Unit 14
Education: Pluralism and Multiculturalism

Contents

Learning Objectives

This unit introduces you to the emerging facets of multicultural education. After reading this unit you should be able to:

*   explain the various dimensions of multicultural education;

*   discuss the features of a multicultural society and its interface with the multicultural education; and

*   analyse the goals and strategies of education in multicultural societies

14.1   Introduction

In this changing world multiculturalism has emerged as a contemporary social reality. To address the educational need of these societies educationist have developed a distinctive perspective known as multiculturalism in education. Multicultural societies like those of America, Britain, Australia and many others have introduced these perspectives in their education system.

In this unit, we have discussed the meaning and dimensions of a multicultural society. The essential approaches to multiculturalism, namely the process of assimilation; cultural pluralism, melting pot, the ideology of cultural choice, etc., are widely discussed. A multicultural society needs different educational approaches. To know the specific educational needs of these societies and to eater to them, we have discussed in this unit the goal and strategies of multicultural education. We have also presented a case study of multicultural education from Australia. This unit altogether will help you to understand the emerging dimensions, goals, strategies and practices of multicultural education.

14.2   Culture, Society and Multiculturalism

Before we proceed further in discussing multicultural education, it is imperative that we must clarify the concept of culture sociologically.

Understanding Culture and Society

You must have studied at the graduate level (ESO-01/11 of BDP) in detail the concepts and various elements of culture. Let us briefly discuss culture again. In the layman's sense culture is perceived in relative term. Some individuals or groups are considered more cultured than the rest. It wrongly conceptualizes culture as it locates social groups or categories in a hierarchical order and does not take into consideration several properties of culture as available from within. In a sociological sense, understanding each one of us both as an individual and as a member of a group belonging to a culture in important.

Cultures may be different from each other, not superior or inferior to each other. We possess culture as members of a group. To us culture is those shared values, norms, behaviour patterns, customs, traditions, art, music, artifacts, etc., which we inherit as members of society and transmit to the next generation. It is not to be understood that these shared values, traditions, norms, customs, art, music, artifacts, behaviour, etc., are static. Rather, all these undergo several changes in the process of interaction with other cultures, and in the processes of transmission and inheritance.

Box 14.1: What is culture?

It is a way of life or a cherished worldview of a group in society. To E.B. Tylor "Culture .... in its ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1889).

To the UNESCO.... "Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, life styles, ways of living together, value systems traditions and beliefs" (http.potal.unesco.org)

It is essential that all members of a group for its survival and functioning accept culturally patterned ways of behaviour. Thus culture conditions, forecasts and attach subjective meaning to the behaviour of the members of a group. Human beings have to satisfy various psychological and biological needs. These needs are satisfied mostly by culturally determined ways. Thus culture makes the behaviour patterns of one group very specific and different from those of others. However, the specificity and differences are not be understood at all as contradictory or oppositional to the rest. Rather, in a fast changing communicative society these can widely be regarded as plural manifestation of cultural richness. In many societies there are groups who are distinct from each other in terms of their cultural practices. These groups are indeed the subcultures of large societies and are distinctive by their racial, caste, ethnic, linguistic, class, occupational, gender and religious orientations.

In many large societies while there is coexistence of significant number of sub-cultures because of geographical vastness, new subcultures are added to these with arrival of immigrant groups in these societies. In societies with ancient historical tradition social fabrics are interwoven with plural traditions taken from various subculture. Now let us understand multicultural societies,

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Box 14.2

In dealing with immigrant groups and their cultures, there are several approaches taken by the nationa-states:

Monoculturalism: In Europe, culture is very closely linked to nationalism, thus government policy is to assimilate immigrants.

Melting Pot: In the United States, the traditional view has been one of a melting pot where all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated without state intervention.

Multiculturalism: The policy that facilitates immigrants and others to preserve their cultures with the different cultures interacting peacefully within one nation.

The way nation states treat immigrant cultures rarely falls neatly into one or another of the above approaches. The degree of difference with the host culture (i.e., "foreignness"), the number of immigrants, attitudes of

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the resident population, the type of government policies that are enacted and the effectiveness of those policies all make it difficult to generalize about the effects. Similarly with other subcultures within a society, attitudes of mainstream population and communications between various cultural groups play a major role in determining outcomes. The study of cultures within a society is complex and research must take into account a myriad of variables (http://en.wikipedia.org)

Multicultural Societies

The post-Second World War period has been conspicuously marked by the triumph of liberal democracies and multiculturalism. While on the one hand there has been a resurgence of people's movements against the totalitarian, theocratic and colonial regions, there have also been the articulation of multiple identities within these societies. The proliferation of Black Civil Rights, students, women's, religious, minority rights, indigenous people, etc. movements across the globe have paved the way for the emergence of multiculturalism in the following forms:

— The mosaic of a multicultural society is formed with a long historical process of immigration of a sizeable number of people in these societies in reference and thereafter developing a process of sharing of cultural values, norms, and traditions among all the members of society. The sense of tolerance and respect for each other's culture form the basis of a multicultural society.

— As in every society, in multicultural societies too there are certain groups of people who are relegated to the margin of the society – socially, economically, culturally and politically. These marginalized groups are deprived of several choices and avenues for upward mobility. At times they form an oppositional sub-culture. Since long the marginalized groups have been struggling for their cultural identity and equal rights in a multicultural society; for example ethnic and religious minorities may assert their cultural rights.

— Multicultural societies provide the social, political and economic space for the articulation of views of all ethnic and religious groups and for the assertion of their cultural rights.

— It is important that many of these cultural identities are inclusive and are constructed criss-crossing the boundaries of many of the pre-existing cultural identities. For example, the migrant groups have members from all racial, ethnic, religious, occupational, etc., groups.

Even though these multi-cultural identities are locally manifested and contextualised they have wider and at times global connectivity. For example the Black women of America are globally linked through the network of international women's movement.

> **Reflection and Action 14.1**
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> What do you understand by culture? Discuss a few elements of culture, which can be used from the viewpoint of multiculturalism in education.

14.3 Cultural Diversities in Multicultural Education

Multicultural education views cultural diversities from a distinctive perspective. Let us examine how cultural diversities are being viewed in this approach to education:

a) Multiculturalism in education recognizes that every learner belongs to a culture, which produces a distinctive pattern of behaviour, life-style, identity, feeling and thinking.

b) No culture is inferior or superior to other cultures. However, as culture shapes the worldview, people tend to evaluate and judge the rest of the world through their nurtured worldview. It may at times solicit feelings of superiority over any other cultures and produce inability to view other cultures as equally viable alternatives for organizing reality. Ultimately it may contribute to ethno-centrism. However by over-coming one's ethnocentric view of the world one can begin to respect other cultures and even learn to function comfortably in more than one cultural group (Gollnick, and Chinn 1990: 10). Here education plays a big role in overcoming these limitations in a multicultural society.

c) Many elements of one culture are shared by members of other culture.

d) Culture is learned and shared. Here enculturation and socialization are important processes to learn how to act in society. Multicultural education facilitates these processes of learning and sharing.

e) Culture is an adaptation and has been developed to accommodate several environmental and technological conditions. This process of adaptation has been integrated in multicultural education.

f) Culture and several cultural practices undergo changes along with the changes in the technological and communicative arrangements in society.

g) Over the centuries human societies have become interdependent. There have been the needs to understand other cultures in their own terms and not in terms of one's own cultural belief. In a plural society no one can relegate others to an inferior status in cultural term. Thus there have been the inter-cultural processes of learning and experiencing another culture so that one would know what it is like to be a member of another culture and to view the world from that point of view.

h) Human beings have the capacity to be multicultural, to feel comfortable and to communicate effectively with the people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Scholars are of the view that a multicultural educational programme can help students to expand their cultural competencies to include those required to function effectively in other cultures in which they are not members (ibid).

As we have already discussed the significances of cultural diversities in multicultural education, let us underline the important dimensions of multicultural education in the following section.

14.4 Dimensions of Multicultural Education

In general, educational institutions are the meeting points of people from diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds. In a rapidly changing society these diversities, which are manifested precisely in the form of race, religion and ethnicity, are both challenges and opportunities for the educators to initiate curriculum to integrate the micro-perspective of local communities with broad educational orientation of the state and society. This educational orientation in essence helps to make the students realize that (a) in spite of cultural differences, individuals across cultures have many similarities, (b) everyone has the desire and capacity to learn from each others culture, (c) we have the desire to share values, moves, norms and traditions, and (d) through interaction with various cultures we become respectful and tolerant to plural existence in the society. In this context multicultural education is viewed as "an educational strategy in which students from diverse cultural backgrounds are viewed as positive and essential in developing classroom instruction and school environment. It is designed to support and extend the concepts of culture, cultural pluralism and equity into the formal school setting (ibid). In multi-cultural education cultural diversities are valued resources.

Democratic value is another aspect of multicultural education. According to Christine Bennett (1990) "multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and in an interdependent world". To him cultural pluralism is an ideal state of societal conditions characterized by equity and mutual respect among existing cultural groups. In contrast to the cultural assimilation or the melting pot images where ethnic minorities are expected to give up their traditions and to blend in or be absorbed by the host society or dominant culture, in a pluralistic society members of ethnic groups are permitted to retain their cultural ways, as long as they conform to those practices deemed necessary for harmonious coexistence with the society as a whole (1990:11). To him there are four distinctive, at times overlapping, aspects of multicultural education. It is a movement, a curriculum, a process and a commitment. Let us elaborate these further.

a) It is a movement to achieve equality of educational opportunity and equity among all groups irrespective of ethnic, social, gender, class, etc., backgrounds. It therefore aims to transform the total learning environment.

b) The system of education develops a curriculum which is integrated and multicultural in essence. This curriculum approach of multicultural education develops knowledge and understanding about cultural differences, the history and contribution of all the ethnic groups in the nations as well as in various civilizations in the past. It also aims to integrate multi-ethnic and global perspectives with the monoethnic ones.

c) It is a continuous process whereby people become multicultural in perceiving, evaluating, believing and doing without rejecting their own cultural values and identities.

d) It is a commitment to combat racism and other form of discrimination through the development of appropriate knowledge and skill.

The concept of multicultural society has always been valued in democracy. It is now realized that in the globalized world multicultural education is essential for academic excellence and equity, existence of multiethnic society, existence of interdependent world and for the promotion of equity and democratic values (Bennett 1990:11-17).

Reflection and Action 14.2

Examine the main features of multicultural education. Do you think it is significant to promote multicultural education in the contemporary society? Why?

14.5 Why is Multicultural Education Essential?

There are several reasons why multicultural education is a necessity in a the contemporary globalised world. Educationists like Bennett (1990) are of the view that multicultural education is essential for academic excellence and equity, and for the existence of a multiethnic society, the existence of an interdependent world and for the promotion of democratic values in the contemporary world. Let us elaborate some of arguments:

a) The principle of equity in education endeavours to ensure equal educational opportunities for the entire student community to express the fullest potential. Students can achieve excellence in an educational system, which is impartial in nature. The ideal of achieving educational excellence "involves concerns about ethnic groups that have been consistently cut off from equal access to a good education". This approach recognizes that the potential for excellence is available across ethnic groups and it builds knowledge about various ethnic groups and integrates them into the curriculum.

b) Plural societies have distinctive complexities in terms of varied cultural practices which are reflected in the patterns of socialization, food habits, behaviour patterns, dress, adherence to particular values, norms, etc. Multicultural education is very sensitive to these needs and is equipped accordingly. By recognizing these pluralities, multicultural education strikes a balance between cultural assimilation and cultural separatism or segregation.

c) Human societies have been facing some common concerns like destruction of the ozone layer, environmental pollution, poverty, overpopulation, nuclear arms, famine and hunger, AIDS, etc. The globalization process has accentuated these concerns. A cross-cultural understanding is essential for finding solutions to these problems. Multicultural education provides a platform for the articulation of common concerns.

d) A nation's commitment to the values of equity and democracy is widely reflected in its commitment to human rights, social justice and respect for alternative life choices. Multicultural education provides the space and platform to inculcate these values and helps to over come the barriers in achieving the democratic values of equity (Bennett, 1990: 15-16).

Reflection and Action 14.3

Is terrorism a common concern in the contemporary society? How can a common concern against terrorism be articulated through multicultural education?

Hence the goals of multicultural education, according to Gollnich and Chinn (1990) are to:

— promote the strength and value of cultural diversity,

— promote human rights and respect for those who are different from others,

— acquire knowledge of the historical and social realities of the society in order to understand racism, sexism, poverty etc.,

— support alternative life choices for people,

— promote social justice and equality for all people, and

— promote equity in the distribution of power and income among groups

14.6 Approaches to Multiculturalism

This is an age of multiculturalism. Here cultural pluralism is a reality now. Several approaches have emerged over the years to address this issue. In the following section we shall be highlighting a few of them.

a) Assimilation

Cultural assimilation is an important process of integration of the sub-cultures in the cultural mosaic of the multicultural society. In a multicultural society, according to Gorden (1964), the process of assimilation would go through the stages whereby the new cultural group/migrant cultural group would (i) change its cultural patterns to those of the dominant groups, (ii) develop large scale primary group relationships with the dominant group; (iii) intermarry fully with the dominant groups, (iv) lose its sense of peoplehood as separate from the dominant group; (v) encounter no discrimination; (vi) encounter no prejudiced attitudes; and (vii) not raise any issues that would involve values and power conflict with the dominant group. Herein he also talks of acculturation i.e. cultural assimilation in which the dominated groups have adopted the cultural patterns of the dominant group. In the American context the following two perspectives of assimilation are frequently suggested: Anglo conformity and the melting pot. The Anglo-conformity theory demanded the complete

renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favour of the behaviour and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group (cf Gollnik and Chinn 1990). In melting pot perspective, ethnic minorities are expected to give up their traditions and to blend in or be absorbed by the host society or dominant culture.

b) Cultural Pluralism

Cultural Pluralism is also a distinctive perspective designed in the context of America. According to Gordon (1964) cultural pluralism often calls for the maintenance of enough sub-societal separation to guarantee the continuance of the ethnic cultural tradition and the existence of the group, without at the same time interfering with the carrying out of standard responsibilities to the general American civil life. However disagreement remains on this issue as to whether an individual should be allowed to choose freely whether to remain within the confines of his birthright community enclave (Pratte 1979 cf: Gollnick and Chinn 1990).

c) Ideology of Voluntary Cultural Choice

Many scholars have pointed out that cultural pluralism has seen an individual in terms of a parochial identity related to ethnicity etc. rather than an autonomous identity. Here Newman (1973) emphasized the need to create a social environment in which groups and individuals may choose voluntarily the identity they wish to play out. As individual choice and mobility across cultural groups increases, the social and cultural barriers are likely to decrease. He has the belief that increasingly we will move towards an open society in which cultural background may influence who an individual is; but become irrelevant in public interaction (Gollmick and Chinn 1990).

Reflection and Action 14.4

In your opinion what should an ideal approach to deal with multiculturalism in a plural society?

14.7 Multicultural Education: Goals and Strategies

In a multicultural set up it is essential that the educators should be aware of the cultural background of the students for positively using the cultural diversities in the educational processes. In multicultural education cultural diversities are recognized as varied resources rather than problems. As strategy to serve the above mentioned goals the following steps are very often discussed:

i) **Sensitivity and criticality for multicultural content in the text book:** Both the text book writers and the teachers are required to be sensitive to multiculturalism and to develop logical criticality on the text to identify and thereafter eliminate bias and stereotypes which are projected about a community/group either unconsciously or deliberately. There are several forms of biases available in the text which can be depicted in some of the following forms:

   — Invisibility of a group in the illustration and example in a majority dominated society is always taken as the national expression of a text. Thus illustrations are quite often derived from the majority groups. Thus the minorities remain unprojected or under- projected.

   — Stereotyping some groups by way of assigning them specific ascribed roles and status.

   — Selectivity and imbalances in interpreting the status of marginalized groups from the perspective of the dominant ones. "Such biases prevent all students, both from the dominant and the subordinate groups, male and female — from realizing the complexity of historical and contemporary situations and developments".

— Very often text book depicts unrealistic social reality in order to take the status quoasits position. Controversial topics are glossed over and discussion on social movements, dissent, sex-education, divorce etc. are avoided. Issues and realities of the lives of the subordinate and marginalized are avoided in the text book.

— Though the aspects of lives of the subordinate groups are seldom integrated in the text, there is a tendency to present these aspects as fragmented and isolated topics in text. This approach suggests that the experiences of these segments of population are interesting ones: and are the integral parts of the contemporary and historical experiences. These contemporary and historical experiences of the subordinate groups are to be integrated in the text.

— Linguistic bias though minimized but yet to be eradicated from the text. Till now gender bias continues in most of the text books. All these biases, which are prevalent in one form or the other, are required to be eliminated from the text.

Box.14.3: Practice of Multicultural Education: An Illustration

Most of the liberal democracies of the world like the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia have accepted the policy of multicultural education in view of the prevalent cultural diversities in these countries. The provincial governments of these countries have formulated a distinctive policy of multicultural education. In this context the Multicultural Education policy of New South Wales (NSW) of Australia can be cited as an illustration.

• Multicultural education supports a vision of NSW as a community which values and benefits from its cultural and linguistic diversity to fully realise its social, cultural and economic potential. NSW has evolved a distinctive Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy for multicultural education in schools. Its policy statements delineate the following:

• Community harmony is promoted through school policies and practices, which counter racism and intolerance and develop understanding of cultural, linguistic and religious differences.

• Schools will provide teaching and learning programs that enable students from all cultures and communities to identify themselves as Australians within a democratic multicultural society and to develop the knowledge, skills and values for participation as active citizens.

• Schools will ensure inclusive teaching practices, which recognise and value the backgrounds and cultures of all students and promote an open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, religions and worldviews.

• Students who are learning English as a second language are provided with appropriate support to develop their English language and literacy skills so that they are able to fully participate in schooling and achieve equitable educational outcomes.

• Schools will provide specific teaching and learning programs to support the particular learning needs of targeted students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

• Schools will promote positive community relations through effective communication with parents and community members from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and by encouraging their participation in the life of the school.

The Principles of Multiculturalism provide the framework for the implementation of the Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy:

- All individuals in New South Wales should have the greatest possible opportunity to contribute to, and participate in all aspects of public life in which they may legally participate.

- All individuals and institutions should respect and make provision for the culture, language and religion of others within an Australian legal and institutional framework where English is the common language.

- All individuals should have the greatest possible opportunity to make use of and participate in relevant activities and programs provided or administered by the Government of New South Wales.

- All institutions of New South Wales should recognise the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of New South Wales as a valuable resource and promote this resource to maximise the development of the State.

ii) **Development of Multicultural Curriculum**: It is important that the educators must be aware of these biases in order to develop multi cultural curriculum. They are also required to integrate the following in the multicultural texts

a) **Achievement**: It is often suggested that in a multicultural context the educator must carefully select illustrations, analogies, and allegories from the experience of different ethnic and cultural groups to demonstrate or extricate the meaning of academic concepts and principles (Gay c.f Gollnick and Chinn 1990). It is also suggested that teachers who are sensitive to the experiences of students from different cultural background can make those students feel as much a part of the class as those from the dominant culture (Ibid). It is important that achievements made by the members of various subcultures in music, arts, sports, academics, politics etc. be adequately projected in the text.

b) **Student's voice**: Examples from student's life experiences are essential components of multi-cultural education. Here teachers develop regular dialogue with the students and their voice can be understood as the voice of their community. Their life experiences can help all students and the teacher to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing.

c) **Communication**: In order to increase the involvement of the students in the learning process of multicultural education teachers are to use oral and non-verbal communication patterns. To overcome the problem of differences between the cultural background of the teacher and the learner, "the teachers are to redirect the interaction to primarily use the kind of interaction that work most effectively with the students. The teachers are to be sensitive to these situations and needs of the students and can "begin to teach students how to interact effectively with which they are most uncomfortable".

d) **Learning and Teaching Style**: Socialization process plays an important role in inculcating individual differences in teaching and learning styles. However, they are not the indicators of general learning ability. In multicultural education, to serve the students effectively the teacher must develop instructional strategies, which are compatible both to the teacher and the learner.

e) **Formal Curriculum**: In multicultural education the educators take affirmative steps to ensure that cultural diversity is integrated throughout the curriculum. It promotes student's exposure to the richness of multicultural history and contemporary cultural fabric built with the contribution of all the cultures. It makes a critical examination

of contemporary and historical issues from the multicultural point of view and an extra planning to make curriculum and instruction multicultural. It is important that when micro-cultures are introduced in the curriculum, they are included not in subordinate, but in positive roles and status. Readings are selected by the authors from various cultural background to allow the students to understand the perspective of other cultural groups and how those perspectives differ from their own because of different experiences. In this pedagogy teachers also help students understand "the relationship of power and knowledge by comparing classical and contemporary writings in the subject being taught".

f) **Hidden Curriculum:** One must understand that hidden curriculum is not taught formally. There are rather parts of values and norms which underground the formal curriculum. These have deep impact both on the teacher and the students. These are located in the way students are being raised in the school and colleges, they are praised and evaluated, being socialized and in the power relationship within the educational institutions. The hidden curriculum prepares the students in view of the prevailing power relations in society. In multicultural education "a first step is to recognize that it exists and provides lessons that are probably more important than the academic curriculum. Developing a more democratic classroom would help in overcoming the power inequities that exist. Multicultural education values students' curiosity and encourages it. It evaluates teacher's interactions with students to ensure that teachers are actually supporting learning than preventing it" (Ibid).

g) **Critical Thinking:** Being able to think critically and to teach students to think criticality is essential for a democratic society. Multi-cultural education, as it deals with social cultural reality, would widen the space to develop critically on the structured causes of oppression and inequality based on caste, class, race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc., in society.

h) **Lived Realities:** In multicultural education the educator must know the communities, their cultural values and identities in order to develop the curriculum and instruction for the students. It does suggest that the teacher must know the sentiments of the community before introducing concepts, which may be foreign and unacceptable. Thus the teachers in the plural realities of the society.

i) **Community Resource:** The community is a repository of knowledge and this knowledge is to be extensively used with all sensitivity for learning and teaching purposes. In the classroom, resources of all the communities are included may it be the start story, poems, technology being used, speakers, leaders, etc.

Reflection and Action 14.5

What do you understand by multicultural curriculum? What are the things that need to be taken care of while developing a multicultural curriculum?

14.8 Conclusion

It has long been realized that notwithstanding differences, there are several similarities among cultures and that through interaction members of various cultures become respectful and tolerant to each other. These realizations have altogether formed the foundation stone of multicultural societies. In this unit, we have discussed some of the essential features of multicultural society and thereafter the need for the formulation of alternative strategies for the educational well being of the members of multi-cultural societies. Why is a

multicultural education necessary? What are the approaches to multiculturalism? What should be the goals and strategies of multicultural education? Answers to all these questions are discussed in this unit. It is pointed out that in a multicultural curriculum student voices from diverse cultural background, their communication skills, their diverse learning style, critical thinking are considered to be essential. It has been widely highlighted in this unit that cultural diversities are not liabilities but national resources.

14.9 Further Reading

Gollnick, D.M. and Chinn, P.C. 1990. *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*. Mernil Publishing Company: London

Bennett, C. 1990. *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*. Ellyn and Bacon: London