

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES

Dr.P.Karthikeyan

Principal, Sri Renugambal college of Education, Ettivadi, Polur, Thiruvannamalai - 606907

Abstract

The world aspires peace and harmony for our generations to come, there is lot of unrest and turmoil in the world mainly due to intolerance for other cultures and religions. But this will not take any country far since narrow perceptions and attitudes impede progress and prosperity of any country of the world. India is no exception. The onus lies with a teacher to nurture and sustain climate conducive for a child to accommodate in a multicultural classroom, the task of the teacher is not confined to curriculum transaction within the four walls of a school but also has to shoulder a larger social responsibility of reaching out to parents and families as well as cultural ethnic and religious groups. A school teacher plays a vital role in dispelling misconceptions about culture and cultural ignorance at the same time this does not mean that they should be loaded with another curriculum on peace and value education; rather they need to be guided through ways of integrating academic subject teaching with an inbuilt methodology of nurturing values and ethics for peace and harmony. This can be supported by a well thought out teacher preparation and teacher education programme that provides direction in several ways for integrating teaching of different subjects with values and ethics among children for tolerance of all cultures and religions. The paper emphasizes on the importance of peace education not as separate subject but as an integral part of day-to-day school activities.

Introduction

In a multicultural and multi-religious society in every nation, people have to learn to live in harmony and peace. India represents a highly diverse multi-cultural society where great responsibility in nurturing the spirit of humanity mankind and unity lies with teachers. Equally important is the role of school administrators, parents, families and the community. Transition in society begins from the recognition that school is the basic unit of change and the teacher is the kingpin to drive changes in the thinking, attitudes, opinions and perceptions form small children in a multi-cultural classroom to society at large. The centrality of the paper lies in the message trust on a teacher as a prime change agent.

Understanding Multiculturalism

In the most generic terms multicultural society involves and consists of people of different cultures. It is a situation in which different people from different races, religions, cultures, political affiliations, etc. live together as a society. India has rich tradition in multiculturalism with people from diverse cultures and religions. Andrew Heywood explains two forms of multi cultureless the term multiculturalism has been used in both descriptive

and normative ways. As a descriptive and normative ways As a descriptive term it has been taken to refer to cultural diversity... As a normative term multiculturalism implies a positive endorsement, even celebration of communal diversity, typically-based on either the right of different groups to respect and recognition or to the alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity.

Multicultural Education

Today India is a country of micro-cultures. Since ancient times, the history of education system in India had been more focused on the needs of elitists of all cultures. While education for Brahmin boys was tailored more to read and write by Brahmin teachers, education of Hindus was greatly influenced by geography, social sciences, family custom, social position social preference, etc similarly muslim education had also been elitist in the same manner. But mainly primary schools were shifted to mosques and education for Muslim boys was more preferred and all teachings were mainly based on the teachings were mainly based on the teaching of holy Quran. Muslim colleges provided opportunities to muslim boys to study Arabic language, Islamic theology, literature, law, history, science, etc. Other cultures are also prominent in the country. Buddhism Jainism and Sikhism grew from indigenous populations. No special multicultural education requirements are made in the teacher education programmes in the country.

Multicultural education is comprehensive school reform that challenges all forms of discrimination permeates instruction and interpersonal relations in the classroom and advances the democratic principles of social justice (Nieto,1992) The impetus towards this move came from the Ministry of Human Resources Development, the erstwhile ministry of education and culture that promoted cultural pluralism in the school curriculum in the country in addition to English and Hindi as language of instruction in primary and secondary schools, regional languages are also promoted for teaching in these schools. While separate schools are provided for children who wish to be taught in their native language, there has been no history of forced racial segregation in the education of this country. In India curriculum materials and textbooks are evaluated to ensure racist free content.

The role of classroom teacher in fostering pluralism

Schools are one of the few places where young minds of diverse backgrounds come together day after day and if schools fail to help to harmonies the society, what will be the consequences? In augmenting this spirit, the teacher in a school is one driving force for igniting minds of our younger generation towards cultural harmony through peace and value education. A teacher carries a big responsibility in her classroom in bringing children of diverse cultures, religions and languages together. Everything the teacher says will have an impact on the students. The teacher can bring positivity in thoughts, attitudes and actions.

Language is one such medium of instruction that acts as a means of establishing rapport with one another in the class. It helps to develop thoughts that need to be presented with integrity and compactness. Communication is not passing of information but involves conceptualization of concepts and experiences of identification and classification of argumentation and assertion through correct language. (Pattanayak, D.P. 1987)

The messages of a teacher spreads fast among children, are deep-rooted and more contagious. Teachers are in fact more responsible for the social behavior in the classroom and through this can nurture and facilitate young minds in overcoming both misconceptions about culture and dispel cultural ignorance through several ways:

Handle biases

Small children may get influenced by biased statements of parents and other family members about racial, ethnic and gender differences in the home environment but these may not yet be deep-seated prejudices and can easily be handled by the teacher as the child grows in the school, year after year.

Infuse respect and appreciation of different cultures

Teachers can also go an extra mile to expose children of the fine. Beautiful aspects of the cultures of humanity. Help children understand the most beneficial aspects of the cultures of their society including the universal human values and moral values they uphold. Another way is to link these issues while teaching school subjects such as mathematics, computer classes, art, crafts, drama, and home economics, Music, languages and history.

Promote the spirit of secular society

Right from childhood if strong bondages of humanity and foundations of common religious beliefs are instilled among children a new world gets created.

Address Heterogeneity through Cooperative Learning

A healthy cooperative learning with heterogeneous groups helps students to understand viewpoints different from their own and appreciate the cultures of the group members when solving problems. The peaceful classroom extends its outreach to peaceful communities and further to society. Solidarity within a school does not require any policy directive or outside intervention but can be made an integral part of a school life.

Encourage Interactive Sessions

Where on one hand, teachers check their own prejudices against certain groups in the society, on the other can place positive impact through book reading, clubs and

encourage reading of books with characters from various ethnic groups. Studies have revealed that peer groups place greater influence than parents in developing shared understanding of each other point of views.

Expanding Horizons: Some Propositions for Teacher Education Programmes

Despite best intentions of a teacher to promote a climate conducive for multicultural education, she would require a direction. A well thought out pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes can equip her with specific skills of bringing change and managing multiculturalism in her classroom. The programmes designed for the elementary classroom can expose teachers to the roots of conflict and violence among children and offer suggested activities exercises and games to help build self-esteem, cooperative behavior and conflict resolution skills. Such programmes will help the teacher to understand the need for removing prejudices and discriminations from society. The in service programmes needs to incorporate such activities for elementary school teachers that guide them to plan activities for children to help would be expected to sustain cooperative environment in the classrooms and schools. This would require imparting of certain practical tips and techniques to teachers to help them implement class activities to create such an environment. One way of doing this is to create fun games for children and group activities like drama, games, role play, etc. in the classrooms to strengthen interpersonal relations. Listening games necessary for developing good communication skills can be taught through telephone games. Children can also be made to solve problems through skits, puppet shows, etc. The teachers would require training on how group activities can be used with other categories of children like children with mental impairment, emotionally disturbed children or others placed in difficult circumstances like those belonging to broken homes or those coming from families of victims of racial riots or militancy or terrorist attacks, etc. Teachers would also need training on evaluation techniques.

Within a bigger programme, one short duration course or workshop encouraging cooperative learning and cooperative games that engages teachers in exploring and implementing what methodology works best in their situation seems to be a meaningful proposition. They need to be given a feel of freedom to decide and plan ways of linking teaching of different subjects with peace education. The teachers need to be oriented to recognize that they have a unique potential to develop and spread peace education by helping them to internalize values related to generosity, forgiveness, helpfulness, etc. Similarly such activities which facilitate a teacher to feel confident enough to link peace education with subjects and as a general practice to reduce prejudices towards anybody may be important part of teachers orientation. Training for administrators to view

themselves in a redefined role, more supportive, geared towards empowering teachers to take classroom-based decisions would be important to achieve better results.

Looking at massive number of teaching in the country and schools under different managements, it may not be possible to reach out to every teacher. The most feasible and workable proposition needs to be worked out. Convergence among different professional institutes at national state district block and cluster levels can work in India through well articulated roles and responsibilities of each training institute and professionals therein. Special workshops can be conducted for involving teachers to prepare manuals guidance material, modules for including value and peace education in their teachings. A cascade approach substantiated with module preparation with the help of teachers in different training workshop sessions and also chalking out school-based modalities may be expected to work in India.

Concluding Statement

In a school teachers are the key players for generating an environment of peace and harmony in its multicultural classrooms. The sustenance of this climate of course largely rests on four strong pillars satisfaction, peace, happiness and enthusiasm. When these pillars are strong the relationships among teachers, head teachers and community members will become more enduring. When each member in school and community is satisfied, happy, enthusiastic and at peace, the returns to children and to society will be greater Therefore, teachers have a substantial role to play in shaping classroom environment for bringing harmony, peace, happiness and satisfaction among children.

References

- Adams, Hetty 1954 Peace in the Classroom Practical lessons in living for elementary age children pequin publishers Winnipeg Canada
- Allport, Gordon,.W 1954 The nature of prejudice Addison Wesley publishing company, Inc. Reading, Massachusetts.
- Balasooriya, A.S. 2001 Learning the way of peace A Teachers Guide to peace education united nations educational scientific and cultural organization, newdelhi.
- Harros, Lan, M. and Mary Lee Morrison 2003 Peace education second edition, Jefferson, McFarland and company, Inc., Publishers. North Carolina.