Multicultural Education: Significance, Content Integration and Curriculum Design

Reeba Sara Koshy

Assistant Professor on Contract, C.M.S College, Kottayam

Abstract

The paper attempts to understand the ubiquitous and complex nature of multicultural education exploring its varied facets. The concept multicultural education and some of its definitions are identified and discussed considering its multifaceted meanings and significance. The definition of multicultural education is examined along with varied ways in which permeates each aspect of the concept 'education'. Sleeter's five different approaches to multicultural education are enumerated. The significance of multicultural education in India is brought out with supporting evidence. The perusal of multicultural education in terms of content integration, language use, infrastructural, skill development and school system is executed in conjunction with factual accounts and socio-pyschological theory. Equity and equality in multicultural education is delineated. The paper identifies different components of multicultural education and concludes with suggestions for modifying and adapting the educational system to be multicultural.

Keywords

Multiculturalism, Education, Content Integration, Multicultural Content, Indian Context

Multicultural Education: Significance, Content Integration and Curriculum Design

Culture is in what we do, what we think and what we think others are thinking. Culture is created by humans and imbibing culture enables one to live amicably and socially in a society. It expands the range of activity one can do. Culture imbibed in a specific era might not always be positive or humane in a multicultural or global context. The term multicultural can be used in lieu of the word global in the sense 'all encompassing without any forms of discrimination'. Educational content can be corrupted by the immediate culture in comes in contact with, by the culture that led to the formation of that particular curriculum, or by the teaching methods used by the teacher. Today's students become tomorrow's citizens who are going to mould and shape the world and the culture imbibed by the same is an unalienable aspect of that process. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the educational content delivered to today's students is multicultural or all encompassing and inclusive. Members of the same family can be culturally diverse. Culture manifests itself through social institutions, legal system, education system and media. Education brings them all together by preparing students to be part of these systems and helps them be accustomed to them. Culture is different from natural as it involves cultivation of an acceptable range of disciplined behaviours as opposed to the natural wherein the natural instinct rules over the disciplined. Culture in a way ensures the continuation of civilization as legality alone cannot make a society fit for mankind.

"Multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds." (Hidden Curriculum). The content itself can be multicultural and teachers can modify or incorporate lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students or in a wider context. In many cases, "culture" is defined in the broadest possible sense, encompassing race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionality. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It challenges all forms of discrimination in society and schools. I personally would try to define multiculturalism as a concept that encompasses the 'other', includes the marginalized and re-centres the centre to be more inclusive. "Multicultural education harbors a place for a multitude of voices in a multicultural society and a place for many dreams." (Muacin 2017)

Multicultural education permeates all aspects of school system including the admission of students, school policies, syllabus followed, staff selection, co-curricular activities and teaching methods and aids. Multicultural education must take into account all facets of education that address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguisism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance and xenophobia. Multicultural education recognizes that students' experience should be placed at the centre of education; curriculum and that classroom experience must lead a student to an experience wherein the student can understand and perceive the world without prejudices and biases. Students must be provided freedom of expression and thought so that they can critically analyze oppression and power relations in their society. Classroom techniques must be suited to enable this freedom of thought. These goals can only be possible if the staff is culturally competent and unbiased in terms of diversity.

Equity and equality is not the same thing. "Equality has become synonymous with "leveling the playing field." So let's make equity synonymous with "more for those who need it." " (Edtrustorg, 2017). Multicultural education must have the quality of both equity and equality and it is a challenge to recognize where and when which is needed. Equitable multiculturalism is what is to be aspired. Category Reservation in opportunities is equity in the sense that people who had been oppressed and dispossessed are given more opportunities. School admission process follows equity and co-curricular activities offer equal opportunities to all students developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes that create positive interpersonal skills.

Sleeter identifies five approaches to multicultural education

a. Teaching the Culturally Different: This approach attempts to raise the academic achievements of all students. Students from all cultural and ethnical backgrounds are taught in a combined classroom.

b. Human Relations Approach: Social and cultural differences are identified and dealt with but institutional and economic power is not given significance.

c. The Single Group Studies Approach: Histories and contemporary issues regarding oppression, suppression and

marginalization of groups

d.   The Multicultural Education Approach: Educational process including instructional methods that value cultural knowledge and differences are used.

e.   Social Reconstructionist: Students are taught about oppression and discrimination. Students also realize their role in their own society as agents of social change (Sleeter, 1996).

Content integration is the inclusion of materials, concepts and values from a variety of cultures in teaching. Integration of materials from other cultures without understanding the underlying significance has its dark side that needs to be addressed properly. As a postcolonial nation, our education system has its roots in the colonizer's point of view and perceptions. Nursery rhymes that have a dark history were mindlessly taught in schools until recently. Rhymes that reflect the culture of our country and civilization need to be included in English education. Some might argue that language has its own certain roots in the culture from it is born and therefore rhymes that teaching rhymes that reflect the language's culture could not be of harm. The rhyme 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' is about the medieval wool tax, imposed in the 13th Century by King Edward I. Under the new rules, a third of the cost of a sack of wool went to him, another went to the church and the last to the farmer. In the original version, nothing was therefore left for the little shepherd boy who lives down the lane. Black sheep were also considered bad luck because their fleeces, unable to be dyed, were less lucrative for the farmer. One might argue that the rhymes are harmless or can only be helpful in teaching vocabulary and in fact entertaining to the students but there is even more culturally constructive outcomes by teaching English rhymes which have 'Indianness' or have Indian cultural significance. The global influence of English cannot be belittled. But blindly following and incorporating a language professing to be multicultural without being cognizant of its real cultural significance can result in a narrow worldview. Unnecessary preference to one language, for e.g.: promoting English over one's own mother tongue can result in an unfavorable attitude towards one's own language and culture. Many schools in Kerala administer strict disciplinary action against students who speak in their mother tongue or any regional language and are made fun of which instills fear and shame in these unassuming innocent children. These kinds of practices are essentially against multiculturalism even though superficially boasts of embracing the same.

In Maharashtra, a class 12 sociology textbook published by the board lists "ugliness of the girl" as one of the reasons for families seeking dowry at the time of marriage. This is how a particularly insensitive paragraph from chapter 3 of the book reads: "If a girl is ugly and handicapped, it becomes very difficult for her to get married. To marry her, the girl's bridegroom and his family demand more dowry. The helpless parents of such girls are then forced to pay up…". The book was used by thousands of students over the last two years to prepare for the Higher Secondary Certificate board examinations. (Padnekar, 2017). This glaring insensitivity towards persons with special needs is what one might call as an evident example of anti-multiculturalism. These ideas are accepted as what is normal and expected norms by some of the young minds that study this book. This type of content could create individuals who wouldn't accept the 'other' later in their lives. Women are oppressed and suppressed in many of the cultures around the world. Different kind of beauty standards exist around the world. A place like Mauritania in West Africa, considers women who are fat to be attractive and therefore force fed so that they can be married off to wealthy families. Learning about different cultures dissolves the

inhibitions one has towards the 'other', eventually disintegrating the very idea of 'other as something different than normal' and creates a better understanding about humans and eventually towards other kinds of civilizations. One can even argue that all the atrocities against women could become non-existent if efficacious multicultural education is implemented.

CBSE recently removed a section on Nadar women's struggle for the right to cover their breasts from the Social Science textbook. Though the section was factually correct several objections were raised citing usage of derogatory words as the reason. Here arises the question whether the struggle though painful should be known to the new generation or it should be covered up. From a multiculturalistic point of view, the inclusion of the chapter creates awareness and sensitivity towards the struggle faced by the Nadar women and therefore enforces a better understanding of the subtleties in their traditions and culture which some may be demeaned by bigots

"Joothan" is a chapter included in the text *Musings of Vital Issues* as part of the common course English programme prescribed for first year students pursuing graduate programme under M.G University, Kerala. The story brilliantly portrays the discrimination faced by Omprakash Valmiki during his school days. He was asked to sweep the school grounds so that he would not study. A teacher dealing with this lesson can evidently discuss the trials and tribulations faced by certain group of people just because they were categorized under 'low caste' without any scientific basis and relate the key ideas regarding discrimination in a wider context. We live in a country where most parents or the generation that grew up in the 1900's still address some castes as lower and therefore inevitably attribute certain qualities or traits to the 'lower' castes that would make themselves seem more attractive. Exposing the irrationality of such a system through stories, essays and poems of people who creatively resist their discrimination would ensure that the coming generation will stay away from the worst pitfall of mankind, which is discrimination against fellow men just because of the colour of the skin.

Content or teaching methods cannot be multicultural if some groups of people and their contributions to the development of history, life, and culture are demeaned or ignored. This type of learning content trivializes or stereotypes certain groups of people. These distort the worldview of the students whose views would have already been chiseled or moulded in a certain way by their own cultural or social setting and also through family influence. Multiculturalistic material would have equitable representation of diversity. This type of education creates respect, understand and inclusive spirit in the students. Students require a broader understanding of world and education embedded in multiculturalism prepares one for it.

History chronologically outlines the events of the past and presenting filtered portions of it is against multiculturalism. Colin Gordon purports that in the case of the Gulf War, the "lessons" were abstracted and filtered in such a way that both past and present were seriously distorted and more instructive analogues were ignored altogether in the history lessons taught in the US. So content developers have in their hands the difficult task of including material which are unfiltered so as to bring forth the oppressed and the underprivileged as opposed to serving the cause of the powerful (Gordon, 1993). How one culture becomes superior or powerful is for different reasons every time it happens in history but all has its base in fallacious doctrines and bogus reasons purported by a person or group of people purely for the

sake of power or wealth and in the latter case amounts to power. Power is seducing to mankind and to hold on to it or to get it in their hands, man can go to any extent of which the anti-semitism and the holocaust of the 1900's is the ultimate proof. Content developed for the ruling power would support and propagate the views and values of the same and normalize the marginalization and oppression of the minorities. In Russia, LGBT issues or the very terms are banned from being mentioned in the textbooks. In 2008, a study revealed that Rajasthan board's textbooks glorify Brahminism. The textbooks glorify Aryan civilisation, the progenitor of caste oppression, presenting it as the 'golden age' of Indian history. None of the heroes mentioned in the books are role models for students belongs to a 'low' caste. Instead, besides the few non-Hindu figures, they are all 'high' caste Hindus, particularly Brahmins, thus reinforcing the tendency to define Indian nationalism in strictly Brahminical terms. The textbooks also mention nothing at all about grovelling poverty and oppression so rife in India and, instead, present a picture of Indian society as a homogenous unit, bereft of caste and class contradictions. (Sahoo).

The umbrella term soft skills must also be included in multicultural education. Soft skill training involves developing personal attributes that enable students to effectively interact with students from diverse backgrounds harmoniously. A programme like ASAP or Additional Skill Acquisition Programme, an initiative by Kerala Government grooms students but there is no programme that concentrates on developing soft skills that make a student realize his or her power over communication skills and how it can impact society in a cultural context, be it spoken or written, be it real world or be it virtual. To prove my point, hypothetically, a frustrated student might share images on Facebook trolling or share hate speech against specific groups of people who in his or her own point of view takes away his opportunity through category reservation system. It could hurt a certain person who would have benefitted from the same system or even groups of people. This can create bubbling communal hatred and biased world view against groups of people in a society and even end in violent outbreaks and killings. The riot between 'Kannadigans' and 'Tamilians' were enflamed by the hashtag, '#WeHateKarnataka', wherein youths posted hate speech against the other state and massive violence that shook the entire nation ensued. It is in a way a blot on the education system enunciating the fact that the educated youth were not culturally inclusive even though they live in a state with multicultural crowd.

When the discrimination based on the colour of the skin is expanded beyond a country, caste discrimination expands to the concept of racism. Racism is when a whole race of people are judged based on the colour of their skin. If caste discrimination had its roots in the job one did for living during the early part of civilization, racism has its roots in slavery and colonization.

Marxist writer CLR James put it, "The conception of dividing people by race begins with the slave trade. This thing was so shocking, so opposed to all the conceptions of society which religion and philosophers had…that the only justification by which humanity could face it was to divide people into races and decide that the Africans were an inferior race."

Equity pedagogy involves teaching methods adopted in the classroom which can accommodate the culturally diverse students in the classroom. These teaching methods must empower students, sensitize the existing prejudices against various classes or groups of people and at the same form healthy worldview without prejudice or bias. Inculcation of tolerance, understanding

and respect go hand in hand. Essentially, pedagogy must aim for holistic development of students. In June 2016, in the official guidance issued by the Boarding Schools Association, boarding school teachers were instructed to address transgender pupils as 'zie' to avoid offence and was aimed at 'queering the education system' This is an excellent example where the school system is adapting or modifying the very use of language itself to be inclusive. Professional development programmes must aim for helping the teachers understand the complex and vibrant characteristics of different groups of children in Indian society and must equip them with techniques that help them efficiently deal with students.

Components of Multicultural Education are as follows:-

a. Study of community keeping in mind the varied cultures hidden or understated in it
b. Organizations of representatives from diverse groups of people
c. Youth development programmes
d. Surveys and studies that bring forward real needs and requirements
e. Focused study on existing tension areas of social prejudices, discrimination and backwardness
f. The curricular modification and adaptation to include multicultural human and material resources
g. Co-curricular activities developed with inclusive spirit
h. Extra-curricular activities giving focus and necessary equity to art and literature of the marginalized

India is a land of diversity and the need for multiculturalism in education cannot be more significant than in a country like India. Each state has its own culture, traditions and language. In order to make education in our country better suited to make a good Indian citizen it is important to let the students understand what India is. Globalization has brought in the need for including diversity in education and the need for inclusion of multicultural content from around the world. Higher education, jobs and life needs to be put into a multiculturalistic perspective. People migrate to different states, countries and continents for better opportunities and standard of living. Multicultural education fosters global citizens who can efficiently and effactually be integrated into any culture.

Multicultural education is being perfected by the true world visionaries. If we believe the social psychologists who consider stereotyping as normal cognitive functioning then the concept of inclusion of varied cultures and sensitizing and creating a better understanding towards other cultures is a complex process and mere superficial modification would not result in the desired effect. According to Appiah(1992) racialism is not itself immoral and it is the view that "there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of those races share certain traits and tendancies with each others that they do not share with members of any other race" (Appiah 13). Forming schemes by which the world around is understood is a common trait of all humans. This itself is not negative and it shares infinitesimally thin borders with the negative aspect of stereotyping. The schemas by which the child understands the world and people around him or her are being constantly built by everything that happens around him or her. Chomsky states that a child learns all the language rules it needs for his lifetime before it reaches the age of two and one can assume that it also imbibes some of the perceptions of the family or the people it comes across. The significance of an advanced

multicultural education becomes extremely important considering these aspects. Multicultural education needs to take into account the inherent nature of man to form schemes which allows them to divide fellow beings into small set of races but at the same time neutralize the negative perceptions formed about certain groups of people via their own culture and society. Such an education also needs to foster healthy schemas of and healthy behavior towards, the different sets of people in the person's life.

Multicultural education and its true purpose cannot be actualized by simple modification to the syllabus, by adding chapters about sexism or the handicapped but by modifying the whole curriculum to acknowledge and address diversity and its issues. Suggestions to modify the curriculum are as follows: Teachers must include key ideas in the classroom discussions that can relate to a whole lot of issues rather than focusing on group and being partial to one cause. The real historical accounts and personal accounts of the marginalized sections evoke a completely different perspective about one's world view. History must be understood from multiple perspectives rather than depending on a single perspective which has chances to be written by people in power and therefore biased. For e.g. History is demeaned as 'his-story' by feminists and 'herstory' is an attempt to rewrite history from a feminist perspective. Regional languages must be given priority keeping in mind the global significance of English. Texts in English could be better adapted to suit Indian culture and works with 'Indianness' could be included. World cultures can be taught as a separate subject. Moral studies can include texts that stimulate a holistic world view in the students. Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities can be developed keeping in mind the diversity of the students. Infrastructural facilities should be modified and adapted to be inclusive.

Multicultural education is the vital change that will make a true difference in the world and its unmitigated form can create the feeling of one world, preventing wars and keep at bay so much of violence and cruelty against specific groups of people, pervasive in today's world.

References

[1]. Appiah, K.A. (1992). In My Father's House-Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. New York: Oxford University Press.

[2]. Edtrustorg. (2017). The Education Trust. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from https://edtrust.org/the-equity- line/ equity-and-equality-are-not-equal/Gordon, C. (1993). Google Books. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from https:// books.google.co.in/books?id=fbpYaLmSfkcC&pg=PA135& lpg=PA135&dq=filt %2Bhistory%2Blessons&source=bl&o ts=VXFMSnGInE&sig=4ImQ3mAdhl1WAji 0xy2jlwgtgac& hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiU5KjC_o_SAhUKExoKHcZ xD6UQ6AEIRzAI#v=onepage&q=filtered%20history%20 lessons&f=falseSahoo, Sarbeswar.

[3]. Hidden curriculum (2014, August 26). In S. Abbott (Ed.), The glossary of education reform. Retrieved from http:// edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum

[4]. Muacin. (2017). Muacin. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from http://results.mu.ac.in/myweb_test/MA Education-Philosophy/Chapter-16.pdf

[5]. Padnekar, P. (2017). Hindustantimescom. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from http://www.hindustantimes.com/ mumbai-news/maharashtra-board-textbook- cites-ugliness-of-girl-as-reason-for-dowry-demand/story-llcGGvMQUKTR0xC8It6I3M.html

[6]. Sahoo, P. (2008). The Practice of Sociology. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from https://sahoo.wordpress. com/2008/02/26/rajasthan-school-textbooks-glorifying-brahminism-invisibilising-oppressed-castes/

[7]. Sleeter, C.E. (1996). Multicultural Education as Social Activism. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Author Profile

Reeba Sara Koshy is currently working in C.M.S College, Kottayam as Assistant Professor of English on contract. She is passionate about teaching and has published poems and articles in internationally recognized journals and books. She is a National Eligibility Test qualified Assistant Professor with Master's degree in English Education from The English and Foreign Languages University.