

Multicultural education literature review

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



Early childhood education is an important phase of education. It is the child's first experience of formal learning. At this stage, academics is not so significant as the development of like skills like hygiene, socialization, good habits and basic readiness for academics. This is also the stage when children step out from the secure and closed world of their family. They encounter the company of other children of their age. They establish relationship with the teachers. The values, beliefs and conventions in the society begin to take shape in the minds of the children. The kind of atmosphere that prevails in the school setting moulds the ideas of the children. The ideals that are inculcated have a deep and permanent impact on their delicate minds. In a sense, their minds are clean slates. Whatever is engraved becomes deep and long-lasting, difficult to erase. It is in early childhood that children begin to form biases towards people and other things. Sometimes, they follow the elders in every matter and pick up the biases of the elders unconsciously. " Prejudice is an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalizations," (Allport, 1954). Teachers, parents and caretakers must take utmost care to control and maintain a free and healthy atmosphere so that children develop the right kind of attitude and perception of the world, devoid of any kind of prejudices or biases. Every word, every utterance of the elders has to be carefully spoken in the presence of children because they are very sensitive to language at this stage. Their minds begin to process the linguistic information that they receive as input and sets about interpreting the tone and content. They are in a stage of grappling with language and meaning. Allport, (1954) stated that it is within a child's first six years that social attitudes are formed. One

of Allport's central premises is that children are unprejudiced until their parents or society teaches them differently.

This is an age of globalization. Mobility has increased considerably in recent years. Travelling to distant countries for jobs and education has become a common trend. As a result, people from different countries and cultures happen to live together and share a neighbourhood. When they settle together in a locality, their children who are admitted to schools also come in contact with each other. This is a new challenge to pre-school teachers in the age of globalization. Initially, their responsibility was limited to socializing a child and helping him to get adjusted within his own community. Now the community is a blend of diverse cultures. Children who are confined to their homes for the first couple of years suddenly find themselves amidst a crowd of children who are not only strangers, but who also come from different backgrounds and speak in different tongues. Now more than ever before in history, multi-cultural education in schools has become a prime concern for educationists. There is a bulk of research on early childhood education and all aspects related to it. However, the problem of multicultural education is a recent one and it offers plenty of scope for research. Research in this area is essential which will help teachers in managing children from diverse backgrounds in a classroom setting. This necessitates integrating multiculturalism in the school curriculum.

Education at all levels revolves around the curriculum. It is the starting point of education and the guiding principle throughout. Researchers have realized the significance of integrating multicultural education in the curriculum. A study was conducted by Piland, Piland and Hess. They examined the status

of multicultural education in the curriculum. The study begins with an assessment of various definitions of multiculturalism. They point out that the term has many definitions. They selected the one that they found the best and most comprehensive, given by Valencia College Community Faculty. It defined multicultural education as “ The intent to include previously excluded groups in both curriculum and content and teaching methodologies, the effort to make cultural stories as complete as possible, recognition of academic integrity, and a reflection of the composition of community college populations,”(Willard, p3, 1993). The article refers to the claim of those who argue against multicultural curriculum. According to them the foundation of the canon will crumble if multicultural curriculum continues. They add that it destroys the unity that the mainstream national culture fosters. Those who are in favour, assert that the canon is continually being challenged from within, that it should be included in the established canon, and that the belief that it is divisive assumes that the countrymen are already united. The studies that they reviewed on the opinion of teachers show that teachers welcome multicultural curriculum. Efforts to change the curriculum are ongoing, but the process is very slow. The reality is that very few students are learning about specific ethnic, gender and disability studies. The most significant point made by the writers from the point of view of early childhood education is that “ because students construct their own knowledge, they must encounter multicultural content to analyze their realities critically,” (thefreelibrary. com. retrieved 2014).

Children utilize other cognitive skills like classification, identification etc, which are suitable to their age group. Based on this assumption, a study was

conducted titled " Pre-school Children's Classification skills and a Multicultural education Intervention to Promote Acceptance of Ethnic Diversity." (the freelibrary. com)The researcher point out that previous studies of ethnic awareness of children have identified a developmental sequence of ethnic understanding based on cognitive developmental theories. This study extends earlier findings by including classification tasks. The results suggest that intervention for pre-schoolers can expand their ability to classify individuals on multiple dimensions like age, gender, race and ethnicity. Research has established that children are aware of ethnic differences at a very young age (Aboud, 1988). The results of the study provide valuable insights for designing multicultural education programs for pre-school children. An integrated curriculum is necessary that would include race, ethnicity, age and gender differences.

It is a fact that all children enjoy stories. The best way to integrate multiculturalism in the curriculum is through story books. " Books are powerful means of providing positive images and interesting material to young children," (Banfield, 1998) A study on " Knowledge of Multicultural Literature among early childhood educators." (thefreelibrary. com) The writers suggest that there should be ' mirror' books and ' window' books. Mirror books reflect their own culture and window books acquaint them with other cultures in the world. The writer suggest that characters must be male and female, and from all ethnic groups. Children deserve books in which they can see themselves and the world in which they live reflected. The writer concludes, " Heightening efforts to help early childhood educators become more informed about multicultural books can lead to increases use in

classrooms and libraries, and more importantly, place these books in the hands of teachers, parents,, and children alike.”

Another very powerful medium that influences children in the present age is the computer. Sue Haugland has written an article “ Maintaining and anti-bias curriculum” in which she has shown how computers can be effectively used for maintaining an anti-bias curriculum. She states that racial unrest and poverty emphasize the imperative nature of fostering an anti-bias curriculum in early childhood classrooms. She suggests that it is the responsibility of software designers to provide material that portrays individuals of differing ages and abilities, from different religions and lands, diverse family styles,(one-parent families, blended, families and extended families etc.) heterogeneous racial representation, gender equity, universal focus and available in multiple languages. She concludes, “ Software should provide children a global perspective which prevents prejudices and enables them to see the richness of their diverse choices and opportunities in the world” (Haugland S., 1992).

Curriculum is the vital component of education. A review of the articles above help to understand the kind of curriculum that must be implemented in pre-schools, what it should include, how it can be implemented in books and software, thereby spelling out pedagogy of the multi-cultural education. From the review of the literature, I have gained an understanding about what kinds of stories I will select for teaching in the classroom and how I should take care not to influence children unawares to form biases or prejudices. The above literature touches upon important related aspects like diverse family backgrounds, anti-bias curriculum and culturally relevant methods. It

offers practical tips to educators who are concerned with pre-primary education.

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