning process i.e. Teacher is well-equipped and keen to evolve a culturally responsive pedagogy.

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