



Culturally Responsive Teaching: Fostering Skills For A Diverse World

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ABSTRACT

The role of teachers in contributing knowledge in this highly advanced digital era is both challenging and competitive. Teachers are resource pools that help students to imbibe social skills and life skills which mould their personality. Imparting core skills include hard skills as well as soft skills and are vital in succeeding in both personal as well as professional life. Hard skills are basic capabilities which aims at career achievements. Soft skills, in contrast refers to unique characteristics in one's personality which includes interpersonal skills, communication abilities, leadership qualities, etc. which has to be acquired through proper practice and training. Developing soft skills in a 'customised' classroom requires individual attention by knowing the personal background of each student and then identifying the cultural context they belong to. Addressing the unique needs of each student who belong to different background is one of the major challenges faced by a teacher in an ordinary classroom. Culturally responsive learning enables to recount the process of acquiring information in an immediate thriving environment. The role of teachers in developing soft skills among students through culturally responsive pedagogy involves active participation of teacher by exploring her full potential in the process of effective transaction of instructional objectives. In this e-world it would never become difficult to enrich learners' hard skills through various online platforms. But polishing the soft skills needs a highly interactive peer group with the guidance of an excellent mentor and performer. Teachers, in modern education theatre, need to become flexible enough to supplement the same to the students by enriching personalised learning. This study aims to find out the role of teachers in a culturally responsive classroom and how it enables to enhance certain essential soft skills among students.

Key words – Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Soft skills, Hard skills

Introduction

Ancient Indian literatures accentuate the role of teacher in an individual's existence as life agents - one who provides overall knowledge which encapsulates both life skills and social skills. Here, the importance of a good teacher lies in seeding moral and spiritual qualities which prepare them best to face the challenges in their life in an efficacious way. Transferring of information is the second thing since one cannot sustain oneself in his life with that plethora of knowledge alone. The basic skills to survive in a society and personal life gain more importance in educational process. In gurukul educational system, Students reside in guru's abode to imbibe the life and moral values of their teachers irrespective of their caste, community, or social status. This kind of learning process was a mandatory in one's completion of education. It was a part of the curriculum which enables them to acquire wisdom and find solutions to practical life issues. The learners were continuously groomed, polished and refined to meet the challenges in future life. In modern age the perspective of teaching as well as learning have had undergone a vast transformation. The immediate aim of education has narrowed to acquire more scores and the ultimate aim became to grab a job and income. In this technically advanced age, gathering information is easily available before us using our fingertips. One can learn at anytime from anywhere in this world which equips them to score excellent grades. The role of teacher in classrooms has becomes a question. The effect is that students are endowed to assimilate only life skills or capabilities to create excellent numerical in academic records. On the other hand, they lack proper communication capabilities,

effective management skills, leadership qualities, confidence and interpersonal skills which are mandatory in preparing them to excel in both personal and professional lives. Hard skills are capabilities or specific abilities which enables to perform the requirements of a position. Proficiency in foreign languages, data analysis, computer programming, marketing skills etc can be considered as hard skills. They are concrete, measurable and are easy to be acquired unlike social skills. Hard skills, otherwise known as technical skills, are job specific which are learned through experience or education. Acquisition of hard skills appears to be quite unchallenging and uncomplicated since it can be mastered by oneself. It is here the role and importance of teachers in providing core skills or essential social skills to learners during their stages of education becomes more important.

Scope of Culturally Responsive Theory

A teacher can assimilate her complete capabilities into her strengths in the classroom. The quality of sound, body movements, gestures, facial expressions can be converted into teaching aids to attract student attention and arouse their interest towards topic. Teacher becomes an artist or a performer by using the complete body in classroom and include students to participate in them. Each student is unique. The learners in a classroom belongs to different social background and cultural contexts. These demands learning in a familiar environment in class rather than contemplating on remote examples. The students need to get exposed through local environment. Culturally responsive teaching, proposed by Gloria Ladson – Billings, American pedagogical theorist and teacher educator, promotes the uniqueness of learners in a classroom and use their uniqueness as tools for effective transaction of instructional objectives. It is a theory of instruction which Ladson defines as, ‘an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Inaccessible examples and mundane contexts could only result in passive learning which students fail to imbibe both the immediate and ultimate aspect of learning in the subject. But customised learning enables them to identify themselves as essential elements in the part of learning. In culturally responsive learning, culture refers to the language, rituals, living background race, community and beliefs where they belong to. Gloria Ladson – Billings identified three aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy – a) a focus on student learning and academic success, b) developing students’ cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and c) supporting students’ critical consciousness or their current and social everyday life.

The benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy in a classroom are:

- a) Helps to identify students’ assets which enable teachers to convert those into a student-centred classroom.
- b) Promotes multiculturalism and generates cultural competence among learners.
- c) Builds confidence and self-esteem by strengthening students’ racial and ethnic identities.
- d) Learning creates a personalised experience which is engaging as well as creative.
- e) Builds a sense of belonging which facilitates meaningful learning
- f) Promotes social connection that develops emotional quotient.

Cultural awareness itself is an important soft skill for an individual who grows in a world which is driven by various public- private interactions. Social institutions play vital role in the development of a child’s schema – the pattern that we organise learning, linking ideas and perceptions to make sense of the world, or the way we see the world according to Piaget. Learning the environment through the environment enables a child to adapt to life in an easier way and hence build an empathetic attitude towards everything that surrounds it. Hence culturally responsive teaching is a proper platform for language teachers to bring the child closer and to hand in various activities to assimilate soft skills among them.

Importance of Soft Skills

Soft skills are essentially interpersonal skills as well as personality traits that makes one to grab attention and interact effectively with others or in a group. In educational curriculum, soft skills are always sidelined or were considered with less priority. Soft skills are immeasurable and hence lacks proper evaluation method unlike hard skills. But the latter involves direct evaluation method which are enhanced through education and experience. Hard skills can be demonstrated in a measurable way. In modern age, availability of job is one among great challenges which one has to face in his life. Today, companies recruit employers on the basis of the excellence in their soft skills and not hard skills. Education, grades and experience skipped the criteria list. Now the they demand candidates with good presentation skills, communication skills, leadership quality, adaptability, self-confidence and interpersonal skills. In personal life, a relationship can either thrive or die due to improper way of communication. Being a social animal and since we all live in a society crowded by human beings; it is important to polish one’s soft skills. It should supplement and compliment the hard skills. It is high time that we should focus on including soft skills in our education curriculum which aims at an overall development of learners. Some of the important soft skills include communication skills, critical thinking skills, presentation skills, teamwork skills, time management skills and so on.

Communication skills should be developed from early stages of education. Articulating the thoughts and ideas in our mind in a clear structured way is crucial in any successful relationships. A teacher can identify the way of speaking in each student using certain speaking exercises like story telling or narrating any loving memories. In a classroom context, teachers can prompt them to speak their ideas and thoughts and through proper correction methods they can erase the fear of speaking. Teacher can provide fake situational contexts and ask

them to live in it with the help of their peers. Through role play method, teacher as well as students can participate in various daily life situations which the students are familiarised with. It paves way to speak the language before others that gradually wipe out the fear of public speaking. It promotes interpersonal communication and enables them to develop communication skills. In a culturally responsive teaching, through this situational role play activities, learners can easily collaborate with the immediate surroundings which they are familiar with and enhance active learning. Adapting communicational contexts into class room provides learners to learn new vocabularies related to their own culture. For instance, a teacher can ask them to be in different groups and enact the roles of family members, teachers or friends and their speeches in daily life or simply providing directions to nearest bus stop to monitor their language, vocabulary and cultural intimacy.

Thinking critically to analyse an information in an objective way in order to take informed decisions is a major skill which one has to face multiple times in his lifetime. It can be acquired and boosted through classroom learning directly from the teacher. This skill requires evaluation, identifying logical assumptions and analysing biases. One has to assimilate and synthesise complicated information with different perspectives and then to arrive at logical conclusions. A teacher can incorporate different point of views in a classroom and encourage students to think critically and ask questions after that. Teachers can ask open questions from their subject during teaching and then to invite their critical comments on that particular point. For instance, while teaching a story or a poem teacher can ask students to think in a different way and offer numerous endings or deviations in the course of that piece of literature. She can also lead them to think if they were in that situation what would they do or like or she can recount learner's past experiences and inspire them to inspect their actions or decisions they had taken before. This creates a personal bond between learners and teacher.

Presentation skills require ability to present ideas and thoughts in an organised convincing manner. Most importantly, while taking a presentation, one should possess the capacity to gain complete enthusiasm of the audience and become centre of attraction. Plan, prepare and practice are the key elements which should be followed before doing a presentation. Each day teacher can assign any learner from the classroom and give them five to seven days to plan and prepare for their presentation. In culturally based classroom, a teacher can polish presentation skills of his students by asking them to present a small report on any local festival or event that had recently in their locality or to present the summary of a mythical story related to their race or community that they have read or learned. This brings the interest of learners and provides a cross cultural co-education. This enables students to prepare them to be a part of society which includes different cultures and beliefs around them. They realise that it is quite natural to be a part of diverse cultures and reinforce the need to embrace it.

Teamwork demands collaborative as well as adaptable mindset from each individual in the team. One has to learn how to behave in a group and the business to keep in mind while being part of a team. This can be created in a classroom using some effective strategies. A teacher can mix up students from different seating positions and can give them certain tasks such as translation exercise, story making, writing essays etc. This makes room for differences. Students from different culture will exhibit difference in their communicative styles. This may lead to a slow pace in their productivity while working in a team. But gradually those cultural differences become their asset which positively reinforces creativity and productivity of whole team. This inclusiveness builds a strong sense of being among students and develops a more humanitarian outlook towards the world.

Other soft skills such as problem solving, leadership quality, creativity, empathy, adaptability also hold a significant function in moulding of one's personality. Teacher can successfully incorporate classroom activities by projecting the implementation of these skills to complement their future goals in life. Teaching soft skills through culturally responsive approach in a classroom requires a highly active and dynamic teacher so as to execute the learning activities effectively. Consistency is an important factor here since acquisition and reflection of those skills involves much time from learners with a tolerant forbearing teacher at the other end. Culturally responsive pedagogy reinforces the importance of student-centred learning by ensuring the engagement of learners throughout the learning process. This also aids them to comprehend difficult topics in a more meaningful way. Through proper blending of learners' unique experiences, culture, race and beliefs into various activities and tasks from their daily life boosts up the confidence level and self-esteem of learners. Unknowingly, they learn the basic qualities and skills which thrive them to unfurl the innumerable possibilities and opportunities in life. learners naturally accumulate soft skills embracing the idea that each culture is distinct and there is nothing inferior or superior about that. The learners can come out as independent and emotionally balanced individuals wiping out every possible discrimination on the basis of colour, race, gender or nation from the very root.

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of education is to build a better world where humanity dignifies everything else in the universe. Classrooms are the best womb for every child to assimilate and nurture the soft skills with the aid of a compassionate and encouraging trainer. Teacher has to move beyond the subject to reach the extend of students. She needs to teach the student before her with all the maxims of teaching. Effective transaction of instructional material is not the immediate aim but to transact the instructional materials by providing an all-

round development of students in all possible dimensions becomes more important. Its high time to transform the mundane educational curriculum to a more productive skill oriented one. Otherwise, the role and scope of teaching diminishes to mere textbook teaching without any productive output. The result is that it could contribute to more academic certificates rather than real life practical wisdom. The proper knitting of pedagogical innovations like culturally responsive teaching into a highly macro skill-oriented classroom is a big challenge since it undermines all the existing practices in a conventional classroom. But it helps to open a wide appreciation among learners that multiculturalism is an asset by elevating their academic expectations. As educators, a teacher should set a new innovative path in education which in turn lead to productive innovations that aids the society in return.

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