Research Article

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: ADDRESSING LEARNER NEEDS IN MULTI-CULTURAL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Cultural responsiveness is the quality to learn and accommodate other's cultures and bring the desired change in the environment we survive. Globalisation in the field of education demands cultural responsiveness which is considered critical in providing quality education. The present paper examines how the teachers consider cultural responsiveness in classroom teaching. It is suggested that they should be trained in a suitable manner to address the learner needs in a multicultural learning society. Recent developments in technologies, migration patterns, globalisation and cross-cultural relationships have paved the way for multiculturalism in education. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions and universities to incorporate technology-based learning platforms and strategies in education. In a way or other, the teachers act as mediators between home culture and school culture. They control social interactions among the learners and monitor the differences in culture. So as to overcome the problems associated with multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic communities, the teachers should be well trained and well informed of the different aspects of multiculturalism. In such learning contexts, teachers should be able to ensure culturally responsive pedagogic practices. Learning outcomes are mainly dependent on culture. So as to prepare the teachers to face the diverse learner communities, a proactive approach is essential to create a culturally responsive teacher community.

Keywords: Cultural responsiveness, culturally responsive pedagogy, multiculturalism in education, online education

Introduction

Erickson (2002) asserts that everything in education is related to a culture which in turn shapes teaching and learning. The idea of inculcating culturally responsive pedagogy to the curriculum is ostensibly the need of multicultural classrooms. The answer to the question 'why do we need a culturally responsive curriculum?' is very comprehensive. A culturally responsive curriculum can be utilized in multicultural, multi-ethnic and multiracial societies. The world, being a global

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village, usually tends to accommodate all. When it comes to an educational scenario, the reflections of globalization and the accretion of technological services have made the learning environment more enriching and academically more adjustable. A culturally inclusive learning environment is dependent on multifarious factors such as the cultural background of the students, their race and ethnicity, diverse language forms, global trends in education and perspectives of teachers. A systematic approach to culturally responsive education helps the learners to enhance their academic achievement by strengthening their cultural traits. It is mostly a student-centred approach where cultural as well as cross-cultural elements are being considered.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Major Concerns

Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as ''using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them'' (Gay, 2010). It is synonymous with culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy can be conceptualized in three main dimensions: institutional, personal and instructional. The institutional dimension focuses on the role of cultural factors on the academic policies, organization and procedures with or without the involvement of the community. The personal dimension is oriented towards the involvement of teachers in the curriculum transaction in such a way to get adapted to the cross-cultural milieu and become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension is more challenging which focuses on the pedagogic tendencies and practices that can be incorporated in a culturally responsive classroom. When a teacher attempts to handle classes in multi-cultural classrooms, he/she should be well aware of the nature of their own culture, the nature of other ones' (parents, colleagues) culture, and the nature of students' culture. The teacher should be able to overcome the inaccurate views about their own culture and to give up all kinds of cultural biases.

What is the need for multiculturalism in education? It aims at reforming educational institutions to meet the needs of students from multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic groups. According to Banks (2016), there are five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction processes, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Content integration can be facilitated by the adoption of various teaching methods in the classroom where teachers use anecdotes from different cultural groups to attain concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in the areas concerned. According to Gay (2004), "the heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students". Knowledge construction occurs when teachers help students to understand and analyse how biases and discriminations within a discipline are influencing the nature of the knowledge constructed. It will be helpful for the students to follow a constructive approach to learning. Prejudice reduction is done by the careful selection of learning activities by teachers to facilitate positive attitudes among students towards others from different racial, linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups. Equity pedagogy can be established in a classroom where the teachers structure their teaching so as to facilitate the academic achievement of learners from multicultural backgrounds. School culture can be empowered when the school organisation is able to accommodate students from diverse groups and help them experience learning similar to that of native students. Researches in language variation found that provisions given to students to express themselves in their own dialects strengthen their engagement and academic achievement (Mallinson & Charity-Hudley, 2010).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: ADDRESSING LEARNER NEEDS IN MULTI-CULTURAL CLASSROOMS

School and colleges are the cultural platforms which provide opportunities for both teachers and students get involved with others from the different cultural background and share diverse tendencies. Teachers, being members of professional organizations are offered development opportunities. These organizations work on the common problems raised by the teaching fraternity. In a culturally responsive teaching scenario, the teachers themselves become cultural beings. Institutional support helps teachers to enrich their understanding of cultural characteristics and perspectives. It also provides platforms for continuous learning and enables them to identify and set professional goals. Infrastructure facilities in the institutions play a key role in teachers' professional life. Teachers should be given in-service training to get acquainted with the cultural diversity of students and the nature of culturally responsive teaching. Institutions will be able to provide essential instructional materials and aids to promote efficiency in teaching. There should be scope for parent-teachers interaction as well as getting feedback on time. Teachers, who are successful in implementing culturally responsive instructional practices in the classroom, should be acknowledged and recognised. Other than instructional and personal provisions for teachers, institutions should also consider other enterprises such as educational administration, guidance and counseling, continuous and comprehensive evaluation and extracurricular activities for students.

Teachers who are efficient in teaching are identified by their resourcefulness, the content they teach, the methodologies they employed, their expectations and their reactions during lesson transactions and the techniques they employed for class management. In a culturally responsive teaching scenario, it is the teacher who decides the nature of learning. The curriculum should be learner-centred and the chosen materials should be suitable for meeting the demands of students' interests, cultural traits and experiences. What is the benefit of personalizing the instruction in a multicultural classroom? How can it be idealized in the classroom? Usually, these questions arise in a multicultural learning environment where teachers also share multicultural traits. Teaching, a two-way communication process, utilizes 'dialoguing' to get an idea about the students' background, to know more about their cultural traits and to provide personalized instruction. Personalized instruction enhances active participation in learning through collaborative work culture. According to Enyedy (2014), personalized instruction is related to technologies and learning systems that facilitate student choice and adaptive instruction. Whereas personalized learning means the ways in which teachers can vary their instructional methods and activities. Gay (2010) opines that culturally responsive teachers should be able to select and supplement multi-ethnic curricular materials during instructional phases.

The effectiveness of instruction is dependent on the responsive nature of the teachers involved. This responsiveness can be reflected in the choice of curriculum content, selection of materials and innovations in classroom interaction procedure. In the classroom environment, the teacher's aim is to ensure authentic materials and references during teaching which would be able to promote real learning. Johnson & Johnson (1994) found that cooperative learning strategies adopted in classrooms promote healthy relationships among students from diverse backgrounds, enhance self-esteem and broaden their ability to see other's points of view.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Multicultural Tendencies in Learning Environment: Role of Teachers

Culturally responsive pedagogy developed as a critique of the cultural deficit theory challenges teachers to develop culturally advanced behavioural patterns in the learning environment. The teachers, who consider students as 'culturally deprived', fail to understand students' knowledge and experiences and very often miss the opportunity to utilize it for a culturally inclusive classroom. The teachers who are adhered to the deficit theory perceive students as culturally deficient and deprived (Milner, 2010). Whereas Aragon (1973) considers teachers as 'culturally deprived' because they fail to value the culture of students whose dominant cultures are different from the mainstream culture of the teachers.

According to Diamond and Moore (1995), the teachers act as mediators, organizers and orchestrators of culture in learning contexts. The role of teachers as cultural organizers makes them think and act according to the changing nature of classrooms, create an appropriate learning environment to sustain cultural diversities and enable the learners to perform high by facilitating the learning conditions. In a culturally organised classroom, the learners' voice is heard and their experiences are shared. Their feelings, worries and concerns will be part of the curriculum. As mediators of culture, teachers should be able to enhance the critical consciousness of the learners where they will be able to understand various conflicting situations that arise out of the association of mainstream cultures with those of their own subordinate ones. The mediating nature of teachers helps learners to collaborate with each other and overcome their fear, weaknesses and oppression. Teacher as an orchestrator of culture gives much importance to the socio-cultural environment of the learners and make the learners get associated with the learning resources in the school.

In a culturally responsive classroom, the teaching-learning resources should be context-based and significant. These materials should definitely cater to the needs of diverse students keeping in mind their cultural backgrounds and cultural tastes. Gay (2002) fixes the need for a strong and safe knowledge foundation, which should be more flexible, rich enough to build cultural consciousness and free from the prejudices of Western resource framework. It is the need of the hour to take a multidimensional approach to lesson planning and the selection of teaching-learning resources.

The teachers, who are ready to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms, consider students' culture and respond in such a way to make the instructional procedure more relevant and meaningful in the existing context. Globalisation and migration patterns tend to develop a multicultural and multi-ethnic society all over the world. The diasporic and trans-nationalistic tendencies make ways for the urgent recognition of diverse cultural traits, skills and knowledge. Planned instruction is highly demanded in culturally responsive curriculum transactions as it is essential to take care of the diverse needs of students who are from diverse socio-linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-political backgrounds. It cannot be considered a teaching method or strategy but an approach to handle the nature of students in a multicultural scenario. The objectives of teaching should be in line with the objectives of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers are the transmitters and preservers of culture. For this, their first concern should be to realize the importance of a native language in an individual's life. Culturally responsive pedagogy conforms to the principles of inclusiveness and language-oriented pedagogy. Irvine & Armento (2001) pointed out that teachers organise curriculum content for meaningful learning only after examining the role of curriculum, content, culture of learners, their skills, behaviours, and preferences in the classroom environment.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: ADDRESSING LEARNER NEEDS IN MULTI-CULTURAL CLASSROOMS

What might be the probable reason for teachers not equipped with the changing needs of students in a culturally diverse classroom scenario? Neito (2007) identified one of the reasons as the incapability of teachers to meet the diverse needs of students. Darling-Hammond (2009) pointed out that the lack of experience and skills of teachers cause trouble in cross-cultural classrooms. It is identified that a culturally responsive learning situation is provided with materials and aids that help to promote teaching skills. In this type of pedagogy, collaborative practices and quality assurance should be taken care of. The integration of school and home culture in the educational institutions welcomes a progressive curriculum where the learners get support from teachers belongs to multicultural backgrounds. Brown-Jeffey & Cooper (2011) noted that students who do not belong to the dominant culture feel estranged when classroom practices are based on the established and dominant culture. Major theorists like Gay (2004), Ladson- Billings (1995) and Banks (2016) observed that knowledge construction is dependent on social factors such as values, norms and social reality.

The culturally responsive pedagogy considers the multicultural aspects of education where prominence is given to individual learners who can see themselves from the point of view of others. It helps them master the basic skills and consider all alike irrespective of their variations in culture, race and ethnicity. In a multicultural setup, the teachers' role is also diverse. They should be able to satisfy the academic requirements by including as many instances and anecdotes from the lives of students who belong to multicultural groups. They are accountable to build up a suitable environment in the classroom so as to make the learners overcome their prejudiced attitudes and discrimination towards their peer groups. The methodologies, techniques and strategies should be chosen carefully so as to fit the need of the multicultural micro-community in the classrooms. 21st-century knowledge societies contribute to global teachers as there are more opportunities in overseas teaching jobs. The teachers are not supposed to teach students from their native country or region. In these situations, it would be beneficial for the teachers if they could ponder over the differences in culture that exist between them and their students rather than considering the cultural difference among students only (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Online Education and Cultural Responsiveness

The knowledge society of 21st century gets adapted to ubiquitous learning by utilizing the online mode of lesson transactions. The pandemic situation has created much scope for online education. It is evident that even in online platforms cultural differences matter and cultural disparities occur. The differences may occur due to the perception of teachers towards learners' nature of learning and their cultural differences. There is a huge rise in student intake in online education. Many educational institutions provide full-time and part-time online educational facilities. Like face-to-face learning, online learning also needs teacher assistance. Means et al. (2010) point out the need for teacher-assisted online learning where the students' group exhibit better learning outcomes as compared to the learning outcomes that emerged out of them without teacher interference. The teachers should be very much conscious of the areas where students face difficulties in online education. Some studies reveal that learners who are intrinsically motivated get more benefits from online learning. The self-directed and self-regulated learning nature of learning helps them to achieve good academic scores. Another major problem faced by online learners is access to a high-speed internet connection. In developing countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, etc. the children face difficulty in accessing the internet from their native

place and from their own homes. Parents' income, poverty and unemployment seem to be the major threats in accessing online education. Smith (2015) found that a majority of students from low-income families depend mainly on their smartphones for accessing the internet and it is found that students belong to the upper strata of society are more experienced with new software used for educational purposes and they show comparatively high media literacy than that of their school mates from the lower strata of the society (Warschauer, 2007).

After the outbreak of COVID-19, Internet usage has increased and almost all institutions have changed the nature of learning. The institutions conduct classes mainly through online mode despite the fact that the students have access to internet connection and other online facilities. We can find disparities exist between the types of devices, platforms used for instruction, and learning software that are used by different institutions. A student who uses his or her mobile device will take more time to complete a task compared to his peer who completes the task with a laptop or desktop. Hanson (2002) observed that online education seems to be gendered and raced as most technologists and developers of these online educational platforms are White males. But still, educational policy-makers opine that online learning improves educational choice and helps to bridge achievement gaps.

The primary concern of the multicultural approach in online education is to reform educational institutions to accommodate students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social groups and they should be able to receive educational equity and equality. Boykin and Noguera (2011) stress the importance of student engagement for improving academic achievement among multicultural students than focusing on curriculum content or time allotted for completing the tasks. Finkelstein et al. (2013) found that students using web-based with culturally relevant dialect show considerable improvement in academic achievement.

The National Educational Technology Plan (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, 2016) put forward a plan to make use of instructional technologies effectively for online learning. The major recommendations are

1. Provision for pre-service and in-service training for teachers using technology-enhanced instruction and thereby increasing their digital literacy and help them to create suitable learning activities for improving teaching, learning and assessing the students.

2. 2. All learners should be able to access online access to secure effective teaching and learning conditions through good technologies. Alternate options should be in consideration when the students are not able to access all online facilities.

3. A teaching community, skilled in online and blended instruction should be developed.

4. University professors and prospective teachers should definitely possess a certain general set of technology competencies to meet the needs of technology-enabled classrooms.

It is evident that in both online and face-to-face teaching, the teachers should be able to accommodate the need of diverse learners. Like face to face teaching scenario, the teachers should be able to integrate their awareness of diverse learners into the online environment. Even though the learning does not occur in direct contact with the learners, the teachers should consider the culture, language, ethnicity and background of the learners.

Conclusion

To reiterate, culturally responsive pedagogy develops self-esteem and capacities among the learners along with the development of scholarly accomplishment, critical consciousness, social confirmation, personal relations and individual competence. It helps learners to utilize appropriate mental models to interact effectively with other individuals from multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies. The students utilise different mental processes for knowing, understanding, and addressing different ethnic and social gatherings. It develops participation, coordinated effort, correspondence, and shared duty regarding learning among students and instructors. A multidisciplinary approach to multicultural education ensures high-status, precise social information and integration of abilities.

Culturally responsive educators believe in the human nobility and scholarly capacities of their learners. They see learning as having the capability to think and act in scholarly, scholastic, individual, social, moral, and political ways. They assist the learners to connect with sociocultural experiences of ethnically different learners and those with the educational program content of scholarly subjects to achieve more significant levels of learning and make it participatory. These educators integrate different ways to deal with the nature of instruction, including the academic content, guidance, assessment and evaluation in the multicultural learning environment. In a culturally responsive educational setting, the culturally sensitive educator will be fully aware of the need for cross-cultural communication and participatory learning tendencies. In every learning context, the scholastic achievement is a non-debatable objective for everybody and in order to realise this goal, the teachers should be warm, steady, friendly, energetic, understanding, and adaptable.

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