CHAPDER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE
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The concept of **multiculturalism** is slowly weaving its way into today’s classroom curriculum. A multicultural approach to education is essential to prepare students for the diverse and global society that will be their adult world. It prepares all students to live in our pluralistic world and at the same time provides them with solid academic benefits.

Multicultural education as a shift in curriculum is as simple as adding new and diverse materials and perspectives to be more inclusive of traditionally under-represented groups. There are a multitude of differing conceptualizations of multicultural education. While some focus on individual students or teachers, others are much more macro in scope. But all the ideals, at their roots, are concerned about transformation in the perspectives of students, teachers and school at large about their own and other cultures. Thus multicultural education involves the teaching and learning of values of diversity and the detrimental effect to society of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

The historical roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movement in the U.S. During the 1960s, the various historically oppressed groups challenged the discriminatory practices in public institutions, specifically educational institutions. In the early 1970s, the women’s rights movement joined the civil right struggle fighting for education reform. Thus multicultural education emerged to meet the needs of a society that was struggling with the realization that it is not monocultural, but is an
amalgamation of many cultures. The basic assumption is that cultural differences enrich rather than diminish a society.

Multicultural education is a very broad concept. To assimilate this concept, one needs to have an understanding of multitude of differing ideals. The focus may be on curriculum, students or teachers. It is concerned about the transformation along the following lines:

i) Ensures equal educational opportunity to all students irrespective of their race, creed, gender or socio-economic status.

ii) Encourages students to appreciate their own cultural backgrounds.

iii) Promotes cross-cultural awareness and makes the students respect heritage of others.

iv) Develops skills, knowledge, values and attitudes in students.

v) Makes education more child-centred and inclusive and student-centred.

An education that is multicultural:

i) ensures access to learning and the resources of the education system for all students irrespective of their colour, creed, gender or socio-economic status. The curriculum will be suited to their experience and knowledge and meet their needs and interest.

ii) provides a framework for all students to examine and appreciate their own cultural backgrounds, how cultures operate, and the roles individuals and groups play in the creation and interpretation of culture.
promotes cross-cultural awareness in all students and interaction through experiences that enhance understanding and respect for the languages and heritages of others and encourage the use of cultural diversity as a resource.

iv) develops in all students the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes to participate as active and informed citizens.

James A. Banks (1994) was one of the multicultural education scholars to examine schools as a social system from a multicultural context. He based his concept of multicultural education on educational equality. He stressed on transforming policies, teachers’ attitudes and teaching styles, instructional materials and assessment methods to create a multicultural school environment.

It is the breadth of multicultural education which makes it such a profound influence in the educational scenario. Banks (2006) described the dimensions of multicultural education in five overlapping areas in which researchers and practitioners are involved.

i) **Content Integration** is the inclusion of materials, concepts and values from a variety of cultures in teaching. It describes the extent to which teachers use examples and content from diverse cultures to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area. Research indicates that such an approach develops more positive racial attitudes in students and also makes them active learners.

ii) **Knowledge Construction** process describes the extent to which teachers help students understand, investigate, and determine how the cultural assumptions,
frame of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it. It is the recognition that all knowledge is socially constructed, created in the minds of human beings to explain their experience and thus, can be challenged.

Banks has identified five types of knowledge. “I argue that students should study all five types of knowledge” (Banks, 2006).

(a) **Personal and cultural knowledge** are the concepts, explanations, and interpretations that students derive from personal experience in their homes, families, and community cultures.

(b) **Popular knowledge** is the facts, concepts, explanations and interpretations that are institutionalized within the mass media and other institutions that are part of the popular culture.

  e.g. Movies such as ‘Gandhi’ and ones relating to Indian freedom struggle.

(c) **Mainstream academic knowledge** is the concepts, paradigms, theories and explanations that constitute traditional (western-centric) knowledge in history and the behavioural and social sciences.

(d) **Transformative academic knowledge** includes facts, concepts, paradigms, themes and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and expand and substantially revise established canons, paradigms, theories, explanations and research methods. When transformative academic paradigms replace mainstream ones, a scientific revolution has occurred.
(e) *School knowledge* includes facts, concepts, generalizations and interpretations that are presented in textbooks, teacher guides, other media forms, and lectures by teachers.

According to Banks (2006), teaching students various types of knowledge can help them to better understand the perspectives of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups as well as to develop their own interpretations of events.

iii) **Equity Pedagogy** exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups. Culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching – a form of equity pedagogy is used to help close the achievement gap (Gay, 2000, Lanson – Billing, 1994).

iv) **Prejudice Reduction** focuses on the characteristics of students’ racial attitudes and how teaching methods and materials can change them. It can include teaching tolerance about religion, physical and mental abilities, and sexual preferences. Research indicates that multicultural instructional materials and teaching strategies help students develop democratic racial attitudes (Banks, 2001).

v) **An empowering school culture** is used to describe the process of restructuring the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. It is this dimension of multicultural education that enables the other four dimensions. Research
indicates that the culture of some schools fosters academic achievement and that the culture of other schools does not (Brookover et al., 1979).

Giving access to ethnically and racially diverse students does not make the school multicultural. Levine and Lezotte (2001) have identified important characteristics that make the school culture reflect multicultural. They include:

- A safe and orderly environment
- A shared faculty commitment to improve achievement,
- An orientation focused on identifying and solving problems,
- High faculty cohesion and collaboration,
- High faculty input in decision-making.
- School wide emphasis on recognizing positive performance.

**Approaches to multicultural education**

Sleeter (1997), in *Multicultural Education as a Social Activism*, mentions five approaches to multicultural education. They are:

- *Teaching the Culturally Different Approach* which attempts to raise the academic achievement of students of colour through culturally relevant instruction.

- *Human Rights Approach* where students are taught about commonalities of all people through understanding their social and cultural differences but not their differences in institutional and economic power.
The Single Group Studies Approach is about the histories and contemporary issues of oppression of people of colour, women, low socio-economic groups, and gays and lesbians.

The Multicultural Education Approach promotes the transformation of the educational process to reflect the ideals of democracy in a pluralistic society. Students are taught content using instructional methods that value cultural knowledge and differences.

In Social Reconstructionist Approach the students are taught about oppression and discrimination. Students learn about their roles as social change agents so that they may participate in the generation of a more equitable society.

**Focus of Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education must have, as its crux, the below defining characteristics to achieve its purposes for students, teachers, parents, and administrators of the school system:

a) A learning environment that supports positive interracial contact;

b) A multicultural curriculum;

c) Positive teacher expectations;

d) Administrative support; and

e) Teacher training workshop.

Schools should encourage students to respect diversity and prepare students simultaneously for nation and global citizenry. Several principles and frameworks
have been proposed by scholars to help educational policymakers and practitioners for achieving the goals. The essential principles designed by the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel, USA, describe ways in which educational policy and practice related to diversity can be improved. They are:

1. **Teacher Learning**

   **Principle 1:** Professional development programmes should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within the society and the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behaviour.

2. **Student Learning**

   **Principle 2:** Schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards.

   **Principle 3:** The curriculum should help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed and reflects researcher’s personal experiences as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work.

   **Principle 4:** Schools should provide all students with opportunities to participate in extra – and co-curricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement and foster positive interracial relationships.

3. **Intergroup Relations**

   **Principle 5:** Schools should create or make salient super ordinate crosscutting group memberships in order to improve intergroup relations.
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Principle 6 – students should learn about stereotyping and other related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations.

Principle 7: Students should learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups (e.g. justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity).

Principle 8: Teacher should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural and language groups.

Principle 9: Schools should provide opportunities for students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups to interact socially under conditions designed to reduce fear and anxiety, school governance, organization, and equity.

Principle 10: A school’s organizational strategies should ensure that decision-making is widely shared and that members of the school community learn collaborative skills and dispositions in order to create a caring environment for students.

Principle 11: Leaders should develop strategies that ensure that all public schools, regardless of their locations, are funded equitably.

4. Assessment

Principle 12: Teacher should use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills.

Multicultural perspective in education has many benefits. It

- broadens student’s views
- builds self-esteem
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- improves academic performance
- provides cultural authenticity
- improves self-concept and self understanding
- enhances sensitivity to and understanding others
- promotes understanding among cultures.
- increases the ability to perceive and understand multiple, sometimes conflicting, cultural and national interpretations of and perspectives on events, values and behaviour.

Strategies to support multicultural education

To promote multicultural perspective in learning, it is essential to cater to the diverse learning needs of the diverse students. Several strategies develop multicultural perspective in classroom. They are:

- **Questioning styles**

  Questioning techniques that personally involve students will allow them to respond in a way that reflects their cultural diversity and that will expose their fellow students to those differences (Evans, 1991).

- **Role-playing**

  Role-playing is a versatile activity that allows students to express their opinions in a realistic situation. Students can “trade places” with a fellow student or a character from a literature selection (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1995).
Role-playing enables students to express and to examine their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about prejudice and discrimination. Poetry, biography, and powerful fiction are excellent sources for both discussion and role-playing (Banks, 1989).

- **Cooperative learning**

Many years of research and practice support the use of cooperative groups to 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 (Slavin, 1983). Group members become more accepting of classmates who are different.

- **Exposure to different languages cultures**

Exposing students to speakers of various languages broadens students’ perspectives by introducing them to different languages and such speakers can share with the students’ ideas and values from other cultures (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990).

- **Group discussions**

Group discussions stimulate thinking. The belief that thinking originates within individuals – and only after that it is ready to be shared socially – has given way to the idea that some of the best thinking results from a group’s collective efforts as confirmed by psychologists such as Sternberg and Vygotsky. In discussions in which students examine more than one point of view, there is ample opportunity to enrich and refine their understanding by helping them to view their own interpretation in the light of the interpretations of others (Alvermann, 1991).
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- **Active involvement**

Instructional techniques that allow for individual differences and that add a spark of excitement to classroom activities should be used in place of fill-in-the-blank activities. Students should be engaged in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking activities that provide opportunities for them to make decisions and solve problems (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990).

**The role of multicultural literature in multicultural education**

Appropriate content is one of the major elements of multicultural or diverse perspective instruction (Banks, 1990). Literature is a powerful medium for understanding the world. Children find it easier to assimilate new information when it is presented within the structure of a story. Mendosa and Reese (2004) stated that ‘good multicultural literature can benefit all children.’

**Criteria for selecting multicultural literature**

The content should have the following characteristics to make it truly multicultural:

- **Accuracy**

Cultural authenticity is a very important criterion which makes the literature accurate. According to Fox and Short (2003), ‘because children’s literature has the potential to play such a central role in an education that is multicultural ... all young readers should have access to culturally authentic literature.’ The literature used should accurately portray the history, customs, values, and language of a particular group (Sims, 1982). The content should be free from any type of bias, cultural stereotyping and prejudices.
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Authenticity is strongly debatable in multicultural literature. According to Fox and Short (2003), ‘authors, illustrators, editors, publishers, educators, librarians and scholars all have different points of view about authenticity...’. ‘Authenticity refers to how books depict accurate representations of the cultural attitudes, feelings and perspectives, both visually and literally’. (Steiner, 2001)

- Develops understanding among cultures

The use of multicultural literature can also extend students’ knowledge about parallel cultures by exposing them to the differences and similarities between their culture and that of other groups. Multicultural literature helps the students to recognize that they don’t all share the same beliefs, traditions or holiday celebrations and thereby broadens their perspective.

- Improves self-concept

Multicultural literature plays an important role in developing a healthy self-concept when it reflects their ethnic and cultural background. So it is important to select literature which has characters to which the readers can relate to and identify with.

There are a number of features that need to be considered while selecting multicultural literature for children. Every literature depicting multicultural characters might not be a good choice in many cases. ‘Most importantly, the stories must be authentic and represent characters as real people, not portray them as different or foreign. Other aspects to consider require careful reading of the text and examination of the illustrations’ (Landt, 2013). The following questions designed to help select
multicultural literature were created by synthesizing criteria from a wide range of
evaluation forms (Cai, 2002; Slapin, Seale, & Gonzales, 1992; Shioshita, 1997).

- Are the characters part of society and not depicted as outsiders?
- Are the characters portrayed as individuals, not generic representations of the
culture?
- Are the characters multi-dimensional and dynamic?
- Are the situations realistic and not perpetuating stereotypes?
- Are problems and conflicts solved by individuals from the culture rather than
  by outsiders?
- Is the language spoken appropriate for the culture?
- Who tells the story, an outsider or an insider?
- What are the author’s qualifications to write about this culture?

Day (1999) identified a list of 11 characteristics to look for the bias in books. They
are 1) omission of a group of people 2) illustrations that represent stereotypes and
tokenism 3) check the story line 4) check the authenticity of the story 5) consider the
relationship between people in the story 6) check for bias 7) consider the effects on the child’s self image 8) research the author’s or
illustrator’s background 9) consider the author’s or illustrator’s perspective 10) check
language for stereotyping or offensive terms and 11) check the copyright date.
Conclusion

The rich diversity of today’s society is clearly evident in many classrooms today. Schools and learning environments must work for all and must reflect the cultures of the communities they serve. Many educators agree that a multicultural approach to education is essential to engage children of all cultures in learning and to prepare students for the diverse and global society that will be their adult world. Teachers need to recognize this and instruct their students with a multicultural perspective. The school authorities have equal responsibility of creating an empowering environment and providing adequate facilities to its stakeholders.