Learning Styles, inclusion and Diversity at Secondary Classrooms in India

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Abstract

Students in our nation's classrooms today are more diverse than ever. They represent different races, ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they speak many different languages. Further, these students often exhibit a wide range of academic, physical, and social abilities or skills. Diversity can be conceptualized in different ways depending on the context. When it comes to our classrooms, we conceptualize diversity as understanding each student brings unique experiences, strengths, and ideas to our classroom. These differences can be along dimensions of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, age, ability, religious or political beliefs, or other different ideologies. Diversity is the exploration and incorporation of these differences to enrich learning and in our classrooms. The present paper explores the learning styles on diversity and inclusion in the classrooms.

Keywords: Learning Styles, Inclusion, Diversity.

Introduction

Our students come to a wide range of experiences and educational backgrounds. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure our students are prepared to work in a diverse environment and collaborate with others who bring new perspectives. When we incorporate a variety of perspectives into our own teaching and offer students new ways of looking at their discipline we prepare our students for the diverse workforce. There are a variety of ways you can incorporate diversity into your classroom and it depends on the goals you have for your students. This is not a one-step process, but, whether you are incorporating diverse perspectives into your course content or teaching students about cultural differences, you want to ensure your classroom is welcoming and you've created a respectful, safe environment

In an inclusive classroom, instructors are aware of the diversity of students and work with students to create a safe and collaborative learning environment. Instructors use multiple methods to deliver course content and provide students with a variety of opportunities to share what they know. Inclusive classrooms recognize students learn in different ways and have valuable perspectives to bring to the content being learned.

Classroom Diversity and Inclusion

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. It is extremely important to support and protect diversity because by valuing individuals and groups free from prejudice and by fostering a climate where equity and mutual respect are intrinsic, we will create a success-oriented, cooperative, and caring community that draws intellectual strength and produces innovative solutions from the synergy of its people. "Diversity" means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve:

- Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.
- Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own.
- Understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;
- Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;
- Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Diversity includes, therefore, knowing how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are present in other individuals and groups. These include but are not

limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, and work experiences. Finally, we acknowledge that categories of difference are not always fixed but also can be fluid, we respect individual rights to self-identification, and we recognize that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another.

Diverse schools feature differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, reading level, athletic ability, background, gender, personality, and much more. Strong programs teach educators to value the unique aspects of what makes each student different, and helps them embrace those differences in the classroom.

An in-depth research review of dozens of other studies on diversity—conducted by The Century Foundation, a New York-based think tank—found that having different and divergent perspectives can create positive learning outcomes. Those outcomes, explored below, can have benefits that reflect well beyond students' graduation and can impact their lives going forward.

Cognitive Skills and Critical Thinking

The presence of diversity in the classroom allows students to consider perspectives and opinions beyond those they've already formed or were shaped in early life by family and friends. By presenting students with viewpoints far different from their own, it gives them the opportunity to think critically about their own beliefs and examine the world in fresh ways. As noted by an article in Scientific American, exposure to diversity alters the way individuals think by promoting creativity and innovation, as well as decision-making and problem-solving skills. As the article summarizes, "Diversity jolts us into cognitive action in ways that homogeneity simply does not."

When students enter the professional world, they join a vast and diverse workforce. Interacting with people of all different backgrounds and mindsets can present a challenge without prior exposure to diversity, especially at a younger age. Companies are taking note of their employees' ability to handle diversity with grace and maturity; 96 percent of major employers, according to the Century Foundation, say it is vital that employees are able to work with people from diverse backgrounds.

Diversity Prepares Students for Citizenship

As part of the Century Foundation's research study on diversity, the authors reviewed 27 different studies about the effects of diversity on people's willingness to interact with and improve their local community—a concept known as civic engagement. The study found that experiences with diversity in college do lead to increased civic engagement. This indicates the more involved citizens are with their government and political landscape, and the more educated they become about government processes, the more informed decisions they can make about how they are governed. As the U.S. Department of Education notes, students' experiences with diversity help mold them into more engaged citizens.

Diversity Promotes Creativity

At its core, creativity is all about bringing together different ideas and transforming them to make something new, unique, and personal. The more ideas and experiences people are exposed to, the more creative they can be. Indeed, Scientific American cites a study conducted by several research professors who found that groups with racial diversity significantly outperformed groups without diversity in a problem-solving scenario. In professional and nonprofessional situations that call for creativity, it is a wise choice to bring together diverse perspectives.

Inclusivity and Diversity as an Educator

As has been discussed, diversity in the classroom has numerous positive benefits for students, but how can educators ensure their pupils are getting the most out of interacting with their diverse peers? Well-trained educators, like those with an EdD, are equipped with the tools to encourage the exchange of ideas and interpersonal understanding. No matter what level of education, elementary school teachers through college professors can all utilize the following strategies to benefit their classrooms.

Classroom students aren't the only ones who can benefit from learning about what makes them diverse. According to the NDT Resource Center, an academic source committed to nondestructive evaluation, educators should also get to know their students and what makes them unique, thereby discovering the viewpoint from which they see the world and their personal learning style. For an educator, understanding cultural diversity in the classroom is a crucial part of being able to anticipate where certain lessons might lead, or any issues that might arise between students of different backgrounds. Educators can establish a tone of inclusion, emphasizing that all perspectives are valuable.

Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

An educator who properly creates a culturally responsive environment will have fostered a classroom where students become respectful and understanding of cultures different from their own. Those students are typically more willing to listen respectfully to different viewpoints, rather than mock, scorn, or fear the unfamiliar. The best way for educators to achieve this, according to The Advocate, is to teach students that people who do not look the same as

them—or who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, follow different religious traditions, speak different languages, or have a different sexual orientation or gender identity—are still just the same as them on the inside.

Learning about one's own culture is just as important as learning about others when it comes to developing cultural understanding among students. Educators with a strong teaching background such as an EdD can facilitate projects for their students that encourage them to get to know their own history. The NDT Resource Center suggests activities such as visiting community landmarks of importance to their culture, and interviewing important members of their community. Students can then be given the opportunity to share what they discover with their classmates.

In recent years, schools have enacted zero-tolerance policies in an attempt to curb bullying, harassment, and intimidation. However, the tide is now shifting toward zero-indifference policies instead, according to GLSEN. Zero-indifference is an alternative that promotes safety in schools by consistently and firmly addressing disrespectful behavior. Unlike zero-tolerance, in which a first offense results in punishments as harsh as suspension or expulsion, zero-indifference allows the teacher to use culturally insensitive moments as opportunities for learning and understanding. The Tolerance.org project of the Southern Poverty Law Center recommends zero-indifference policies when it comes to addressing bullying and harassment, as does the Anti-Defamation League; the American Civil Liberties Union; the Respect for All Project; and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network—according to research by Jacqueline Leung on the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs.

Cultural Diversity in the Classroom

Teachers who wish to be at the forefront of their profession should have a strong foundation in understanding diversity and how to create an environment of inclusion in the classroom. To accomplish this, educators would do well to explore an award-winning education program, such as American University's Online Doctorate of Education. The curriculum is designed to provide educators with the tools and understanding to adapt to any classroom, regardless of its diverse student makeup—and to ultimately foster a wider appreciation of our human differences.

Understanding these different types of learning styles can drastically impact the way teachers handle their students, set up group projects and adapt individual learning

Ways of learning: four learning styles

1. Visual learners
2. Auditory learners
3. Kinesthetic learners
4. Reading/writing learners

Learning styles and preferences take on a variety of forms—and not all people fit neatly into one category. But generally speaking, these are the most common types of learners:

1. Visual learners: Someone with a preference for visual learning is partial to seeing and observing things, including pictures, diagrams, written directions and more. This is also referred to as the "spatial" learning style. Students who learn through sight understand information better when it's presented in a visual way. These are your doodling students, your list makers and your students who take notes. The whiteboard or smart board is your best friend when teaching these types of learners. Give students opportunities to draw pictures and diagrams on the board, or ask students to doodle examples based on the topic they're learning. Teachers catering to visual learners should regularly make handouts and use presentations. Visual learners may also need more time to process material, as they observe the visual cues before them. So be sure to give students a little time and space to absorb the information.

2. Auditory learners: Auditory learners tend to learn better when the subject matter is reinforced by sound. These students would much rather listen to a lecture than read written notes, and they often use their own voices to reinforce new concepts and ideas. These types of learners prefer reading out loud to themselves. They aren't afraid to speak up in class and are great at verbally explaining things. Additionally, they may be slower at reading and may often repeat things a teacher tells them.

Since these students generally find it hard to stay quiet for long periods of time, get your auditory learners involved in the lecture by asking them to repeat new concepts back to you. Ask questions and let them answer. Invoke group discussions so your auditory and verbal processors can properly take in and understand the information they're being presented with. Watching videos and using music or audiotapes are also helpful ways of learning for this group.

3. Kinesthetic learners: Kinesthetic learners, sometimes called tactile learners, learn through experiencing or doing things. They like to get involved by acting out events or using their hands to touch and handle in order to understand concepts. These types of learners might struggle to sit still and often excel at sports or like to dance. They may need to take more frequent breaks when studying. The best way teachers can help these students learn is by getting them moving. Instruct students to act out a certain scene from a book or a lesson you're teaching. Also try encouraging these students by incorporating movement into lessons: pacing to help memorize, learning games that involve moving around the classroom or having students write on the whiteboard as part of an activity. Once kinesthetic learners can physically sense what they're studying, abstract ideas and difficult concepts become easier to understand.

4. Reading/writing learners: How to recognize reading/writing learners in your class: According to the VARK Modalities theory developed by Fleming and Mills in 1992, reading/writing learners prefer to learn through written words. While there is some overlap with visual learning, these types of learners are drawn to expression through writing, reading articles or books, writing in diaries, looking up words in the dictionary and searching the internet for just about everything.

Of the four learning styles, this is probably the easiest to cater to since much of the traditional educational system tends to center on writing essays, doing research and reading books. Be mindful about allowing plenty of time for these students to absorb information through the written word, and give them opportunities to get their ideas out on paper as well.

Conclusion

Embrace all types of learning a style understanding these different learning styles doesn't end in the classroom. By equipping students with tools in their early years, teachers are empowering them for their futures. Pinpointing how a child learns best can dramatically affect their ability to connect with the topics you're teaching, as well as how they participate with the rest of the class.

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