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GRT CHALLENGES OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION



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Abstract: In our society many sects of population strive each day for something but how many of us actually get what we want? Does our society, our communities really provide us the right track or opportunity that we deserve? In today's competitive world there's a cut throat competition and slowly and gradually we humans are becoming insensitive everyday as we are focusing on our desires, our goals and most importantly on our life. In such situation the educational institution is the only hope left with us which can help to preserve the sensitivity and innocence of the future generations. In classrooms, the child first time learns to know people other than his family and slowly learn that how much they differ from his own family. As we know that classroom is the best place to study variety of individual personality's altogether under one roof therefore it can be stated that school plays a vital role in making a good understanding society and its members. On the other hand if we think it over seriously this positive aspect if not catered carefully can lead to many problems. As the students comes from varied backgrounds and hence totally differ in not only personalities but in cultures, beliefs and traditions. So, it becomes a little tricky on the part of the teacher to very well understand the concept of Multiculturalism and make it a point to properly educate the students about the basic beliefs and goals of Multicultural Education.

Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values that affirm cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world. There are currently two viewpoints or perspectives of multicultural education in the United States, namely:

The assimilation or "melting-pot" perspective: The assimilation perspective of multicultural education is that micro cultures must give up their original culture and identities in order to blend in or become absorbed into the predominant Anglo-Western European culture.

The pluralism or "global" perspective: The global perspective is that micro cultures can retain many of their traditions such as language, religion, and social customs while adopting many of the aspects of the predominant Anglo-Western culture. The global perspective of multicultural education recognizes cultural pluralism as an ideal and healthy state in any productive society and promotes equity and respect among the existing cultural groups. This principle allows the global perspective of multicultural education to extend beyond equity pedagogy as the only way to counteract problems that have been created by the assimilation perspective.

Multicultural education is a set of strategies and materials in U.S. education that were developed to assist teachers to respond to the many issues created by rapidly changing demographics of their students. It provides students knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups.

Recognizing that equality and equity are not the same thing, multicultural education attempts to offer all students an equitable educational opportunity, while at the same time, encouraging students to critique society in the interest of social justice. Therefore this paper is an attempt to present the basic concept of Multicultural Education and its different faces mainly focusing on the challenges & issues which are acting as hindrance in the development & implementation of this concept at global scenario.

Key words: Multicultural Education, Equality, Equity, Pedagogy, Culture, Society, Strategies, Diverse Groups.

INTRODUCTION:

What is MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION?

Multicultural education is a philosophical concept built on the ideals of:
freedom,
justice,
equality,
equity, and

human dignity

Multicultural education attempts to offer all students an equitable educational opportunity, while at the same time, encouraging students to critique society in the interest of social justice.

According to Banks and Banks (1995), "Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging

discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good."

"Multicultural education not only draws content, concepts, paradigms, and theories from specialized interdisciplinary fields such as ethnic studies and women studies (and from history and the social and behavioral sciences), it also interrogates, challenges, and reinterprets content, concepts, and paradigms from the established disciplines. Multicultural education applies content from these fields and disciplines to pedagogy and curriculum development in educational settings.

Therefore, multicultural education may be defined as, "a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies."

Multicultural education is a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. It helps the students to develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups. Thus, school curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguisticism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia.

Multicultural education advocates the belief that students and their life histories and experiences should be placed at the center of the teaching and learning process and that pedagogy should occur in a context that is familiar to students and that addresses multiple ways of thinking. In addition, teachers and students must critically analyze oppression and power relations in their communities, society and the world.

Basically, Multicultural education is a set of strategies and materials in U.S. education that were developed to assist teachers to respond to the many issues created by rapidly changing demographics of their students. It provides students knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups.

On the basis of above definitions we can state that Multicultural Education:

Affirms the need to prepare student for their responsibilities in an interdependent world.

Recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society.

Values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect.

Challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice.

Dimensions of MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION:

1)Content integration: Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, generalizations, and issues within their subject areas or disciplines.

2)The knowledge construction process: The knowledge construction process describes how teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the biases, frames of reference, and perspectives within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it. Students also learn how to build knowledge themselves in this dimension.

3)Prejudice reduction: Prejudice reduction describes lessons and activities used by teachers to help students to develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Research indicates that children come to school with many negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about different racial and ethnic groups. Research also indicates that lessons, units, and teaching materials that include content about different racial and ethnic groups can help students to develop more positive intergroup attitudes if certain conditions exist in the teaching situation (Banks, 1995). These conditions include positive images of the ethnic groups in the materials and the use of multiethnic materials in a consistent and sequential way.

4)An Equity pedagogy: An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, and social-class groups (Banks & Banks, 1995). Research indicates that the academic achievement of African American and Mexican American students is increased when cooperative teaching activities and strategies, rather than competitive ones, are used in instruction (Aronson & Gonzalez, 1988). Cooperative learning activities also help all students, including middle-class White students, to develop more positive racial attitudes. However, to attain these positive outcomes, cooperative learning activities must have several important characteristics (Allport, 1954). The students from different racial and ethnic groups must feel that they have equal status in intergroup interactions, teachers and administrators must value and support cross-racial interactions, and students from different racial groups must work together in teams to pursue common goals.

5)An empowering school culture and social structure: An empowering school culture and social structure is created when the culture and organization of the school are transformed in ways that enable students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups to experience equality and equal status. The implementation of this dimension requires that the total environment of the school be reformed, including the attitudes, beliefs, and action of teachers and administrators, the curriculum and course of study, assessment and testing procedures, and the styles and strategies used by teachers.

Advantages of Multicultural Education:

- 1) This process can have a notable impact on creating cohesion in both the classroom and the school
- 2) In a multicultural environment, students, teachers, and other educators learn to accept people from different backgrounds.
- 3) The students may not come from a diverse range of backgrounds, but they learn about other cultures. Teachers find creative ways to make learning about other cultures more engaging. They can eat food, sing songs and play games from a country while learning about its history. The goal is not to simply teach them facts but also to give students a desire to connect with people from other cultures and places.
- 4) Eradicating racism and prejudice and building as much interaction between all diverse cultures is one of the most important advantages of multicultural education. With an integrated curriculum, administrative support, training in regards to ignorance and personal detachment, fear could essentially be reduced on both students and teachers.
- 5) Teaching with a multicultural perspective encourages appreciation and understanding of other cultures as well as one's own. Teaching with this perspective promotes the child's sense of the uniqueness of his own culture as a positive characteristic and enables the child to accept the uniqueness of the cultures of others.
- 6) With multicultural education, learners may develop a racial tolerance though with time, they become more comfortable expressing and conversing and working with one another.
- 7) The process of multicultural education put in motion an emotional cascade that enlightens and empowers each student to fight against the process of oppression that has become a hegemonized part of social discourse.
- 8) The process of multicultural education when applied can have significant impacts not only on the development of education in a classroom but also on the evolution of the individual student toward a greater understanding of how education fits into the larger context of social discourse. Through this process, the student becomes more than just a warehouse of facts and figures; rather the student becomes a dynamic learner capable of problem-solving and decision-making.
- 9) The uses of reading materials that contain multicultural themes have a positive impact for engaging older students. "Novels have much potential for engaging high school students in reading at a time when a myriad of competing interests vie for their attention and time" (Bean, Cantu'Valerio, Senior, and White, 32). Clearly, what this implies is that the process of multicultural education can have notable impacts on the specific with which students engage. By utilizing these materials in the classroom, educators can improve the quality and context of information that is provided to their students. In this context, the importance of the materials utilized provides a means for educators to enhance the learning experiences of all students.
- 10) As the process of multiculturalism begins to infiltrate the classroom and the school, educators are better poised to establish critical links between the school, the community and parents. In this context, the utilization of multicultural

education is aimed toward the latter development of the school as an integral part of the larger community. When this process is successful, it can improve the overall operation of the school and the quality of education that is provided to all students. Mary Louise Pratt has observed that when the community is able to work together toward achieving a common goal, differences that exist among individuals can be put aside for the larger imperative of community improvement (526). This is clearly what is represented in sentiments to expand the multicultural learning environment to the larger community.

Disadvantages of Multicultural Education:

- 1) A major downside is the fact that most institutions are not prepared to implement multicultural education in their classrooms. This would require a very diverse staff that is also extremely culturally competent. Educators must be aware, responsive and embracing of the diverse beliefs, perspectives and experiences. They must also be willing and ready to address issues of controversy. These issues include, but are not limited to, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, classism, ageism, etc.
- 2) This biggest disadvantage to teaching multicultural education would be the student's family. Most students have strong ties with their families and they may come from families that would disapprove of them learning about some cultures. For example, many students have parents who don't want them to because of their own feelings towards that particular culture. This is why classes like this need to be forced upon and perhaps get some cultures out of this sense of entitlement and superiority.
- 3) On a note of interest, the NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation for Teacher Education) requires teachers to complete multicultural education prior to obtaining their teaching certificate. For multicultural education to be successful teachers need to be implementing it and the problem is; they aren't. Furthermore, there have been accusations against teachers whom the students and some parents feel aren't qualified to teach children based on cultural backgrounds.
- 4) Other significant drawback is the student's resistance to the process of multicultural education. According to Garcia and Van Soest, "Facing the social and psychological consequences of injustice, however, can be difficult. Regardless of whether students have lived lives of privilege or marginalization, they may find exploration of these topics painful-and they may resist it". Also if faculty is to be able to effectively mitigate the negative ramifications that can occur as a direct result of multicultural education, instructors must be aware of the problems that can arise in this context and take necessary steps to reduce the overall resistance that may develop.
- 5) Multicultural pedagogies can also create a "false" understanding of other cultures. According to Scott, "Critics of the teaching methods associated with global education have suggested that what students are taught about different cultures is often superficial, with the emphasis on exotic differences and negative stereotypes" (180). When this occurs the process of multicultural education has the benefit for anyone. Multicultural education is aimed at increasing

awareness of other cultures and also appreciating the diversity that exists within this context. Hence, when multicultural education programs only provide rudimentary information that is based on stark differences and stereotypes, students do not learn to appreciate the notable differences that exist among different cultures.

Unfortunately, most schools attempting to successfully implement a multicultural education program have found that the complexities of achieving this goal often lead to the development of a rudimentary program that only has negative outcomes for the development of multicultural understanding. Thus, improving multicultural education is not just an issue of creating diversity in the school; rather it is an issue of improving the multicultural programs that currently exist.

Challenges of Multicultural Education:

The most common false assumption is when people take their own cultural ways of thinking and behaving as representative of human nature and therefore the "right" way to think or behave. Exactly same can happen in case of instructional providers who may assume that they need to teach those from other cultures to adopt new learning behaviors to think and learn properly. This the biggest challenge of multicultural education.

Humans are highly adaptable, and the situational influences on thought and behavior are significant (Lemke, 1997). So observing how a person behaves in one situation is not necessarily indicative of how they will behave in another. In addition, people are able to compensate for their cultural conditioning when they find themselves participating in another culture by adopting the behaviors they begin to see as appropriate to that culture. These cases can also lead to additional false assumptions that are more difficult to avoid.

The unique challenge for instructional providers is to understand which learning behaviors are based on deeply entrenched cultural values that should not be challenged and which behaviors are more superficial practices that can be challenged for the sake of promoting learning. In addition, other challenges include:

accepting that research-based instructional strategies are also culture-based and may be at times inappropriate, knowing which instructional activities will be most effective for a particular group of students, and deciding how instructional strategies should be adapted in cross-cultural and multicultural situations.

The existing literature that will aid in addressing these challenges is growing but still limited. But still we can adopt the following seven program components that have been developed to address the challenges of multicultural education:

- (1) conflict resolution;
- (2) cultural awareness;
- (3) learning and teaching styles;
- (4) cooperative learning;
- (5) multicultural curriculum;
- (6) parent and community involvement; and

(7) elimination of tracking.

CONCLUSION:

In the nutshell we can conclude that multiculturalism has come to mean better representation of minorities in public and private sector positions of authority and equal opportunity in hiring practices. "Tolerance" for other racial, linguistic, and national groups has been the catch-phrase in the swing toward multi-culturalism, in the search for a rainbow culture. Multicultural education is one of the most influential factors to affect higher education. Community colleges with egalitarian and democratic principles are philosophically more supportive of meeting diverse student needs and student diversity than any other type of institution in higher education (Stoll, 1995). The challenges of embracing multiculturalism are many. However, to be effective the change must be systemic, addressing the multiple facets of an institution. These factors include student recruitment and retention, hiring practices, reward systems, policies and practices, student services and activities, and curriculum development.

A challenge facing multicultural education is terminology. There are several terms that are congruous and incongruous to multiculturalism. They include: cross-cultural, cultural awareness, cultural diversity, and cultural pluralism, cultural sensitivity, diversity, globalization, intercultural, international, pluralism, multiethnic and many more. Therefore, the ability to accommodate culturally based learning differences is becoming an increasingly critical skill in this time of rapid globalization and technology-influenced cross-cultural interactions. This paper contributes to the literature on cultural considerations of teaching and learning by exploring the basis of culture and the dimensions that directly impact the teaching and learning enterprise along with the basics of multicultural education and its different facets so that a justified understanding can be made for getting right approach regarding the issues and challenges of multicultural education.

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