
“MANAGING THE CULTURALLY AND SOCIALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM BY THE TEACHER”

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ABSTRACT

India is a socially and culturally diversified country where children come to school from different backgrounds. The home culture of the students differs from the mainstreamed culture of the school. Here it becomes very important for the teachers to understand the differences. Also, how can the teachers take advantage of student’s cultural traits to improve classroom management, student performance, and school-parent relations? In the present paper, an effort has been made to see, how the teacher should manage the diverse classrooms. Some strategies has been suggested which can be incorporated by the teachers to manage the classroom. Also, an attempt has been made to understand why is it important for teachers to make their expectations explicit to students, especially when their students are not from mainstream cultural groups and how can teachers act as cultural brokers in these situations.

Key words:-Diverse, Socially & Culturally Different, Culture, Mainstream

We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion. :- Max de Pree

Introduction:-

Today the mounting number of learners from diverse backgrounds entering classrooms has reinforced the importance of making schools more inclusive. With a greater variation in the talents, and social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds of the learners, the class-room in India faces a challenge to use this diversity constructively in order to democratize the teaching-learning processes and practices, and achieve the larger goals of social justice.

In this context the agenda of “inclusive education” has gained importance. There has been a further impetus with the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The implementation of this Act will be considered successful only if it addresses the issue of making the children of marginalized communities “visible” within the four walls of the classroom. Many of these children, across the country come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities; ethnic and religious minorities, economically weaker sections (EWS), children of these communities are enrolled in school, they face the danger of dropping out. Many of them live in extremely vulnerable socio-economic conditions and face a serious threat to their universal rights, such as a school education. From a learner’s point of view, RTE, 2009 provides a legal framework to make school admission, attendance and completion compulsory. With physical access taken care of to a greater extent, it is no longer enough to talk merely about provision of universal access. Rather, the growing importance is to make school education free of anxiety, fear and stress for the diverse learners. In this context, the quality of teaching-learning practices and processes

has attracted the attention of all the stakeholders of elementary education. It is now a widely recognized fact that evident achievement gaps exist between the children of marginalized and non-marginalized communities. At the very heart of the issue that has occupied recent debates and discussion about making school education “stress free” and “child friendly” is the teacher and teaching practices (GOI, 2009, p. 9).

In fact, in recent decades, various studies, reports and documents have revealed that in the classroom, curriculum delivery and pedagogy in contemporary mainstream government schools in India, children especially those belonging to the marginalized communities- are subjected to various forms of discrimination and humiliation which severely affects their self-respects and self confidence. Like for example, in various government schools, it can be seen that the children among themselves, call each others with their caste .like for example, in a classroom, the cleaning and booming the class is done by the child belonging from the disadvantage section in most of the situations and the child from upper class assists the teacher in teaching activities. Also, children from upper class usually sit at the first bench in the class and those from the disadvantage section preferably sit at the back. Various researches proves that children narrate painful stories of their experiences in the classroom and shown their resentment to this, as well as towards the teachers (*Probe Report*, 1999; *Nambissan*, 2001; *Govinda*, (2002). It was reported that, some children have undergone violent experience inflicted by teachers as well as their classmates from dominant castes. A study of schools in Uttar Pradesh by *Dreze and Gazdar* (1996) reported that teachers refused to touch SC children. They were subjected to verbal abuse and physical punishment by teachers, and were frequently beaten by their upper-caste classmates.

Rationale of the study:-

Various studies and researches advocate that there is a need of sensitizing the issue and there should be debates and discussions so that the issue can be well understood by the stakeholders. Merely the government programs and policies can't resolve this issue. We need to have a child friendly teaching and learning in the classroom for every child irrespective of his or her caste class gender or religion. If we see our curriculum framework, i.e. (NCF), 2005, it has attempted to address the issue of “child-friendly” teaching-learning. It notes the fact that learning has become a burden for the children, causing immense stress to them and their parents, which are evidenced by the deep distortion in educational aims and quality. It makes a series of observations and suggestions about pedagogy, curriculum, teaching-learning material, and class-room and school environments. Along with it, it notes that: Children's voice and experiences don't find expression in the classroom. The curriculum must enable children to find their voices, nurture their curiosity to do things, to ask pursue investigations, sharing and integrating their experiences with school knowledge—rather than their ability to reproduce textual knowledge. NCF, 2005 thus recommends a child-centered pedagogy giving primacy to children's experiences, their voices and their active participation. Here the point to be highlighted is nowhere it talks about a particular caste or religion. However, the curriculum frame-work also observes that: This perspective on the learner may sound “obvious” but, in fact, many teachers, evaluators and textbook writers still lack the conviction that this can become a reality. It also observes that many schools now have large numbers of first generation learners whose parents cannot provide them direct support in their schooling, and therefore, the pedagogy must be reoriented to meet their schooling needs. So there is a need to initiate discussion on this topic and to come up with some alternative ways for the teachers, suggesting that how they can manage the socially and culturally diverse classroom situations.

In fact, the necessity to address teacher-based practices in the changed circumstances of elementary education in India has been even more strongly emphasized in the recently released National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009). Along with recognizing the issues to be addressed in the context of teacher education reform, the document stresses an urgency to provide due emphasis on developing reflective teachers with positive attitudes, values

And perspectives: developing teacher education curricula on the basis of the changing requirements of time; and develop skills in the art of teaching. Despite such serious concerns it is still a fact that children belonging to marginalized communities and girl children have persistently “under-achieved” in school. In fact, not only in India but also at the global level, current strategies of educating children of marginalized communities have been severely questioned (UNESCO, 2003).

Contemporary Debates for Managing the Diversity in Classrooms;-

A significant aspect worth mentioning here is that much of the current debate on the underachievement of children of marginalized communities takes place at a level that treats the problem as a “technical issue”. That is to say, the current debate treats the historical underachievement of children of marginalized communities as being caused by faulty and inadequate teaching-learning practices and processes. It is assumed that certain sections in our society were discriminated for certain time period and hence they face the problem of competing with the children who belong to the oppressor class of the society. However, posing the problem in such a manner means that the only possible solution considered is the “right teaching methods” or finding the ‘best practices’. This is a gross misrecognition of the issue and has compounded the problem further. It’s not only the teaching practices, not only the classroom practices, and the change in curriculum which can bring the change or can solve the problem. It’s the combination of various form of efforts done jointly to cope up with this problem. But as a result, considerable time has already been wasted in crying out for a bagful of pedagogic tricks. Perhaps we have only scratched the surface of a far more complex and deep-rooted problem.

Strategies to be followed by the teachers to manage Culturally Diverse Classroom:-

As the population in the schools grows, teachers need to embrace and welcome cultural diversity into their classrooms. Student populations in India today often reflect the spectrum of culture, language, and religion found throughout the world. While cultural differences among students can occasionally create challenges in the classroom, they should be viewed as opportunities to create positive, trusting relationships. So, here are a series of tips on managing a culturally diverse classroom.

The teacher can Educate and Sensitize himself to Cultural Diversity:-

The teacher must define himself how he feels about the diversity in the classroom. Do his feelings affect the way he teaches in positive or negative ways? What can he do to overcome?

Deeply held biases that he may have? Being aware of his own behaviors and motivations is the first step in successfully managing a culturally diverse classroom. While it is recognized that most people hold biases at some level, teachers who can replace these biases with an appreciation and a tolerance for culturally different students, greatly increases the likelihood for ‘student’s success. They also provide a model for acceptance to other teachers and students.

The teacher can Celebrate Cultural Differences in the Classroom:-

The teacher should not expect students to adopt mainstream cultural behaviors overnight or, possibly, at all. Instead, teachers should recognize that when a student's culture is valued, it can have a positive effect on performance. Students who are willing to share their culture should be encouraged to do so in ways that contribute to the curriculum. This can help create a community of learners in the classroom, where differences become strengths.

The teacher can Learn About the Cultures in the Classroom:-

The teacher should take time to learn all he can about the cultures of the students in his class. The behaviors that teachers may automatically expect may not be what a student has learned at home. For example, in some cultures, students don't make eye contact with figures of authority. In others, even the slightest physical contact, such as a handshake, is strictly taboo between members of the opposite gender who are not married or related. Behavior that might be construed as cheating could be a student's cultural expression of helpfulness. Behaviors are shaped by cultures. A teacher must learn all that he can before correcting or disciplining a student.

The teacher must Consider Students' Cultural Needs First:-

The teacher should treat all students with fairness and dignity. He must evaluate his teaching style, expectations, assessment practices, handouts, and classroom environment in terms of cultural diversity. He must see that, what modifications are necessary to support all learners? What are the different learning styles in the classroom and should give consideration to the various holidays students in the class may celebrate before scheduling special events or assignments.

The teacher must learn to Communicate with Culturally Diverse Parents:-

The teacher should find out what he needs to know to be a culturally competent communicator. He must remember to respect the standard modes of communication between parents and teachers in other cultures. The home culture of the parent often dictates the acceptable forms of communication between parents and teachers. A teacher should regularly communicate with all parents with information regarding student expectations, school policies and procedures, and methods to have questions answered. Solicit feedback from parents regarding student attitudes and perceptions about the class. The teacher should be consistent, supportive, and honest with them.

Conclusions:-

The challenges of inclusive classrooms and diversity discussed above appear formidable, especially because the mainstream policy and practice in the elementary education sector have yet to adequately recognize and focus attention on them. On the other hand, it is fortunate that during the recent decades, these issues and concerns have started getting the attention of a section of policymakers and practitioners. Various innovative experiments in school reforms have also been taken up by civil society organizations as well as in the government sector in different parts of the country. These experiments have attempted curriculum design, development of teaching-learning methods and materials, and teacher development with child-centered inclusive perspectives. These have shown encouraging results in terms of the learning achievement of children from diverse backgrounds. For instance, the Loreto Day

School in Sealdah, West Bengal uses a variety of teaching and learning methods to ensure that all children can learn intelligently in the classroom. Activity based learning methods and the uses of local resources are emphasized. The school is sensitive to the children's different cultures and promotes appreciation and pride for each one. It recognizes the injustices poor children are subjected to and is flexible enough to give them first priority. The school is deeply concerned about the dignity of every child and carefully monitors all existing structures, eliminating or re-orienting those which could make a child feel inferior. The curriculum encourages the affluent children to mingle with children from weaker section of society and develop relationships.

This exposes them to a variety of life experiences that children from diverse backgrounds bring from their homes or from the streets. *Care India* has taken initiatives to promote inclusive and equitable classrooms in a few schools in Uttar Pradesh. In the area of teacher training, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has developed and implemented an innovative four-day training model, "Rupantar", for primary school teachers in the tribal areas of Orissa. The model focuses on attitudinal training of teachers and their sensitization to tribal language, culture and knowledge systems. In the government sector, the Activity Based Learning (ABL) programme introduced by SSA in the primary schools of Tamil Nadu has received considerable acclaim in recent times for its comprehensive and holistic approach in enhancing the quality of education at the school level. The ABL methodology was introduced in response to the poor learning levels amongst children and uninteresting classroom processes. The most notable feature of the reform is its focus on changing classrooms, in terms of methodology, the role of teachers, classroom organization and classroom environment as a whole. The innovative experiments initiated in different parts of the country present a silver lining to the clouds. The positive and critical awareness from these initiatives need to be documented, shared and widely disseminated, and a perspective and strategy needs to be developed to address the challenges of inclusive classrooms and diversity.

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