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Together We Stand

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Abstract:

Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles.

Practically speaking, it is the existence of different and varied perceptions, viewpoints, attitudes and behaviours. This issue has been much talked about in scholarly arenas. This becomes more apparent in an academic setup where an educator has to handle students who belong to different ethnic groups, races, religion and backgrounds.

A multicultural classroom is one in which there is a blend of students from various cultures to form a diverse learning environment. Where culture not only includes tradition and religion but also races, language, socio-economic level, ethnicity and living conditions. To combine all these in a classroom involves lots of creativity and management skills on the part of the teachers. The present paper discusses various teaching strategies which may help English teachers in a multicultural classroom setting. Therefore, by creating a multicultural environment in the classroom the teacher can create an atmosphere conducive for learning. Incorporating these strategies for students of diverse backgrounds is worth the efforts because each student learns acceptance and the importance of diversity.

Keywords: Multicultural, Classrooms, learning, diverse, backgrounds.

India is a land of varied cultures. It is here that we truly follow the maxim of Unity in Diversity. The Preamble of our Country visibly declares India as a sovereign, secular democratic Republic. It also declares that the state shall not be biased towards any one religion, community or caste. The Law of our Land also assures to all its citizens, freedom, liberty and sovereignty. India is a land where varied people from all diverse cultures work,

and get educated. Therefore, it becomes obvious for a country like ours to have multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Multicultural education is a concept built on the standards of freedom, justice, equality and human dignity which is mentioned in the Declaration of Human Rights and is adopted by the United Nations Organizations. There has been a huge transformation in schools during the past two decades. The Right to Education is rapidly being recognized and implemented by intellectuals, educators and policy makers. The typical black and white school classes are a thing of the past now which has been replaced with multicoloured, multi-ethnic groupings that reflect the changed composition of our society. We now have a wide spectrum of multi ethnic populace which is being catered to by a multicultural system of education.

Multicultural education refers to any form of learning that assimilates the histories, texts, traditions, beliefs and values of people from varied cultural backgrounds. It is a multi-dimensional and dynamic form of education which encompasses pupils from all cultures, castes, religion and ethnicity. It understands the role which education plays in developing the values and attitudes necessary to sustain oneself in the co-dependent world of today. The education system values the cultural differences and reflects them through the students, teachers and various communities. A Multicultural environment challenges all form of discrimination in schools and societies through the promotion of democratic principles of equality and social justice. Multicultural education is a process that involves all aspects of school practices, policies and organizations to ensure not only the highest level of academic achievement but also the all-round development of the pupil's personality. It helps the students develop a positive self-image by providing knowledge about the different traditions and cultures apart from theirs. This is a tedious task which expects the teacher to always be alert and conscious of the following principles during the teaching learning process:

- Understanding one's cultural perspective and how it affects the ongoing teaching/learning correlation and that exploring this cultural issue is a never ending process.
- Providing and promoting an atmosphere in which cultural differences are respected and explored. This atmosphere is one in which this process is not only academic, but also brings about changes in one's attitude and viewpoints.

- Flexibly adjusting and accommodating varied learning styles, building on students' strengths, and avoiding judgments and labels that might otherwise be placed on students.
- Understanding and communicating that all cultures have their own integrity, legitimacy and consistency
- Expanding students' knowledge of their own cultures and their capacity to appreciate differences in others, and helping them move toward a multicultural and global perspective in their thinking.

Majority of classrooms in India have students who belong to different cultures, follow different beliefs, customs and traditions, belong to different socio- economic status and adhere to different sets of ideology. In education, this diversity has its own pros and cons and is especially noticeable when it takes place when students move into the threshold of their professional life after completing their basic education or class 12th.

The life of an Engineering college teacher is both challenging and exciting. Along with the usual plethora of activities related to curriculum and academics, they are also beset with many other issues which at times pose to be taxing and testing. One of these challenges is to adjust with a diverse and varied level of learning which occur due to the multicultural backgrounds of students in the classroom. This is chiefly visible in the English Communication class where the teacher is confronted with different levels of spoken English possessed by the pupils. Students in The Engineering Classes have to take a paper known as English Professional Communication. It is here that the English teacher finds him/herself face to face with multiculturalism. As they come from different backgrounds and belong to varied cultures, their level of spoken English will also vary. The teacher can face situations where the students sulk away or refuse to speak in English owing to fear of rejection by his/ her peers. Nevertheless, an innovative and creative teacher can think of various activities which can be used as ice-breakers or as activities facilitating communication among pupils in the English Language. These activities would not only enable the pupils to come out of their self imposed boundaries but also facilitate their knowing about varied cultures, customs and traditions of people.

Role playing

Role Playing is an activity in which the students are divided into groups & given certain situations which they have to enact. This allows students to express their opinion in a realistic situation. In role play the students play a part they do not play in their actual life (eg: enacting as parliamentarians, as banker's or a role from work of literature). A multicultural role play exercise allows students to be immersed in a societal setting that causes them to experience feelings and realities that they may not otherwise be exposed to. Hence by organizing a role play activity in the class the teacher can, very dexterously, bring in issues of the subjects related to caste, religion, current topics or something related to history which are otherwise difficult to explain to the students in the class. Students may write in their own dialogues, their script and assign different roles. Emphasis should not be put on grammar, but on making the students aware of working in teams.

Exposure to different languages and cultures

Culture pertains to the traditions, rituals, beliefs and values that are common and shared amongst a group of people. Every individual is a part of one culture or the other. The first goal of multicultural education should be to help students with identifying differences as well as similarities among their classmates. The English communicative activities should be so planned that it allows children to explore different cultures thus creating opportunities for them to see that even when other students have different customs, languages and traditions they also share some common traits. Students can be made to relate about any festival celebrated in their culture. Students can also be made to tell their fellow pupils about things related to their culture. Also, at this stage a pupil would be in a position to clear misconceptions in the minds of others regarding his or her traditions and customs. These can then be successfully and amiably be discussed in the Classroom under the supervision of the teacher.

Teachers to act as facilitators and role models

Students learn that people can be different and unique, yet still share a lot of common things. Such activities help students to learn to accept differences and help in ruling out all feelings of differences from the minds of the learners. These realizations assist students to accept and respect people from all cultures and backgrounds. The Communicative English Teacher should also be aware that students see them as role models. Therefore, the teachers'

inclusion and acceptance of different ideas, customs, traditions and languages help them to learn to accept and respect fellow students.

Knowledge of student's background

For a successful multicultural classroom setting one of the most essential things is knowledge of diverse cultures. The teachers should take out time to learn the background of the class students. Knowledge of the traditions, beliefs, values, customs, food habits, economic status etc helps in understanding the students in a better way. This knowledge should then be shared with children by incorporating them in the learning experiences.

Collaborative learning

A much popular concept of collaborative teaching can be incorporated into the English classroom as well. Students should be made to learn the importance of co-dependency and co-existence. Students can be grouped together and made to do assignments, tasks and activities related to their curriculum. They can be asked to collect matter on a particular topic and make a project file, or give a class presentation or simply discuss about their culture and customs. A Question and Answer session can be organised too, after the presentation which will help them gain confidence and facilitate a healthy interaction of students with their classmates. The environment of the classroom should help support children from minority cultures in developing teamwork and social skills. Collaborative learning is all about making small heterogeneous group of students so that they can master the various aspects of a particular task. By doing so not only are the students motivated to learn but they also forge stronger interpersonal relationships than they would do by working alone. These groups help focus on students' different strengths and styles. In addition, cooperative learning groups have been found to have strong and consistent positive effects on social relationships between culturally different students. Group members become more accepting of classmates who are different.

Group discussion

Group discussions inspire thinking. It is an excellent strategy for enhancing student motivation, fostering rational thinking and encouraging democratic habits. They provide opportunities for students to practice and hone a number of skills including the ability to express their opinions, defend positions and consider different point of views. In group discussions students work with many ideas and have to balance new ideas with their original

conclusions which becomes a challenging task. Thus the teachers should make use of discussions on current topics which can initiate a discussion and help develop students questioning power, in depth analysis of situation and development of logical thinking.

Video Tapes

The students could be put in groups and scenes from popular English films can be screened first without any running script on the scene. Then the students are asked to identify the words, script etc., Again the scene will be repeated with the scripts on the scene. This kind of telecasting videotape with and without script makes the students to get access with the pronunciation, accent and word usage of English with interest. This method also encourages students to be interactive and creative.

Multicultural education cannot be taught in a textbook. It must be developed by each educator based on a particular student group.

- **Learn students' learning styles.**

Teachers can help students discover their academic strengths by helping them discover their own learning style. In this way, students discover what method of comprehension works best for them based on their own backgrounds and personalities. If educators make this learning style quest a class project, an inherent lesson in multiculturalism is taught.

- **Encourage students to be proud of their heritage.**

Educators should look for ways to emphasize the differences between students in a positive light. This might mean writing essays on family background or partnering with other students to help each other develop projects that accent the culture of the other. This can include prompts that look back on family history for generations, or could ask students to look at their current family setup.

- **An educator should particularly be aware of their own biases.**

In order to fully understand the significance of multiculturalism in the classroom, educators must first thoroughly examine their own cultural beliefs, values, and biases. Then prospective educators are ready to begin learning about other cultures—to become familiar with their values, traditions, communication styles, learning preferences, contributions to

society, and relationship patterns of their future students. While some of this education can be achieved by simply reading about cultural diversity, genuine interaction and discourse with students also helps a great deal.

Some changes can also be done by the administration of the school/ college in which multicultural classes are run.

- Provide books in the classroom library that feature children of many different races. These are easily found in the Scholastic book orders.
- Place posters or artwork on the wall that features a variety of multicultural children.
- Discuss differences and similarities in cultures with your students openly, but stress the similarities.
- Provide students with multicultural paint, paper, and crayons as often as possible and allow students to choose the colour of paint, paper, or crayons they want to use.
- Provide multicultural books to the class.

Teachers today face the privilege and challenge of serving exceedingly diverse classrooms. Diversity takes many forms; one of the most obvious ways students are different has to do with their culture. In one classroom, a teacher may have students that represent a dozen different cultures. Therefore, it entirely rests upon a teacher as to how s/he handles and manages the diverse groups of children without making them feel excluded or segregated.

We get a lot from our cultures, including learning styles. Teachers interested in making their students learn and feel equal, must think about incorporating multicultural learning styles in their teaching. By making the students indulge in small activities in the class, a smart English teacher can provide an environment conducive to learning and foster a feeling of equality among her students so that the pupils feel themselves to be a part of the class, learn acceptance, stand together and work towards a common goal of learning.

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