

# Role of Teacher and Teacher Education in Multicultural Society

Dr. Reetu Sharma

Assistant Professor, Bhavan's Leelavati Munshi College of Education, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K.G. Marg, New Delhi (India)

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 20 January 2019

### Keywords

Multicultural society, Cultural Diversity, culturally diverse society, Role of teacher, Role of teacher education

### \*Corresponding Author

Email: reetusharma25[at]gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity or multicultural society has been the main challenge in imparting the education. It is challenging task for the teachers to cope up with students belonging to different societies. It becomes the responsibility of the teacher to meet the needs of students from the culturally diverse societies. Teachers need to be trained in such a way to overcome these difficulties that they face because of the persistence of cultural diversity. In this paper discussion is made upon the role of teacher and teacher education in culturally diverse society.

## 1. Introduction

The process of acquiring knowledge, skills and experience by an individual is basically known as 'Education'. Education makes an individual civilized and cultured. Cultural diversity or multicultural society has been the main challenge in imparting the education. Cultural diversity is basically the quality of different cultures. There are different societies that differed distinctly from each other and many of these differences persist till today. As cultural diversity is a challenge in teaching learning process, it is not an easy task for a teacher to educate an increasingly diverse student population in school. It becomes the responsibility of the teacher to meet the needs of students from the culturally diverse societies. Teachers need to behave in such a way to overcome these difficulties that they face because of the persistence of cultural diversity. Hargreaves (1993) emphasized on the importance of teachers by mentioning that the teachers as the ultimate key to social change and school improvement since they define, develop and reinterpret the curriculum. This makes the role of teachers more challenging. Many challenges are faced by the teachers and teaching learning process in this ever changing society as a teacher has to deal with different student having different culture. So it becomes important to understand this cultural diversity because "Understanding of the cultural diversity of contemporary society means increasing the possibility of communication between people of different cultures, creating positive attitudes towards cultural diversity, increasing social interaction between culturally different people and groups" (Sedano, 2002:268).

## 2. Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is basically the quality of different cultures. It can also refer to having different cultures respect each other's differences. Cultural diversity is sometimes used to mean the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region or in the world itself too. There are different societies that differed distinctly from each other and many of these differences persist till today. The more obvious cultural differences exist between people such as language, dress and

traditions and even there are significant variations in the way societies organize themselves, in their shared conception of morality, and in the ways they interact with their environment too. "Different groups have different needs and groups are also made up of individuals with differing needs. However, recognizing similarities means that individuals can come to know that they often have something in common with individuals from other groups. Everyone is a member of a wide variety of groups, but no one group solely defines a person. Learning about the diversity within groups helps break down the propensity to stereotype. Identities are complex and layered: and every individual has differences from others within their groups, as well as commonalities with those from different groupings." (DICE, 2008:29–30).

## 3. Teacher's role in Multicultural Society

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has marked in his book "India 2020: A Vision of the New Millennium" that "If you are a teacher in whatever capacity, you have a very special role to play because more than anybody else it is you who are shaping the future generation. A teacher has a higher responsibility as compared to other professionals as students look upon the teacher as an embodiment of perfection." This makes the role of teachers more responsible and challenging. A teacher may have the following role in a multicultural society –

### 3.1 Fostering cultural awareness

Teachers should actively exhibit that they actually care about all the needs of their students i.e. cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs to foster a cultural awareness in their classroom. This can be used to build trusting relationships with diverse students.

### 3.2 Having Interest in the ethnic background of students:

Teachers should encourage their students to research and also share information about their ethnic background in order to develop a gullible relationship with their fellow classmates. They should analyze and celebrate differences in different traditions,

beliefs, and social behaviors which are very important to develop an actually culturally responsive classroom.

### **3.3 Transaction from instructor to facilitator:**

A teacher should shift his / her role from instructor to facilitator to create a nurturing environment in culturally diverse classroom. Students may display negative behaviors as a result of a perceived sense of social injustice in an authoritarian classroom. So the teacher must act more like a facilitator than an instructor.

### **3.4 Sensitivity to language concerns:**

In classrooms some students are not native English speakers. They often feel marginalized. They even feel pressured to discard their original language in favor of English. Diversity of language is celebrated in a culturally diverse classroom. The level of instructional materials provided to these students is tailored to level of their need by the teacher. Other study material is also provided in the primary language of student by the teacher.

### **3.5 Incorporation of self-testing methods:**

As in traditional classrooms testing is usually linked with grades, a teacher can use some non-graded tests to check the progress of the students in a culturally diverse classroom keeping in mind their diversity

### **3.6 Maintaining an "inclusive" curriculum :**

A teacher should maintain an inclusive curriculum that remains respectful of differences for culturally diverse class. A culturally responsive curriculum is that which ensures that all students are included within all aspects of the school. A culturally responsive curriculum encourages the understanding of teachers about different cultures as well as the recognition of cultural life of every student.

### **3.7 Need to become a reflective practitioner:**

A reflective practitioner or a reflective teacher applies observational, empirical, and analytical skills in order to evaluate and revise their own teaching practices (Irvine, 1990). Reflective teachers develop the awareness of their own cultural perspective and realize that it is not the universal norm which is the perspective of their culture and even it is not the only right one. Teachers need meta-cognitive strategies for being aware of their own knowledge and skills in the classroom as well as the efficacy of activities done by them on students' learning (Cardelle-Elawar, 1992).

### **3.8 Cultural competence:**

Teachers must have cultural competence i.e. the ability to function effectively in cross-cultural settings. They have to interact pleasantly with people from different cultures which differ from their own. According to (Giles, Coupland, Williams, & Leets, 1991) "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". Many education

students have either little or no exposure to the people of other cultures. "Teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students from diverse cultures play a major role in their expectations of students" (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Hernandez, 1989), Education students must understand as well as appreciate human diversity in order to be effective and impartial teachers.

### **3.9 Cross-cultural communication:**

The opportunity of direct interpersonal contact and gain knowledge of the history and culture of diverse groups should be provided to the teachers in order to evolve appreciation and better understanding regarding culture of diverse groups. A teacher must act as effective cross-cultural communicators. Cross-cultural communication skill needs an understanding of the interrelationship between language and cultural meaning. "Understanding how culture shapes what can be communicated, how much is assumed to be known by the listener, and how much must be overly conveyed promotes effective cross-cultural communication" (Hall, 1989; Bonvillian, 1993).

## **4. Teacher Education and Culturally diverse society**

Teacher education plays an important role in culturally diverse society. The main goal of teacher education is to train the future teachers thus it becomes the responsibility of teacher education to inculcate the capabilities to deal with culturally diverse society in them. As cultural diversity is a challenge in teaching learning process, it is not an easy task for a teacher to educate an increasingly diverse student population in schools. Effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms means-

- To use culturally sensitive content and strategies
- To ensure equitable opportunities for individual fulfillment, academic success and personal development for every student
- Need to be "knowledgeable about how minority children perceive the world, and process and organize information" (Irvine, 1990)

The main objective of teacher education is to train the future teachers by developing specific skills of teaching in them, to prepare them for facing the diverse situations in their real class room. 'It is more important for educators to understand the cultural norms of the community than to learn specific skills' (Wiggins and Follo, 1999). Teachers need to be exposed to a combination of multicultural course work, field experiences, modeling by successful practicing teachers (Baldwin, Buchanan & Rudisill, 2007). The multicultural education is to give equal opportunity experience to the students from diverse racial, ethnic and social class groups.

While providing teacher education these qualities should be inculcated in a teacher who is dealing with the culturally diverse society -

- A teacher needs to become a reflective practitioner. Teacher candidates need meta-cognitive strategies for being aware of their own knowledge and skills in the classroom as well as the efficacy of activities done by them on students' learning (Cardelle-Elawar, 1992)

- Teacher candidates must have cultural competence i.e. the ability to function effectively in cross-cultural settings. So in teacher education the teacher candidates should be provided with the opportunity to develop their cultural competence.
- Many education students have either little or no exposure to the people of other cultures. "Teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students from diverse cultures play a major role in their expectations of students" (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Hernandez, 1989). Education students must understand as well as appreciate human diversity in order to be effective and impartial teachers. The opportunity of direct interpersonal contact and gain knowledge of the history and culture of diverse groups should be provided to the future teachers in order to evolve appreciation and better understanding regarding culture of diverse groups.
- In teacher education, there is need to train future teachers as effective cross-cultural communicators. Cross-cultural communication skill needs an understanding of the interrelationship between language and cultural meaning. "Understanding how culture shapes what can be communicated, how much is assumed to be known by the listener, and how much must be overly conveyed promotes effective cross-cultural communication" (Hall, 1989; Bonvillain, 1993).
- A future teacher must be aware with the concept of inclusive education. He /she must have the knowledge

about the needs of different types of children and should be prepared for the challenges he/she would be going to face in inclusive classroom.

## 5. Conclusion

A Teacher needs to have the specific skills and training to adjust in their real class room situation. Cultural diversity is a challenge for teachers to manage in the class room situations. The role of teacher in cultural diverse society can be- Fostering cultural awareness, Expressing interest in the ethnic background of students, From instructor to facilitator, Maintaining strict level of sensitivity to language concerns, Incorporation of self-testing methods, Maintaining an "inclusive" curriculum, being reflective practitioner, having cultural competence, cross cultural communication skill, understanding and appreciation of other culture etc. in order to deal with the culturally diverse class room.

A teacher has to face the challenge to deal with the students from different cultural in the same class room. Teacher education provides the future teachers with specific skills and trains them to adjust in their real class room situation. Cultural diversity is a challenge for teachers to manage in the class room. The role of teacher education in cultural diverse society can be to preparing future teachers for dealing with the culturally diverse society by developing the qualities like reflective practitioner, cultural competence, cross cultural communication skill, understanding and appreciation of other culture etc. in them.

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