

Dimension of Multicultural Education: Issues for School Reform in Nepal

DHANA KRISHNA MAHAT

Lecturer

Jumla Multiple Campus, Jumla

dkmahat111@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is very important and necessary concept. It is an educational approach designed to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, including those in marginalized groups. Multicultural issue in the present context is a global issue of socialization. It has not yet been materialized into the education system in Nepal. The education system of a country should prepare students to function in today's diverse society. There are issues emerging in the electiveness of the multicultural education and the concerns how to better shape the multicultural classroom in Nepal. There are many views on the benefits and/or shortcomings of the multicultural education. The question is not whether a multicultural education should be adopted but it is rather what we understand from multicultural education and how we are going to initiate such a reform within an educational system. In this article, the five dimensions of multicultural education and issues of school reform are described in the Nepalese context.

Keywords: Multicultural education, multicultural classroom, dimensions, knowledge construction, school reform, Nepalese context.

Introduction

Nepal is a multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic country, it has a long history of monolingual and monocultural policies. Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (2004) defined multicultural education as adopting a culturally responsive pedagogy with trained instructors facilitating it. Banks and Banks (2010) define multicultural education as an idea and movement focused on reducing prejudice in schools and creating equal educational opportunities for all students.

This field is not focused on any one group or minority, however, multicultural education has evolved to address gender, disability, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and intersectionality (i.e., the combination of group identities) (Banks, 2013; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). Moreover, multicultural education is designed to reform schools so that all students, including those in the majority and minority, acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to thrive in an increasingly multicultural society (Banks & Banks, 2004; Cummins,

2015). In order to accomplish this goal, multicultural education specialists agree that changes must occur in multiple areas of schools including course curricula; teaching materials; individual teaching styles; assessment procedures; overall school culture; and the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of school staff (Banks, 2004; Banks, 2013). Multicultural education is an idea, an approach to school reform, and a movement for equity, social justice, and democracy. A major goal of multicultural education is to restructure schools so that all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world. Multicultural education seeks to ensure educational equity for members of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups, and to facilitate their participation as critical and reflective citizens in an inclusive national civic culture. With the shifting cultural texture and demographics of the United States (Banks, 2006b; Irvine, 2003), Therefore, the teachers should teach children to respect the cultures and values of others; help children learn to function successfully in a multicultural society; promote the development of a positive self concept in those children who are most affected by racism, sexism, handicappism and so on and lastly, encourage children to view people of diverse cultures as unique parts of a whole community. The goal of multicultural education is to prepare students to function in today's diverse society. Therefore, the teachers should teach children to respect the cultures and values of others; help children learn to function successfully in a multicultural society; promote the development of a positive self concept in those children who are most affected by racism, sexism, handicappism and so on and lastly, encourage children to

view people of diverse cultures as unique parts of a whole community.

This paper aims to explore the dimension of multicultural education and issues for school reform in Nepal. This study is based on descriptive and analytical research design. Secondary sources have been used for this study. Data are taken form internet search and library study.

Discussions

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a broad concept with several different and important dimensions (Banks, 2004). When considered comprehensively, these dimensions comprise a useful conceptual tool to explain how educators can work towards equal opportunities for all students to succeed in school (Cole & Zhou, 2014). Although the five dimensions of multicultural education are highly interrelated, each requires deliberate attention and focus.

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, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline. The infusion of ethnic and cultural content into the subject area should be logical, not contrived. More opportunities exist for the integration of ethnic and cultural content in some subject areas than in others. In the social studies, the language arts, and music, frequent and ample opportunities exist for teachers to use ethnic and cultural content to illustrate concepts, themes, and principles. There are also opportunities to integrate multicultural content into math and science. However, the opportunities are not as ample as they are in

the social studies, the language arts, and music.

The Knowledge Construction Process

Knowledge construction, the second dimension of multicultural education, involves a process in which educators, “help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed” (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 20). Knowledge construction engages students in a process exploring the biases and values of the creators of the knowledge they are learning (Chin, 2013; Cole & Zhou, 2014; El-Atwani, 2015). These biases may be due to an individual’s background, frame of reference, perspective, and/or cultural assumptions, and may relate to gender, race, ethnicity, and/or social class (Banks, 2004). In order for students to become politically engaged citizens, they must learn how to challenge academic knowledge and question how it is selected (Banks, 2015). Furthermore, knowledge construction teaches students how to critically consider the formation of ideologies, stereotypes, and group classifications (Chin, 2013). It 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 (Banks, 1996). Students also learn how to build knowledge themselves in this dimension

Prejudice Reduction

The prejudice reduction dimension of multicultural education seeks to help students develop positive and democratic racial attitudes. It also helps students to understand how ethnic identity is influenced by the context of schooling and the attitudes and beliefs of dominant social groups. The

theory developed by Gordon Allport (1954) has significantly influenced research and theory in intergroup relations. He hypothesized that prejudice can be reduced by interracial contact if the contact situations have these characteristics: (1) they are cooperative rather than competitive; (2) the individuals experience equal status; and (3) the contact is sanctioned by authorities such as parents, principals and teachers.

An Equity Pedagogy

Teachers in each discipline can analyze their teaching procedures and styles to determine the extent to which they reflect multicultural issues and concerns. Equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social-class groups. This includes using a variety of teaching styles and approaches that are consistent with the wide range of learning styles within various cultural and ethnic groups, being demanding but highly personalized when working with groups such as Native American and Alaskan students, and using cooperative learning techniques in math and science instruction in order to enhance the academic achievement of students of color (Cohen & Lotan, 2004).

An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

Empowering school culture, the final dimension of multicultural education, entails restructuring school cultures to promote student equity (Banks & Banks, 2010). These kinds of school cultures allow students in marginalized groups to experience cultural empowerment and educational equality by making structural changes in a school’s environment (Cole & Zhou, 2014). It 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.

Some Burning Multicultural Issues in Nepal

Education plays a fundamental role in the development of a country. Nevertheless, this awareness is yet to seep into countries like Nepal. Appointing credible heads loyal to the school and adeptly ensuring that teachers are doing justice to their jobs is another much needed initiative. The more a situation is taken seriously, the better efforts are made to reform it. As Nepal has been divided into 4 races and 36 castes on the basis of profession which helped in establishing a kind of biased social hierarchy in which low caste people have still been victimized and marginalized from the mainstream of the center of national functioning. The issue of multicultural education is no more a foreign issue because we, the teachers in Nepal, too face the challenges of teaching students from multicultural background ranging from the Sherpa students of Mountain region born out of intractable Buddhists parents to the students from the plains of Terai heavily influence by the Hindu religion. In this light, Nepalese teachers should teach about, Lord Shiva or Vishnu to emphasize the culture of Hindu students, Gautam Buddha to emphasize the culture the Buddhists students and so on.

Besides, the students of other religious background such as Christianity, Sheikh, Jainism and others too hold a good share in the roll registers of Nepalese classroom teachers. And on top of this, there is the prevalence of caste system with infinite branches of sub-castes within them bearing varying cultural values and practices. So, the issue of multiculturalism in education is relevant from the perspective of Nepal too besides its relevance in the other countries and communities. The curriculum should be inclusive of all these aspects but not just focusing on a particular personality of some dominant culture. And these aspects are to be taught together with the basic content of the curriculum. It should never be forgotten as Haralambos and Heald (2000) say with the functional emphasis on the importance of shared norms and values as the basic for social order; it could appear that deviance is a threat to order and should therefore seem as dysfunctional for society. Yet slowly and gradually the situation has been drastically worsen despite the slow pace development due to some slight updated academic curriculum and conduct and treatment of teachers towards so called marginally deprived students. Besides, the roles of upper-class people, human rights advocates and other national and international agencies have also contributed to some extent to end up such discriminating social hierarchy from the root. The social stratum of our country clearly indicates the country cannot survive without the slogan of national integration. Besides, it is essential to end up vertical relationship between the practices of center and margin issues by bringing change in behavior, thought and vision as they are most powerful weapons to eliminate the worry caused due to multiculturalism.

Challenges and Opportunities of Multicultural Classroom

Giddens as cited in Slattery (2003) says the key to human behavior is neither motivation nor self interest. It is rather man's capacity to know how to act in any situation and his / her capacity to adapt their behaviors should the situation require it. The definition states that there are challenges, yet our focus is only concerned to classroom purpose. There are some challenges as heterogeneous linguistic situation different levels of languages, different language contexts within language content realities, interaction in the classrooms, communication between the teachers and the students, students and students themselves, respecting the norms and values of each other's culture, adjustment and classroom setting, developing the students' participations , relationship between the teachers and students, pedagogical traditions in teaching, the forms of socialization and dynamic management of institution are some of the challenges seen in multicultural classroom. In addition to challenges, it also promotes the rights of all people, enabling the students to understand issues and problems of diverse society, developing the intellectual level of teacher, making teacher a recourse people, updating teachers to learning how to deal with different cultures, ways of reasoning, the values beliefs, attitudes etc are some of the opportunities seen in multicultural classroom.

Remedial Procedures to Addressing Multicultural Issues in Nepalese Classroom

Multicultural education are a set of ideological and pedagogical commitments to providing education for and about diverse groups. Though most often associated with education for students of underrepresented

racess, multiculturalism more accurately refers to students of all races, ethnicities, genders, religions, sexualities, abilities, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, national or geographic origins, and languages. Bottomore (1986) says almost all social changes are purposive, since the results from the purposive act of individual mean. After all it is teachers to address such situation in the classroom. So, the teacher should prepare their students feel for real multicultural world by drawing the world of students. The teacher should foster students' attitude of understanding, expectation, respect and discuss, difference and similarities in cultures with students openly but stressing the similarities helps to integrate heterogeneity into unity. Teachers in multicultural classroom must be open to the students and put forth the effort needed to get to know their student's insight and outside of the class. Teachers need to pay attention to their verbal and non-verbal language when he or she responds to students who speak differently. The teacher must evaluate the cultural diversities by building multicultural programs to show appreciation of difference avoiding stereotypes, acknowledged difference in children and discover the diversities within the classroom. Knopf (1998) says life, mind, society and culture are not outside the matter of energy, not outside space and time and free of them. They are in and of nature with matter and energy. They are different organization of matter and energy, if one will, which the physicist and chemist cannot, in virtue of their physical and chemical methods, deal with fruitfully; and similarly all the way up to scale. Therefore, the role of teacher should be concerned to all the dimensions. Successful learning requires an inter cultural approach when students are responsible for listening and

reading and experiencing to understand both the perspective of others and for understanding their own perspective and to know how they acquire them. They should try to understand the diverse culture influence impacting school, community, state, county, world etc. Students are to be involved in thinking critically, solving problems, questioning and creating increased sensitively to an awareness of different cultures. Students must be engaged in the teaching and learning process transcends the banking method and facilitated experiences in which students learn from each other's experiences and perspectives.

Conclusion

Government must motivate parents to send their children to school by assuring them that proper education is a seed they sow which they will reap as a brighter future for their children and the nation as a whole. This can be done through the right type of incentives. Gautam (2007), states that socialization is the process of learning it is mainly a matter of social cultural learning. In this process, an individual learns the social behavior and cultural practices. In the same way, multicultural issue in the present context is a global issue of socialization as people are settling in every nook and corner of the world due to various reasons. Everywhere an individual seeks to save his identity and Nepal cannot be exception for that. Besides, Nepal has its own problem based on hierarchy of caste system. In addition to that there is a problem of religious, ethnical, political and geographical issues. Every community is trying to find a safe land. So, Nepalese multicultural curriculum must focus on those burning aspects by applying the procedures suggested above. If the nation hesitates to address all these areas, the

country will be in a great crisis and invites irreparable loss. In other words, if the burning need of introducing multicultural curriculum is delayed and neglected, it will influence the nation fall into the value of violence, protest, strike, kidnap, rape, robbery and mass brutality. It's been already late so the nation must immediately come with these issues to retain peace and harmony of the nation back.

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