

Addressing Diversities in Classrooms with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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Abstract

In recent years, it has become increasingly obvious that to enable students in schools from an increasingly diverse range of cultural backgrounds to acquire literacy to a standard that will support them to achieve academically, it is important to adopt pedagogy that is responsive to, and respectful of, them as culturally situated. Today's children are increasingly more diverse in their cultures, languages, abilities, interests and learning styles. We must create environments where student differences are supported and celebrated so that all students are provided with the best opportunity to learn. This article examines the need for addressing diverse needs in the classroom. Benefits and barriers to facilitating a culturally responsive pedagogy are explored, as well as approaches and pedagogical tools for fostering equitable and inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally situated, diversities, learning

1. INTRODUCTION

In a country where we strive for equal opportunity in every field for all, one of the most important areas of concern is to strive for equity in our classrooms. Promoting equity in the classroom means including all students even with physical and mental disabilities, such students with various learning capabilities can be taught through different instructions styles, while addressing gender and their cultural differences. One of the most concerned issues of today's teaching and learning process is to provide a high quality and equitable education to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The students bring their cultures with them into classrooms. Each one is unique and important. Students come with varied experiences. Even students having little or no education have their own experiences. They may differ from the experiences we have had. Their experiences may be with cooking different food items, vegetation, or with cattle rearing. The various hands-on experiences are very useful and we all can benefit from hands on experiences. When one respond as educators to the students' cultures, one understands that cultural differences are assets, we can learn from one another. If we think of education for a multicultural society then broadly three things needs to be focused : number one heterogeneous grouping, highly interactive instructions used in the classroom which includes a variety of learning styles, and a curriculum that is inclusive in nature. Students from different cultures who will study and play together with each other will find it easier to adjust in workplace in future. As rightly said students are the future of the country, so better adjustments will lead to better development of the nation. When providing education to students an environment is given to them in which they feel safe and comfortable, children with diverse background may feel unsafe and uncomfortable if their culture is unrecognized and undervalued. Today,

when the education in our country is growing rapidly and has become a key focus it becomes necessary for the teachers to address the diversities in classroom.

2. ADDRESSING DIVERSITIES IN SCHOOLS

A diverse classroom is a mixture of students either by race, culture, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, education, marital status, gender or other characteristics. When we deal with students in a diverse classroom the teacher needs to be careful as the students can get offended easily. Taken care of all the diversities in the classroom the students will learn and respect all the culture and will grow together to work with a positive attitude. As many students from different diverse backgrounds are taking admission in the classrooms of 21st century needs efforts to identify effective methods to teach these students, this calls for the need for pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsible. Today's classrooms require teacher to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities and many more other characteristics (Gollnick and Chinn, 2002). To meet this challenge, greater responsibility lies on the shoulders of teachers who must use a theoretically sound as well as culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create an environment where all students, irrespective of their culture and racial background are welcomed, supported and provided with the best opportunity to learn and express themselves.

Moreover a classroom environment which follows culturally responsive instructional reduces the students' isolation as they attempt to adjust to the different culture, races, languages and backgrounds. With the number of students with diverse backgrounds (racial, religious, gender, etc.) increasing in the India, it is important to understand a student's culture so as to not offend any groups of students as a reason of ignorance (Davis, 2002). For addressing those with different cultural backgrounds, one needs to strive for "cultural competence" by becoming more informed about the history and culture of groups other than your own by finding and reading books which might help them to learn students cultures, involving oneself in multicultural lectures or activities, team teaching with specialists from ethnic or women's studies. Students might perceive that they do not "belong" to the classroom setting — a feeling that can lead to low participation in the classroom activities, a feeling of inadequacy, and other distractions may create hindrances in their learning process. Teachers may assume imprecisely about students' capabilities or may assume a uniform standard of student performance. Teachers may themselves feel out of place based on their own inscription traits (i.e. differences based on class, privilege, etc.). To Identify and to think through notions of distinction and how this may affect the classroom helps both students as well as the teachers to see the classroom as an inclusive place.

3. WHAT IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY?

Culture remaining the central to how all learning that takes place (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student - centred approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning. This very approach is meant to promote engagement, enrichment, and achievement of all students by embracing a wealth of diversity, identifying and nurturing students' cultural strengths, and understanding each student's lived experiences and their places in the world (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Culturally responsive pedagogy helps to promote and supports the achievement of all students. Culturally responsive teaching does not mean to celebrate a certain culture for one day. It's about the instructions used as daily practices that bring students' cultures , valuing each student and what they bring in classroom in the form of culture, teaching them as humans first in order to maximize their potential as students.

Culturally responsive teaching is:

- Using students' cultural experiences in daily instruction.
- Embracing native language and students' families as assets.
- Creating a classroom environment that represents and respects all students.
- Communicating clear high expectations for everyone.

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 educational system is the institution that provides the physical and political structure for schools. To make the institution more culturally responsive, reforms must occur in at least three specific areas (**Little, 1999**). The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive.

The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. When the tools of instruction (i.e., books, teaching methods, and activities) are incompatible with, or worse marginalize, the students' cultural experiences, disconnect with school is likely (**Irvine, 1992**). For some students this rejection of school may take the form of simply underachieving; for others, rejection could range from not performing at all to dropping out of school completely.

4. ROLE OF TEACHER

Rabindranath Tagore has rightly said that "The problem is not to wipe out all differences, but how to unite with all differences intact". First and foremost duty of the teacher is to identify the differences among the students and also be sensitive towards them. With this the teachers must accept all the cultural or physical difference that comes to the classroom. When we focus on the group activities where children from all the background work together, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each student and also disabilities of the children. The teacher must ensure equal learning opportunities and participation to students without comparisons and biasness. The teacher must provide all the aids required by the students and make them feel comfortable in the classroom environment.

5. EDUCATING TEACHERS FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

It becomes the responsibility of the teachers to provide an equal opportunity to all the students in the classroom to achieve to the best of their capabilities. If the instruction focuses the cultural, linguistic practices and values of a particular group of students, then the other students might feel denied an equal opportunity to learn. Teacher must adopt an instruction that is culturally responsive which addresses the needs of all learners. The educational system plans and develops the curriculum for schools, and gives teachers to use it who will transfer the mentioned content to their students. This daily interaction 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. It is the matter of fact that the curriculum is made under the guidance of the school system, and teachers simply teach it. The teachers have to use their potential and power to teach the children wisely. The curriculum might not cover the needs of all the students but the teachers can be a bridge to fill up the gap. If the system is insensitive towards the culture and linguistic, teachers should be understanding and provide them support. In short, it is expected that a teachers must be culturally responsive where she/he can utilizing materials with illustrations, engage students in practices, and teach values that include all students from different backgrounds. By so doing, teachers fulfil their responsibility towards all their students.

Self-reflection can act as an important personal dimension for the teachers, by honestly examining one's attitude and belief about oneself and others. This will help the teachers to understand their own uniqueness and also the biases which have impacted their value system. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers have a great influence over the students and so their values impact the relationships with students and their families, teachers must try to overcome their negative feelings towards any cultural, language, or ethnic group. Teachers are unaware and are ignorant to the notion that their values might reflect prejudices or even racism towards certain groups. When teachers are able to rid themselves of such biases, they help to create an environment of trust and acceptance for students and their families, resulting in greater opportunity for student success.

Culturally responsive is an interesting pedagogy where the teacher is a facilitator and a learner. One which is characterized by teachers who values and understands others diversities and are committed to cultural competence.

6. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES FOR BECOMING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHER

Teachers have many responsibilities on their shoulders but one of the most important responsibility lies on their shoulders is 'valuing diversities'. For this many strategies or approaches can be used by the teachers for addressing diversities:

- The first and foremost thing is, the teacher should have patience to know the students background, their interest areas and the learning styles they are comfortable with, this will help the teacher to create a conducive environment where all the students will assimilate with each other.
- Various opportunities must be provided to the students by organizing team work in which the students will be able to find out the weaknesses and strength of different students and also learn respect each others individuality
- Teachers should welcome people from different backgrounds into the classroom so that they can share their experiences with students which will further help students to learn about different customs and beliefs and see various personalities as their role model.
- 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.
- Further, by learning about other groups, teachers begin to see differences between their own values and those of other groups. To learn about the histories of diverse groups, particularly from their perspectives, teachers can read literature written by those particular groups as well as personally interact with members of those groups.
- Teachers should take action against racial bullying, teasing and other such behaviours that makes the students uncomfortable in the classroom.
- Teachers need to understand the importance of learning about various approaches to teach students from diverse backgrounds. Reading about many successful teachers who managed to teach diverse groups in a beautiful manner.
- Teachers must appreciate the differences and should not be biased towards any community or praise a culture more than the other culture. Teacher should not give importance to her own values more than that of the students.
- Also, the teacher can act as a bridge between the institution and the students as to cover the loopholes in the curriculum which might not be meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

- Teachers can celebrate different diversities in the classroom by acknowledging it also this will help the teacher to connect to the student's parents as well as their communities.

7. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Promoting diversity is a goal, but actually achieving this goal in the day-to-day classroom is often hard to do, especially when the teacher may have limited background knowledge in relation to the given topic or may disagree with the practices of a group. Such topics can result in discomfort, and, as a result, may be minimized or avoided. The challenge of having a narrow understanding of cultures and assets of the students and communities they serve, which also results in a potential disconnect and decreased likelihood of embracing this framework. When teachers are not familiar or do not have experience with people who are different from themselves, they may perceive difference as less valuable or deficient.

In addition, when access to resources or pedagogical strategies is limited or teachers do not know where to find them, they may not have information, materials, or knowledge they need to facilitate a diverse, representative, and inclusive curriculum. Since culturally responsive teaching encourages teachers to position themselves as both facilitators and learners, and the challenges highlighted consistently connect to a need for increased exposure, information, and resources, strategies to help navigate these existing challenges are not only available, but are also an expected component of the culturally responsive learning process.

8. STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Teachers should establish a classroom expectation where all students are expected to participate and employ strategies to encourage participation of multiple voices in discussion. Strategies such as asking open-ended questions, accountable talk, modelling effective conversations

Team building activities can be used to foster positive relationships and teachers need to scaffold content and model the process to encourage an environment where students feel safe to take risks and actively engage in rigorous learning.

Further exploring the idea of enhanced engagement, participants emphasized the need to tailor learning to students' interests by incorporating various cultures into the curriculum and designing lessons that are inclusive, representative, celebrate diversity, and encourage questions about difference. Teachers must reflect on the texts, resources, supplementary materials, and learning activities they are using and how those resources serve to represent (or not represent) and include (or exclude) the students in their classrooms. If district adopted or school-provided resources are not representative, participants asserted it is the responsibility of the teacher to seek and incorporate inclusive supplementary materials.

9. CONCLUSION

Though there are many issues and challenges in implementation of the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy but at present it has become the need of the hour. Previously the education was focused to a limited group with one culture or background like in the Buddhist education system or say the Muslim education system but at present when more and more children are brought under one roof for education it has become important for the teachers to make the students comfortable with the educational environment and pedagogy so that no child is felt left out in the class. It is also important that the child feels that he or she is a part of the class to actually enjoy his learning. So, the greater burden lies on the shoulders of the teacher to first become culturally responsive then take initiatives for the culturally responsive teaching.

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