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## Cultural Diversity and Classroom Teaching: A Critical Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to emphasize the importance of cultural diversity in Indian classroom situation. India is the sacred land where people with diversity in language religion, cast, creed, race, gender, colour etc live in with peaceful co-operation. Here, classroom represents miniature society of this first cultural diversity. Hence, it's become a challenging as well as important task for teachers to promote 'multiculturalism' among the learners developing diverse learning environment through proper classroom transactional techniques and cocurricular activity management. The essence of rich cultural heritage and respect for other cultures keep the thread of cultural unity strong. Hence Multicultural Education system needs innovative ideas, technical assistance, cooperation between teachers and learners and the participation of community to prepare the learners as future responsible citizens.

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### Introduction

India is very famous for her 'unity in diversity'. Despite of her diversity in various aspects, this country utilizes it to flourish her beauty through harmony, tolerance, perseverance and hospitality. Naturally, the education system in India plays a very crucial role in building the nation by preserving and transferring her beautiful culture and diversity. This great work of education starts from the very holy classrooms. Most of the classrooms in India are a representative of her huge cultural diversity irrespective of caste, creed, gender, religion, language, colour, food, festival, economy, society and many more. So, naturally

considering such a beautiful but challenging scenario teaching in such a diverse classroom is certainly a challenging and as well as interesting job. First education of a child begins from his/her home. The socio-cultural influence of his/her home and neighborhood influence his/her thought, activity, behaviour and all other characteristics. When different cultures mixed-up in a classroom, the exchange of cultures and preservation of cultures occur by the art of teaching. An effective teaching helps to flourish different individual culture, maintain the diversity with harmony and also it transform the cultural heritage with the help of a proper curriculum. To promote multiculturalism teacher has to face many difficulties. Still through proper teaching and interaction strategies he/she continues this very important work of maintaining the 'unity in diversity'.

### **Culture & Cultural Diversity: An Overview**

The word 'culture' is first used by the British Anthropologist Edward Tylor in an inclusive and universal sense. Literally, in middle English the noun 'culture' originated from French 'culture' or directly from Latin 'cultura' which means 'Growing' or 'Cultivation'. This verb also arises from French 'culturer' and medieval Latin word 'culturare' and both of them are based on Latin 'colere' meaning 'tend' or 'cultivate'. In 16<sup>th</sup> century this means 'cultivation of the soil' and gradually by broadening its aspect, now it means 'cultivation of the mind, faculties or manners' from early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The culture is synonym of Sanskrit word 'samskriti'. 'Samskriti' is derived from the word 'samskrita' which is derived from the root word 'Kri' by adding prefix 'sam' and suffix 'ktah'. 'Kri' means to do, make, perform, accomplish, characteristics. In another way, 'samskriti' means purified, refined and perfect. So, without culture there existence of society.

'Culture' has two main basis. These are 'materialistic' and 'non-materialistic' domains and on basis of these aspects there are many types of 'culture' namely High culture, Low culture, Ideal culture, Real culture, Popular culture, Folk culture, Sub culture, Corporate culture, Counter culture, Global culture, Youth culture, National culture, Cyber culture, Consumer culture, Dominant culture etc.

Hence, 'culture' is defined as a common belief, thought, art, ethics, volume, language, possessed by a group of people in a society to live peacefully with understanding.

According to Anthropologist Cristina De Rossi "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we were it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones and a million other things".

‘Cultural Diversity’ is similar to ‘Multiculturalism’. Cultural Diversity is the difference in thought, belief, ethics, behavior, value, norms possessed by different communities or societies for mutual understanding and peaceful living.

Cultural diversity is important for creative growth and development. Knowledge of cultural diversity enhances mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. ‘Multiculturalism’ does not create separation, it promotes unity.

According to Robert Alan, “Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.”

### **Multiculturalism and Indian Classroom Context:--**

Culture influence our education system is many ways. Our school is a miniature of our cultural diversity which act as an active fuel to keep running our classroom with the harmony.

### **Cultural diversity and curriculum:**

Curriculum is the machinery which controls the entire classroom education so it is very crucial to develop a diverse curriculum for a culturally diverse group of pupils. Curriculum of a country like India naturally differs from state to state and develops cultural values giving respect to her cultural diversity. This multiculturalism is promoted through different classroom activities and co curricular activities throughout the whole academic session. Hence students develop gratitude for other cultures and this is very important.

### **Cultural diversity and students:**

In a classroom students came from the different cultural background with difference in language, religion, economy, society, ethics, values etc .Through their interaction they share their different cultures and shows respect for other cultures too. This creates a healthy and enriched environment.

### **Cultural diversity and teachers:**

Teachers also come from different cultures and they work with pupils to promote this multiculturalism through their activities and classroom interactions. In Indian context teacher tries to know every culture which belongs to his/her students so that he/she can know the student better and make the education

machinery a better one. Thus teacher also try to promote multiculturalism environment for the sake of our society.

### **Cultural diversity and learning:**

In a culturally diverse classroom students developed the concept of cooperative learning through proper interaction, exchange and understanding. This develops the values of sharing, tolerance, harmony among them. This multicultural environment enrich them with different ideas, believes, values and develop sense of respect for other cultures along with conversation and transmission of own culture.

### **Cultural diversity and behaviour of students:**

Citizens of a country are developed in a classroom through proper education. In an autocratic cultural classroom environment, students do not have the right to share their own believes or ideas whereas in democratic one they possess the right to share, to argue logically and challenge someone's thought. This develops gradually in them the citizenship characteristic in future.

### **Cultural Diversity and Equality:**

In a democratic classroom situation we give respect to different cultures irrespective of religion, caste, creed, economy etc. Hence, each culture is given equal opportunity to develop and transmit. This concept giving importance to each and every culture strengthens our cultural equality in future.

### **Cultural Diversity and Unity:**

Cultural Diversity in classroom not only differentiates us by specific sub-cultures but also enhances our cultural understanding. Exchange of different cultures creates a mixed cultural environment and this is the root of unity among people belonging to different cultures.

### **Cultural Diversity and National Value:**

In a multicultural classroom national values are shared by different cultures. There may be manyess in ideas but they all are attached with the thread of our national values and morals.

### **Cultural Diversity and Creativeness:**

Creativity needs divergent thoughts. In a multicultural classroom different beliefs are present in different cultures. When pupils share their ideas among each other, then new ideas occur. Thus, a culturally diverse classroom helps to promote creativity among learners.

### **Multicultural Classroom and Challenges:--**

Multicultural classroom is a reflection of our multicultural society. It is very important to promote cultural democracy. But, in a culturally diverse classroom there are several challenges too. These are –

#### **Language Barrier:**

Language is the media to connect with people. But, when in a multicultural classroom pupils from different language come together it becomes very difficult for them to communicate with each other and even for a teacher, it is a big challenge to understand different languages of his/her pupils. This creates a huge communication barrier. Again, many students may be learning all necessary knowledge materials and instructions in a second language rather than their mother tongue. So, it has become a harder task for them because first they have to adapt a different language and then have to understand the content knowledge.

#### **Individual Learning Style:**

Culture also effect learning styles of learners. Students come from different cultural traits with individual differences. Hence, for a teacher it becomes extremely difficult to follow different learning techniques respecting learners' individuality.

#### **Behavioural Differences:**

Many students sometimes feel worried about how to speak or behave as a consequence of any talk of teacher. These behavioural differences based on their cultures also confuse teachers and make the whole situation more complex to manage.

#### **Non-Verbal Communication:**

Cultural difference has great influence on non-verbal communication. Students belonging to different cultures use different signs, gestures, and movements for communication. A teacher may not be accustomed with all these things and effective communication cannot happen there.

**Absence of Co-ordination:**

Due to difference in socio economic, religious, racial cultural diversity, students sometimes do not understand each other well and similar is the situation with the teachers. There is always a lack of coordination between the students and in between teachers and students.

**Managing Co-curricular Activities:**

Co-curricular activities are the way to express gratitude for individual culture. Sometimes, concept of one culture may be misunderstood by another. Thus, managing co-curricular activities in such situation showing respect for every culture is really a sensitive and challenging one.

**Lack of Exchange Interaction:**

Cultural Diversity also creates interaction barrier among learners and also between learners and teachers. Thus, the main purpose of a multicultural classroom hampers. The objectives of preserving and transferring cultural values and establishment of harmony sometimes remain a dream for a teacher. Moreover, without effective interactional exchange, knowledge exchange do not occur. This is a great loss for our education system.

**Pupil -Teacher Relationship:**

For effective learning, effective communication between teachers and learners is a necessary condition. But, cultural diversity is a huge hindrance here. Sometimes, for a teacher it becomes impossible to understand his/her student's thoughts, behaviour and emotional level to form rapport with them. But, for effective learning, this friendly and healthy communication is crucial so that a learner can talk freely to his/her teacher about the difficulties he/she facing to learn content in school environment.

**Ways to Promote Multiculturalism in Classroom Situation:--**

To promote multicultural environment in a classroom following activities can be taken by a teacher--

**Understanding the Nature of Learners:**

Teacher can make rapport with his/her diverse learners within classroom through listening their daily life stories and experiences. These ultimately help the teacher to understand his/her learners better.

**Identifying the Strength and Weakness of Learners:**

Teacher can identify the strength and weaknesses of his/her learners by daily assessment in classroom and checking the previous academic records of learners.

**Open Mindedness:**

Teacher can discuss with learners open mindedly about their learning environment at home, what type of socio-cultural and language related difficulties they are facing to receive knowledge and their economic barrier can also be discussed sensitively. Thus, learners feel comfortable to share their problems with their teachers.

**Using different TLM:**

Considering the individual differences in learning style, a teacher can use different types of TLM to create a learner friendly interesting environment.

**Organising Quiz:**

Co- curricular activities on culture related issues can be organised so that learners can achieve the knowledge of different cultures and share their cultural heritage with others in a very interesting and joyful way.

**Group Activities:**

Group activities foster the sense of cooperation and create the environment of cultural exchange. Hence, this is a very effective technique to promote multiculturalism.

**Appropriate use of Assignment:**

Assignment on different culture based topics can be given by teachers to his/her learners so that learners inculcate the knowledge based on their own culture and get opportunity to comprehend the culture of others.

**Organising Food Festival:**

Food festivals can be organised in a school where students from different cultural background represent their cultural heritage for preparing food and presenting it to all others. Thus, cultural understanding become stronger and harmony established.

**Involving Community:**

Involving community in various co-curricular activities enhances the exchange of culture and collaborative mentality and teachers become more familiar with the cultural background of his/ her learners.

### **Organising Seminars on Cultural Diversity:**

Seminars on cultural diversity or multiculturalism can be organised to promote culture based knowledge as well as to show respect for other cultures. In future, these play very important role for learners to become responsible citizens.

### **Celebrating different Culture based Festivals:**

Co-curricular activities can be organised in school celebrating the cultural believes of diverse learners with different cultural backgrounds. These provide opportunity for the learners to involve directly in cultural activities and develop inter cultural understanding and respect for all cultures

### **Conclusion:--**

Nowadays, it is very important for teachers to add up new innovative techniques to promote Multiculturalism in classroom. Diversity regarding cast, creed, economy gender, language etc has very crucial role in cultural cooperation and tolerance. Moreover, cultural diversity influences tremendously the development of future citizens. Hence, as a nation builder this great challenging responsibility comes upon teachers. This is not easy but an interesting task and needs a clear and respectful understanding of the cultural heritage of the diverse learners to keep the flow of cultural unity in diversity unaltered.

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