

Grooming Teacher Educators And Prospective Teachers In Multicultural Education

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Abstract

The concept of "learning to live together" lays emphasis on understanding and respect for others, including their belief system, values, and culture. In a diverse nation like India, which celebrates its vibrant mosaic of cultures, it is crucial to provide culturally sensitive education to all students, regardless of their backgrounds. This requires preparing teachers who are attuned to the philosophy of inclusivity and who perceive diversity as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

The present paper aims to explore teacher education programs with a focus on multicultural education and to examine the factors that hinder or promote inclusivity in school-level education. The author reflects on the perceptions of prospective teachers regarding caste-based intelligence differences, highlighting the deep-rooted caste consciousness in Indian society.

Though schools are expected to facilitate in the proper growth and development of students, it was found in a number of empirical research and observations that schools often adopt exclusive approaches that perpetuate discrimination. Incidents of discrimination against vulnerable groups have been reported in schools, hindering the democratic ideals that education should uphold. Teachers, as crucial agents in education, can play a transformative role in creating an inclusive and cohesive society.

The pedagogical consequences of discriminatory mindsets include low expectations, neglecting students' needs, and stigmatizing certain students. Multicultural education is essential to address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguisticism, and ableism, religious and racial intolerance.

To incorporate multicultural education effectively, teacher education programs should provide cross-cultural experiences and seek to develop teachers as reflective practitioners. Teachers must cultivate cultural competence, understanding the interrelationship between language and culture, and contextual competency. This requires exposure to different cultures, introspection, and an appreciation for cultural diversity.

In conclusion, multicultural education should be an integral part of teacher education programs to prepare teachers who can effectively respond to the needs of diverse learners. By embracing multiculturalism, teachers can promote equity, equality, and social justice, contributing to a more inclusive and democratic society.

Introduction

The concept of 'learning to live together' is centred on the development of understanding, consideration and respect for others, their belief systems, values and culture. It acknowledges recognizing difference and diversity as an opportunity rather than an obstruction, and as a valuable resource to be used for the common good. Since our nation, India, is a mosaic of vibrant, diverse colours, one where a cultural medley forms a variegated whole called the Indian culture, it aspires to provide culturally sensitive education to all students—diverse in race, ethnicity, economic resources, language, fluency, abilities, geography, first-generation status, age, gender and sexual identities. The very nature of our national composition demands multicultural preparation of teachers. They, in the main, need to be attuned so as to be positively inclined towards the philosophy of inclusivity, perceiving the process as beneficial to all participants within the inclusive setting. With these considerations in view, the objectives of the present essay is to revisit teacher education programs with multicultural education in focus and understand the prospective teachers' status in regard to factors which obstruct and/or can foster inclusivity in school level education.

A slight view of prospective teachers' perception may further be had from the experience of the present author for highlighting the need of inclusiveness in education Before introducing the hereditarian and environmentalist approaches

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of development, a question was posed to the prospective teachers (students of B.Ed level programme): if an IQ test is administered on three students, a Brahmin, a Kshtriya and a Shudra, who would obtain a higher score? Most of the students were sure that the Brahmin would get a higher score. It was not particularly shocking -- mainly because the student-teachers hailed from a caste-ridden society and were thus yet to be exposed to the role of environmental factors in the making of a person's intellect. The students of M. Ed programme were likewise asked the same question – but, disturbingly, their answers were not all that different from their less experienced counterparts.

The fact worth mentioning here is that most of the students belonged to backward castes, and thus were not from among the higher caste strata who could be accused of suffering from self-conceit, or self-proclaimed caste-based superiority. At the same time, the backward caste respondents could not stomach the conviction – indeed, outright refused to believe it -- that caste does not play a role in determining IQ. It underscores the traditional and oppressive thinking on the caste phenomenon: The students' perception seems to be emanating from their belief in the notion of inferiority and inequality being inherent in caste, intellect and physical attributes (NCF2005). Caste consciousness is undoubtedly a deep-rooted phenomenon in Indian society; and, it would be belabouring the fact to claim that young boys and girls imbibe these and other similar social biases during as they grow up in a caste ridden milieu. By the time they reach adulthood, their perceptions tend to be as rigid and inflexible as those of their elders.

Although the quality of education is the subject of intense study and debate, not much is known about how classroom pedagogy reinforces traditional views on caste and discourages critical thinking. In the caste context, the uncritical nature of traditional thinking only perpetuates rigidity and caste inequalities. Can such teachers who believe in caste-based (heredity) inequalities, to the point of it affecting their perception of a person's intelligence, take up the task of inclusive education/multicultural education as expected of them?

Prejudiced in Schools

Since education is considered a major tool for the development of children, society looks at schools as the most appropriate places for fostering proper growth and development of the learners. The fact, however, remains that schools are not marooned islands; school-teachers alone cannot overcome social injustices that currently impede democracy. Nonetheless, they can play an important role in nurturing desired qualities of citizenship among young people. At the same time, it can't be said for certain that schools have been performing this function as required, and as desired.

A school is a reflection of a larger society; specifically, the larger society within which the school exists and operates. Yet, research has found that, often, schools tend to adopt an exclusive approach, as opposed to an inclusive approach – usually at the hands of groups, but sometimes by individuals. This is naturally because teachers and other staff within a school come to their workplace with a pre-existing mindset and attitudinal patterns towards certain people and groups, which is often reflected in their actions and speech.

Media has regularly reported incidents of discrimination against students of vulnerable groups in schools, colleges and Universities at large. For instance, school teachers were reported to have sprinkled cow's urine to 'purify' Dalit kids in Maharashtra (Source: *The Times of India*, dated 21 April 2007), denied Dalit students their midday meals, and so on. Discrimination hurts not just the person who experiences it, but the one who perpetuates it, too. In fact, it is a clot in the society within which it exists. Although it is no easy task to entirely transform the existing, persisting systems of discrimination that are perpetuated even in schools, a duly geared and reinforced system of education may play a decisive role for facilitating the desired transformation that is inclusive education. It is here that the teachers are a crucial element, and thus may play a highly constructive role. A teacher who is imbued with essential dispositions may transform education into an effective functional tool for making a cohesive society.

The school is a child's first encounter with the world outside of their home. In the same vein, a child's first encounter with prejudice is sometimes from school, as well, often in the form of discrimination. These inequalities serve to limit the actual practises of a democracy. This discrimination and differential treatment is not limited to anything – it can be about a child's identity, gender, caste, religion, language, family occupation, disability, and so on.

Though children sometimes report these incidences of discrimination as they happen, more often than not, they are able to realise (and thus report) the weight of these events only in retrospect, long after their experiences. The autobiography, *Joothan*, by Om Prakash Valmiki, which details his experiences growing up as a Dalit in the newly independent India during the 1950s, is a famous example. This discriminatory mindset, as seen in teachers, is often reflected in their pedagogical practises.

Pedagogical consequence of prejudices based discrimination

The pedagogical consequences of these discriminatory mindsets include teachers having low expectations from certain students, being inattentive to their needs and failing to provide them with necessary learning opportunities, as well as a generally lackadaisical approach to providing learning experiences; not giving students the required time, and content as a result of pre-existing prejudices. Students are thus often stigmatized as being "slow learners", "dumb", or

“troublesome”. It is also against the mandate of UNICEF (1990) which says that empowering the younger generation with knowledge and resources to meet their basic human needs and to make them grow to their full potential should be the primary goal of the national development as their individual development and social contribution will shape the future of the world (UNICEF, 1990).

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) recommended for professional development for teachers, so as to make their social attitude democratic, gave birth to a commitment to upholding constitutional values in their minds, and makes them capable of overcoming internalized discriminatory patterns that they may be otherwise unaware of.

Our country is a highly diverse one. For education to fulfil its job as a means of righting students towards a more knowledgeable path in life, teachers should be aware of to whom they are teaching and what to teach and appropriate methodologies to teach them. We need teachers who can use research-based pedagogy; teachers who will be responsive towards the needs of the students and especially who are linguistically and ethnically diverse. Thus, teacher education curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ableism, religious intolerance, and racial intolerance. There thus arises the need of incorporating multicultural education in teacher education programme for the purpose.

Multicultural Education: what and what for

Multicultural education is a philosophical concept which promotes and is built upon ideals such as equity, equality, and human dignity – and which has been acknowledged in the constitution of India and as well in Human Rights Declaration of the United Nations. It affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world and also recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice (National Association of Multicultural Education).

Multicultural education is based on the belief that students, their life histories, and their experiences should be central to the teaching-learning process. The teaching pedagogy adopted should be familiar to students, and further be capable of addressing their thinking from multiple perspectives. Teachers and students should be able to analyse and assess the power relations within their society, and the systemic injustices that arise from it.

The Need for Multicultural Infusion: A copious of studies documented the effectiveness of a multicultural infused teacher education program (Diez & Murrell, 1991; Maher, 1991; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1991; Hadaway et al., 1993) in attitudinal changes and developing cultural competence in pre-service teachers. A teacher education programme with the proper flavour of multi-culturalism may prepare teachers to teach students with diverse cognition, ethnicity, physical ability, language, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic level. The multicultural education has to be a vital part of the teacher preparation program; not just an added component addressed in one or two courses or by one or two instructors.

Multicultural Teacher Education

There is an alarming need for Teacher Education Programmes to offer a variety of cross-cultural experiences. Although our teacher education programmes have attempted to address these issues by incorporating content on “multicultural education” into one or two papers and somewhere in field experiences, but it is also a fact that multicultural education has not been integrated in a systematic, tenacious, and overt manner. Our teacher education programmes need to frame a cohesive, organized and comprehensive multicultural curricula for prospective teachers, so that they will be able to respond to the needs of diverse learners. A few steps may be taken to make a niche of diverse learners in inclusive schools.

Teachers as Reflective Practitioners: ‘Reflective teachers apply observational, empirical, and analytical skills to monitor, evaluate, and revise their own teaching practices’ (Irvine, 1990). Teachers need to develop a sentience of their own cultural perspective, thus gaining insight into the cultural assumptions underlying their expectations, beliefs, and behaviour. They also have to understand that while their cultural perspectives might be right, they are not a universal norm. In short, ‘teachers need meta-cognitive strategies to gain awareness, not only of their own knowledge and skills in the classroom but also of the efficacy of their activities on students’ learning’ (Cardelle-Elawar, 1992).

Cultural competence: ‘Although culture, to some degree, influences thinking, but our schools and teachers expect that students from a variety of cultural backgrounds comprehend and learn many new and complex ideas even when exposed to language and values that differ from their own’ (Langer, 1987). Awareness of the cultural foundations of logic and thought inclines multicultural teachers to make their thinking explicit to students, to be less judgmental of students’ reasoning, and to look beyond learning disabilities to cultural and linguistic differences that may explain students’ academic performance.

The prospective teachers must gain and nurture cultural competence; that is, the ability to function comfortably in cross-cultural settings and to interact and cooperate harmoniously with people from cultures that are different from their own. Based on the research on effective intercultural communication, culturally competent individuals (a) cope effectively with the psychological and emotional stress of dealing with the unfamiliar, (b) quickly establish rapport with others, (c) sense other people's feelings, (d) communicate effectively with people from varying backgrounds, and (e) respond adequately to miscommunication (Giles, Coupland, Williams, & Leets, 1991). These complex skills require knowledge and the cultural understanding that evolve over time from cross-cultural interpersonal experiences.

A number of researchers have found that many prospective teachers and practicing teachers have little to no exposure to people of other cultures (Naqvi 2010, Hadaway et al. 1993 Zimpher, 1989 Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Hernandez, 1989). It is pertinent that our future teachers need to be effective cross-cultural communicators because it encourages good interpersonal relationship and create a healthy classroom environment. For this teacher has to understand the interrelationship between language and cultural meaning.

Language as a Reflection of Culture: Language and culture have a deep rooted, comprehensive relationship. Language is, after all, the primary means of communication – as such, it is central to the conveying of culture, and to the maintenance of cultural ties. It, therefore, ensures a method of connection. Besides this, the very existence of several cultures is deeply rooted within their language; the preservation of one begets the preservation of the other. It is for this very reason that prospective teachers should have a well-developed understanding of this connection. Edward Sapir, in his studies with Benjamin Lee Whorf, recognized the close relationship between language and culture, concluding that it was not possible to understand or appreciate one without knowledge of the other” (taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 220). Some communities have culture-specific ways of viewing and understanding the world; these may sometimes directly contradict with those of others. It is, however, crucial for a teacher to avoid judging or dismissing these, even if they are at odds with their own values. From the complex "cultural meanings and models that are shared and assumed" there emerges a unique world view that makes sense of the world as it is perceived (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 52). Schlesinger (1991) believes this cultural influence on cognition probably manifests itself more strongly in children because they are still developing the language of thought.

Contextual competency: A culturally-competent teacher is generally aware of the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of their own culture, as well as the cultures to which their students belong. Observing as well as assessing one's own culture, and those to which one does not belong, will allow a teacher an opportunity to understand their own values better, as well as to understand how they interact with and affect others, furthering a multicultural environment. Culturally competent teachers cannot be developed from a single experience, or in one shot; for proper cultural-competence to develop, the teacher needs a healthy exposure towards other cultures, as well as direct experience with them. Lastly, introspection, understanding, as well as manifestation related to said experiences is necessary. Culturally competent teachers can only be created in institutions appreciative of cultural diversity.

One of the first and foremost responsibilities of teachers is to ensure acceptability, support and approval of their efforts by parents and the community. For this, teachers need to acquire a nearly overall understanding of the socioeconomic, family cultural, linguistic and religious context of the specific family milieu and the community profile. Teachers need to understand and also be proficient enough to adapt the content of instruction and teaching style to students' cultural and individual preferences. Curriculum, methodology, and materials should invite students to identify with the educational process and enable them to function bi-cognitively (Cohen, 1969; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987; Singh, 1988 Naqvi 2019). If the content is incompatible with the students' values and cultural norms, misunderstanding and distrust are likely to ensue (Croninger, 1991). The disproportionate representation of culturally diverse students in programs for exceptional children (Epstein, Polloway, Foley, & Patton, 1990; Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Reschly, 1988) may be attributable to misdiagnosis resulting from differences between the students' cultural background and their teachers' teaching styles, culturally determined expectations, and structuring of curricular content.

The development of cultural competency requires multiple and varied opportunities, within and beyond school settings, to interact with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities over a prolonged period (Grant & Secada, 1990; Larke, 1990 Naqvi 2019). Pre-service teachers benefit from field experiences that place them in multicultural settings and engender sharing with a diversity of people. Direct opportunities to live and teach in another culture generate multicultural competency, nurture positive cross-cultural attitudes and skills, and produce a deeper understanding of the need for cross-cultural competencies (Cooper, Beare, & Thorman, 1990).

From Knowledge to Reflection

For pre-service teachers to apply a theory such as multicultural education into the classroom, they first need to gain a sufficient understanding of the concept. On a fundamental, baseline level, a general course in multicultural education would provide this opportunity. Pre-service teachers could use this as a means to get acquainted with the lifelong process of developing the cultural competency required for bridging the gap between the majority culture and their students' respective cultures. Altogether, an introductory multicultural education would allow teachers to become self-aware, and reflect and develop on their personal philosophies.

There is a need of the introduction of sound multicultural education to furnish the following:

Behaviour shaping factors: Practical opportunities to reflect on how one's culture and gender shapes their behaviour, beliefs, expectations, identity, and personal biases are just as important as understanding the concepts that make up multicultural education. This understanding and reflection can be developed centrally through personal experiences with a variety of different cultures and people, as well as through reflecting on one's own beliefs about one's own culture. Additionally, intercultural experiences help reduce the anxiety experienced in unfamiliar cross-cultural encounters, allowing for a positive feedback loop where one is again provided with initiative to interact with other cultures.

Communication strategies: Having a grasp over the different communication strategies that can be used over cultural barriers increases cultural competency, and makes cross-cultural communication easier to carry out. Teachers should know and be able to accommodate cultural and individual differences in their students' learning styles into their own teaching. Being able to do so generates greater professional confidence and, indirectly, an increased willingness to teach children from diverse backgrounds.

Guarding against biased content: Teachers should be knowledgeable enough to identify the presence of cultural bias, if present in their teaching materials. A lack of awareness in these cases, where materials that are prejudiced in their content and that perpetuate stereotypes are used, results in the minority students being affected negatively (both socially and academically). Multicultural education can allow teachers to discern this misinformation, if there is any.

Upholding and promoting Equity: Through multicultural education, teachers can develop a true understanding of equity, and how it differs from equality. Not only does this distinction lie at the heart of multicultural education, but knowing it also allows pre-service teachers to examine them and their educational implications wholly.

Liberal outlook: The descent of a society into narrow-mindedness can only be prevented through focusing on widespread education; this, of course, begins with the teachers. As such, a liberal arts education is essential; not only is it impartial and progressive, it also opposes chauvinist, self-absorbed approaches to other cultures. This only serves to signify both the essence and need of multicultural education.

As with nearly all disciplines, practical or field work is just as important a component as understanding the concepts. Field experience is an important component in teacher preparation. Add a multicultural focus to it, and teachers should be expected to develop the ability to observe and accommodate diversity in their classrooms; indeed, this will culminate into teachers nurturing and inspiring students to apply culturally appropriate strategies.

Student-teaching, if done right in a multicultural setting, gives way to students reflecting on their own cultural competencies and teaching strategies, and thereby putting the ones they've learned into effect.

Introductory courses on multicultural education will allow teachers to explore its multiple definitions and interpretations. Pre-service teachers would be able to introspect on their underlying beliefs, assumptions, and the goals inherent in each perspective. Eventually, a global view of multicultural education would allow future teachers to clarify their own perspective of multicultural education.

Conclusion

As teacher educators, it is our duty that we must prepare our teachers to provide quality education for all students irrespective of their caste creed and language. Field based researches indicated that teachers are usually lacking multicultural education that is why they are inadequately prepared for the reality of a pluralistic society and tend to have low expectations for minority children (Olstad, Foster, and Wyman 1983, Naqvi 2010,2019). It is the high time when teacher educators may ask themselves whether their teacher preparation programs facilitate increased cultural self-awareness, nurture admiration and positive reception of diversity, increase cultural competency, and prepare teachers to work efficiently with a diversity of students and parents. To the extent that education programs achieve these ends, to that extent they prepare culturally competent teachers.

Pre-service multicultural education is inevitability. It is not a matter of individual penchant, curricular addition, or pedagogical notion. Neither should it be merely an added-on course after providing for the necessary knowledge and skills. Multicultural education is not simply an ethnic issue; it is everyone's issue, for teaching is a multicultural experience. It is a big and moot question against us that as a nation can we afford the mis-education of such a big and large sector of the population.

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