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## **MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT AND PRE SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

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### **Abstract**

Diversity in cultures has become the prominent feature of 21st century. The effect of this feature can be observed in classroom environment where the teacher has students having multicultural backgrounds. Therefore, there is need to train prospective teachers for teaching in diverse/multicultural classroom. They are not prepared for coming in contact with different cultures than the sheltered one many of them have lived in. They are not prepared for the different needs possessed by today's multicultural student population. In this paper, we discuss not just the problems that arise due to this issue. We also discuss ways to remedy these problems, starting with pre-service teacher education programs and ending with these prospective teachers themselves.

**Keywords:** Classroom Environment; Multicultural Background; Multicultural Classroom; Pre Service Teacher Education Programme; Prospective Teachers.

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### **1. Introduction**

The diversity has become the prominent feature of 21st century and this feature has gained more importance due to advancement of information communication technologies (ICT) and scientific developments that has made the whole world a global village. The effect of this feature can be observed in classroom environment. At present even in one classroom there may be cultural diversity. In such an environment there is need that to prepare prospective teachers in teaching diverse classroom. In current scenario of the world there is need to foster unity and multicultural understanding among the people within a country. Creating awareness and understanding about multicultural has become an essential part of current education system. Diversity or Multicultural education describes a system of instruction that attempts to foster cultural pluralism and acknowledges the differences between races and cultures.

Multicultural classroom denotes where there are students of various cultures and the teacher has to teach them in the same classroom. Sometimes multicultural is also named as diversity of cultures in classroom. In such an environment where there are students of multicultural backgrounds, there are needed some specific methods of teaching as well as techniques of dealing and interaction with students having multicultural backgrounds. In current scenario in India there is dire need to understand culture of different parts of the country and to promote trusts, harmony and unity in cultural diversity.

It addresses the educational needs of a society that contains more than one set of traditions, which is a mixture of many cultures. There can be found various differences among students of a classroom like difference in language, culture, race, religion, gender, learning styles, age, individuals' needs, and regional and social class background. The best practice for diverse classroom teaching is realizing teachers' training need in recognizing their students as separate individuals and respect their cultural values and accepting them with their own identity. Hauptman and Hirji, (1999) are of the opinion that when different functional groups are affiliated to multiple organizations, communication is complex due to relatively high cognitive and cultural differences, geographic distances, diverging interests, and manifold interdependent relationships.

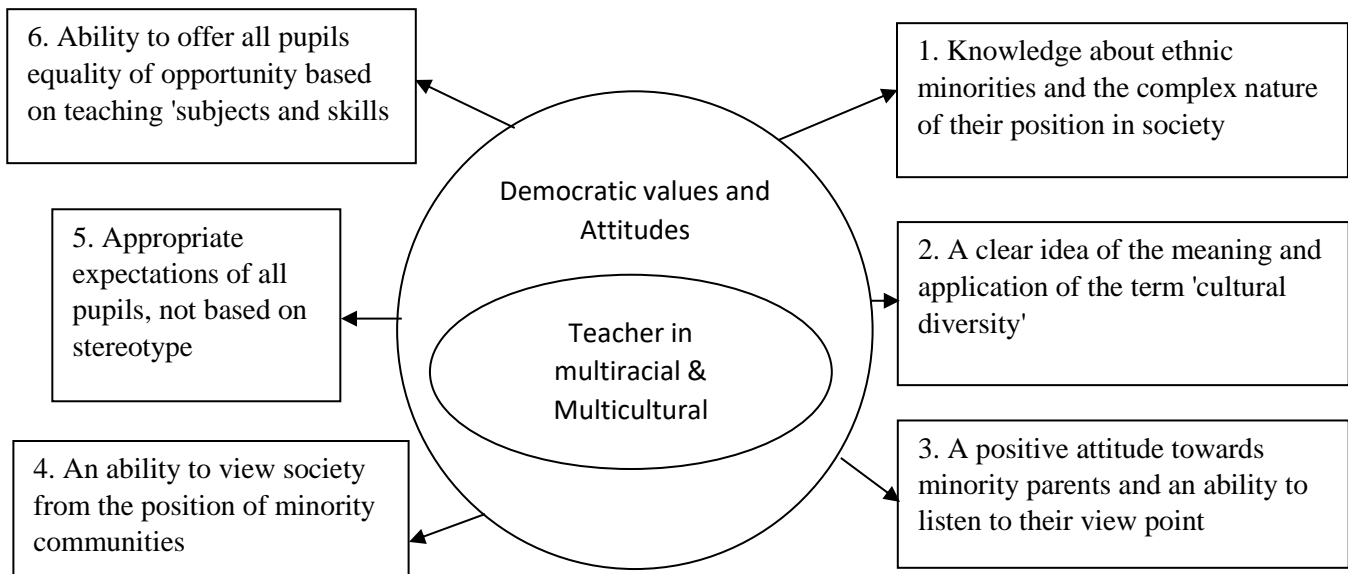
Gloria (1994) inferred from his study that teachers who engage in culturally responses practices- recognizing and valuing the racial and ethnic background of their students, creating vibrant learning communities characterized by mutual respect and collaboration and having a passion for knowledge- can produce great results.

"Today we prefer the "salad bowl" metaphor to think about cultural pluralism; a situation where in each ingredient is valued for itself but also binds with others to make something different (Arends p. 61, 2007)". Given that "there is no universal construction of a multiculturalism course that is perfect for achieving all goals for all students" (Henry, 2003, p. 26), finding a way to build a multicultural foundation for courses across the disciplines may be a better aim for faculty in higher education institutions. Educators should critically reflect on their understanding of multicultural education and their position among the diversity of the student community (McIntyre, 1997). The next responsibility that educators need to possess is becoming educated about their students. In a study conducted by Allen (2000), one participant stated that "it is important for teachers to be educated about their students and their backgrounds and to promote appreciation and respect for different cultures, races, and religions" (p. 9).

Nagy, (2000) explains diversity that it is not separating cultures by saying "us" and "them" when discussing different ethnicities or different cultural groups. Multicultural-oriented faculty should display inclusive and openness to helping all students. "College students who perceive their professors to be highly supportive of questioning are more likely to be motivated internally and to use strategies typical of self-directed learners" (Locke & Kiselica, 1999, p. 82). "Creative teaching strategies can help the process become less threatening and more productive than traditional lecture approaches" (Locke & Kiselica, 1999, p. 85). Making use of varying multicultural teaching techniques is helpful for students of all learning styles. According to Henry, (2003, p. 26) that "there is no universal construction of a multiculturalism course that is perfect for achieving all goals for all students". Updating curriculum by incorporating race,

gender, and multicultural perspectives can be beneficial in defining the classroom as a multicultural learning environment (Benms-Suter, 1993). In the article, An Ecological Perspective on Preparing Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms (Johnson, 2003), it is written that discussions of multicultural education generally center on the importance of broadening students' understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. The teacher must have following information and training for dealing with diverse students in classroom environment:

(Adapted from Banks 1981, in Tomlinson 1984:49)



In this context, the teacher is expected to be knowledgeable about the various ethnic minorities and to have an open-mind and a pleasant demeanour. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) in England outlined the qualities that courses of Education offered in Teacher training programs need to develop in trainee Teachers. These are:

- 1) To be equipped to prepare all pupils for life in a multicultural society;
- 2) To be able to teach in the multiethnic classroom; and,
- 3) To have an awareness of the issues of intercultural relations (Aurora R, in Aurora R and Duncan C: 1986: 174).

It need of the hour that teachers and researchers must promote practices and principles for teaching and treating with diverse groups of students teaching "Studies also show that educationists and teachers often differ in their views and definitions on this subject. It is rare that any two classroom teachers or education scholars will have the same definition for multicultural education. As with any dialogue on education, individuals tend to mould concepts to fit their particular focus." (Multicultural Education). Learning processes are not just to grasp and gather some information and facts and figures about certain knowledge and skills. Therefore it is essential that teachers should be trained with practical aspect of students' learning obstacles just as Gagliardi (1994) elaborates that learning obstacles can be affective, religious, cultural, logical and conceptual.

The curriculum of teacher education must have material relating to various aspects of the deprived groups of the society with the country. Likewise there must be content regarding teaching methods to diverse groups within a particular classroom environment and treating with conflicts of diverse groups of students. As stated by Bennett (1995), "to dwell on cultural differences is to foster negative prejudices and stereotypes, and that is human nature to view those who are different as inferior". Banks (1991a) notes the importance of integrating multicultural education within the teacher education curriculum. In her view an effective teacher education policy for the 21st century must include as a major focus the education of all teachers, including teachers of color, in ways that will help them receive the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work effectively with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups."

## **2. Need of Addressing Nature of School Diversity in Pre Service Teacher Training Programme**

Multicultural education means to have extensive inspection of all factors relating to environment of school. According to Gorski, (1995) the factors relating to school environment are the followings:

- The experiences of students must be brought to the fore in the classroom, making learning more active, interactive, and engaging.
- Traditional teaching approaches and pedagogical models must be deconstructed to examine how they are contributing to and supporting institutional systems of oppression.
- Known oppressive practices like tracking (even if informal) must be exposed and critically examined.
- All aspects of teaching and learning in schools must be refocused on, and rededicated to, the students themselves instead of standardized test scores and school rankings.
- Emphasis should be put on critical and creative thinking, learning skills, and deep social awareness as well as facts and figures.
- Pedagogy must provide all students with equal potential to reach their potential as learners. Pedagogy must be flexible enough to allow for the diversity of learning styles present in every classroom.

All the above –mentioned aspects of schooling need to be incorporated in the curriculum of pre-service programs of teachers for providing them practical training about diverse aspects of students. The major thing is that we must train prospective teachers in the ways of finding how to promote similarities among different aspects cultural diversity and not to promote any single aspects of culture and promotion of culture of the nation must be horizontal within a particular society. In spite of making any particular group to be typical we must provide prospective teachers training in how to promote and maintain unity amongst multi groups of culture. Researches found that a school may unwittingly contribute to student aggression through inappropriate classroom placement, irrelevant instruction, inconsistent management, overcrowded classrooms, rigid behavioural demands, or insensitivity to student diversity (Gable, Manning, and Bullock, 1997; Gable and Van Acker, 2000).

Van Acker, Grant, and Henry (1996) echo this sentiment when they state, "teachers require information on their pattern of interaction with individual students. Only then would differential

treatment of specific students become evident” (p. 332). Zeichner (1993) has identified some key elements of effective teacher education for diversity that provide the organizational framework for "Educating Teachers for Diversity." These elements are as follows:

- **Element 1:** Pre-service education students are helped to develop a clearer sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities.
- **Elements 2 and 3:** Pre-service education students are helped to examine their attitudes toward other ethno cultural groups. They are taught about the dynamics of prejudice and racism and how to deal with them in the classroom.
- **Element 4:** Pre-service education students are taught about the dynamics of privilege and economic oppression and about school practices that contribute to the reproduction of societal inequalities.
- **Element 5:** The teacher education curriculum addresses the histories and contributions of various ethno cultural groups.
- **Element 6:** Pre-service education students are given information about the characteristics and learning styles of various groups and individuals. They are taught about the limitations of this information.
- **Element 7:** The teacher education curriculum gives much attention to socio-cultural research knowledge about the relationships among language, culture, and learning.
- **Element 8:** Pre-service education students are taught various procedures by which they can gain information about the communities represented in their classrooms.
- **Elements 9 and 10:** Pre-service education students are taught how to assess the relationships between the methods they use in the classroom and the preferred learning and interaction styles in their students' homes and communities. They are taught how to use various instructional strategies and assessment procedures sensitive to cultural and linguistic variations, and how to adapt classroom instruction and assessment to accommodate the cultural resources that their students bring to school.
- **Element 11:** Pre-service education students are exposed to examples of the successful teaching of ethnic- and language-minority students.
- **Element 12:** Pre-service education programs provide both intellectual challenge and social support.

Lipman (1996) observes as cited in Gibson (2004) that often traditional pre-service multicultural training focuses on disseminating cultural knowledge and, at the same time, avoiding a discussion about mainstream cultural attitudes and beliefs. Gibson (2004) is of the view that pre-service teachers are to learn proper classroom management and instruction techniques (Sheets, 1996) and as related to issues of cultural diversity. Multicultural education for pre-service teachers involves effective teaching skills with sensitivity toward cultural diversity.

Generally in teacher education curriculum we do find the elements of individual differences of different nature like mental, social, physical differences, etc. but the most important factor that has not been given proper consideration in current teacher training curriculum is diversity among students belonging to different classes of cultures.

### 3. Curriculum and Instruction in Teacher Preparation Programs

Reforming the curriculum of the teacher education program is essential to preparing teacher for cultural diversity. It is my observation that the curricula of most teacher education programs are



usually additive; ethnic heroes and cultures have been inserted into curricula without properly examining the meaning of these materials, and which have been developed largely through the eyes of mainstream scholars and historians (Banks & Banks, 1997). As a result, many programs failed to challenge and help prospective teachers self-examine their own beliefs about diversity. Another problem is the dominant cultural “habit” of avoiding and “silencing” discussion of race and racism. Ladson-Billings (1994) states: “Discussions of race and racism in education are akin to the proverbial elephant in the parlor at tea time. Everyone maybe sitting there enjoying the tea but no one wants to acknowledge the presence of a huge problem. It is as if noticing and naming it, not the elephant itself, is the problem” (p.5). She claims that the teacher educator must find ways to create disharmony and dissonance in these habits that force personal introspection, critical reflection and provoke the formation of different realizations and attitudes.

The content of pre-service teacher education courses requires careful consideration to ensure that relevant and useful information is relayed to teachers. Many factors apart from practical strategies and curriculum content are salient when educating teachers in this area. These include attitudes, cross-cultural understanding and multi-cultural awareness (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005; Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

#### **4. Issues of Instruction**

It should be noted that teacher preparation has tremendous impact on professional practice, teacher learning, and student learning. There are various instructional strategies and experiences commonly used in teacher education (for example, analysis or preparation of cases, action research projects, teacher research or other forms of practitioner inquiry, technology, construction of portfolios, community immersion, biographical/autobiographical/narrative exploration, micro-teaching, use of videotaped lessons and classroom scenes, etc.). These strategies would not be effective if they are used by those who ignore the differences between students, are insensitive to cultural diversity, and students’ needs. Simply put, the attitudes of educators and teachers need to be examined to validate culturally responsive instruction.

#### **5. Cultural Immersion**

According to Carroll (1990) and Gay (1993), pre-teachers need to be taught to become changing agents with skills for the following: (1) critical self-analysis, (2) self-reflection and (3) understanding culture. In addition, the authors believe that teachers must develop strategies for teaching both minority and mainstream students. To do this, teachers may need to be immersed in other cultures (Follo, Hoerr & Vorheis-Sargent, 2002). Immersion could be made a part of internships, practica and, or other field-based experiences (Clark et al., 1996; Cannella & Reiff, 1994 on Englert, 1997; Payne, 1980; Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997; Weiner, 1993).

The connection between teacher education, school culture, and the social context of communities is central in terms of teaching for change because teacher education reform depends on school reform and school reform depends on teacher education change. The teacher education program needs to be able to provide experiences for prospective teachers that foster a critical perspective to understand and act in relation to families and communities (Grinberg & Goldfarb, 1998). Such experience will provide the future teacher with the possibility of creating meaningful linkages

between school, family, and community. Learning about the community's composition and its relationships with schools, both positive and negative, is imperative.

DeAcosta (1994) asserts that student teachers must spend time in the local community, "outside school doors" (p. 9), in order to understand and appreciate how various community organizations and agencies serve the families of the children in their elementary and secondary classroom (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998). Similarly, through his extensive work with American Indian education, Gilliland (1995) concludes, "Even though you may be an expert teacher, failure to learn the local culture can doom you to failure in the Indian community" (p. 18). She adds that community involvement is essential, enhancing mutual understanding.

Preservice teachers should be immersed in cultural learning; they should be exposed to various perspectives, which might challenge or even contrast to their beliefs and attitudes.

## **6. The Prerequisites of Multicultural Teacher Education Programs**

Teacher education programs must prepare all teachers, majority or minority, to provide quality education for all students. Olstad, Foster, and Wyman (1983) indicated that teachers' lacking multicultural education are inadequately prepared for the reality of a pluralistic society and tend to have low expectations for minority children. Teacher educators must ask themselves to what degree their teacher preparation programs (a) facilitate increased cultural self-awareness, (b) cultivate appreciation of diversity, (c) increase cultural competency, and (d) prepare teachers to work effectively with a variety of students and parents, to the extent that education programs achieve these ends, to that extent do they prepare culturally competent teachers? (p. 138)

Some argue that teacher education students should acquire the dispositions, attitudes, and knowledge in their liberal arts courses, but Melnick, Gomez, and Price (1990) report that they receive little, if anything, there. Neither is special "multicultural education" courses developed around presentations about particular racial and ethnic groups which facilitates in-depth student understanding. Even worse, these courses or programs, though initiated by the best intention of teacher educators, strengthen preservice teachers' beliefs that students of color and poverty cannot learn (McDiarmid & Price, 1990). Therefore, preservice multicultural education is a necessity. It is not a matter of individual preference, curricular appendage, or pedagogical whim. Neither should it be merely an added-on course after providing for the necessary knowledge and skills. Multicultural education is not simply an ethnic issue; it is everyone's issue, for teaching is a multicultural experience.

A teacher preparation program has to incorporate two important components: a theoretical element and a practical element (Barber, 1995; Davies & Ferguson, 1997; Drever & Cope, 1999). The theoretical element refers to the various dimensions of the craft of teaching that allow students to develop the ideas, knowledge, and dispositions that enrich the learning opportunities for all students. Teachers-to-be should be actually engaged in responsible teaching; be able to observe star teachers in action; have a mentor who is a star teacher coaching them; be part of a team; participate in a network coping with a highly bureaucratized system; be students of their communities; and continually be faced with problems that cause them to reshape their ideology.

Some scholars (for example see Zeichner et al., 1998; McCaleb, 1998; Gay, 1993; Dottin, 1984; Darling-Hammond et al., 1999) have identified some key elements for multicultural teacher education. Instead of giving the characteristics of an exemplary teacher education for diversity, the researcher propose, based on the discussion above, the following components for consideration.

The entire climate and culture of department, schools, or colleges of education and cooperating schools radiate a consistent, pervasive, and comprehensive appreciation for and promotion of cultural diversity. The commitment to multiculturalism is conveyed through lecture series, awards presentations, and criteria used to identify accomplishments of students, faculty, and staff deserving distinguished recognition (Zeichner et al., 1998). Institutions must also continue to support faculty development programs to assist faulty members in gaining the knowledge and expertise to teach from multicultural perspectives (Bulter & Schmitz, 1992).

Reflection should be encouraged in teacher preparation. Through reflections on prior experience, prospective teachers can focus on change, development and growth. The combination of reflection and reframe can bring prospective teachers to an understanding of their own biases as well as an understanding of cultural differences. Students are helped to develop a clearer sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities. Student teaching (1) provides opportunity for pre-service teachers to gain insight into their personal beliefs, as they relate to multiculturalism; (2) associates attitude to classroom performance; (3) articulates experiences pertaining to diversity.

- Students are helped to examine their attitudes toward other ethnocultural groups. Through reflections of prior experience, preservice teachers can focus on change, development and growth. Students learn critical thinking through discussion of mainstream ideology, and are taught about the dynamics of prejudice and racism and about how to deal with them in the classroom. Students are taught about the dynamics of privilege and economic oppression and about school practices that contribute to the reproduction of societal inequalities.
- Teacher education program should be able to provide various cultural materials for prospective teachers. They are given opportunity to understand and appreciate other cultures, and information about the characteristics and learning styles of various groups and individuals and are taught about the limitations of this information. In addition, students are taught various procedures by which they can gain information about the communities represented in their classrooms.
- Students are taught how to assess the relationships between the methods they use in the classroom and the preferred learning and interaction styles in their students' homes and communities. Students are taught how to use various instructional strategies and assessment procedures sensitive to cultural and linguistic variations and how to adapt classroom instruction and assessment to accommodate the cultural resources that their students bring to school.
- School and community field experiences in a variety of cultural settings that can provide all prospective teachers with opportunities to develop greater intercultural teaching competence are important (Zeichner, 1993). Students complete community field experiences with adults and/or children of other ethnocultural groups with guided reflections. Students complete practicum and/or student teaching experiences in schools



serving ethnic- and language-minority students. Students are encouraged to live and teach in diverse community.

A high quality teacher for the culturally diverse classroom is beyond what we usually expect for a good teacher does. He or she has appropriately high standards and expectations for their students. When their pupils do not initially master the materials, these teachers do not ascribe blame on external factors, such as the child's parents or previous teachers nor do they impute negative characteristics to the child, such as an inability or unwillingness to learn. Instead, they restructure the learning activities, assuming that the child has not yet mastered the instructional objectives.

Vavrus (2002) suggests that teacher education programs play a crucial role in determining teachers' attitudes toward diversity and the accommodation of that diversity within their teaching. a high quality teacher education for diversity should equip its preservice teacher with the abilities of "understanding students' cultural backgrounds, interests, skills, and abilities as they apply across a range of learning domains and /or subject areas; understanding students' motivations and their interests in specific class content; clarifying and articulating the performance outcomes expected of pupils; and planning instruction for individuals or groups of students" (Standards for Teacher Competence in the Educational Assessment of Students, 1989, p. 2).

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