

## **Infusing Multiculturalism in Learner-Centered Teaching Classrooms**

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## **Introduction & Need for Strategy**

United States has seen a dramatic shift in the demographic profile in the last 20 years. Increasingly, every workplace, institutions of higher education, schools and communities is made up of various cultural, racial and ethnic groups. The United States census data indicates that the diversity index in the country has risen to 61.1% in 2020, up from 54.9% in 2010. Classrooms in the U.S., both K-12 and college level, are becoming more diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, race, language, and in many other dimensions (Choi & Lee, 2020). According to Hussar and Bailey (2019), classroom diversity is increasing, with the number of non-White students in the United States reaching 52.5% in 2018. Diversity in the classroom refers to distinctions in social identities among students. It comprises differences in age, race, socio-economic status, culture, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, language, and nationality etc. Establishing a sense of belonging in today's multicultural classrooms is of utmost importance for instructors, students, and administration. Creating awareness of the demographic shifts and understanding of various dimensions of diversity is critically important if we are to function as society where people are treated with respect, trust, and more importantly appreciation of various cultures and what it offers for mutual benefit. Today's classrooms are much different than what was 20-25 years ago. A study conducted by Pew Research Center (2018) found that "post millennial" generation of people ages 6-21 are the most diverse generation in American history. Creating an inclusive classroom environment is essential for fostering effective and successful learning for everyone in the class. The inclusion of diverse student groups is extremely important for developing educational equity and improving academic achievement. However, majority of educators lack the requisite skills to proficiently teach students in multicultural classrooms (Castro, 2010). Enhancing teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural education and culture-responsive teaching is vital for bridging the gap between students and teachers and fulfilling the goals of instructional practice.

## **Connection to Literature**

Our approach to studying multiculturalism is based on extensive review of literature that included journal articles, reports, Census data, our own life experiences in teaching an increasingly diverse populations, and other resources. In this paper presentation, we will discuss: 1) the importance of multiculturalism, 2) various dimensions of diversity and how these dimensions are critical to understanding multiculturalism 3) strategies to infuse multiculturalism in the LCT classroom, and 4) discuss examples of diversity dimensions that can be adapted in LCT classrooms.

According to UNESCO (2006, p.17), "The term multicultural describes the culturally diverse nature of human society". Multiculturalism is defined as the coexistence of multiple cultures in the same geographical, physical or social space, encompassing all the differences that exist (religious, linguistic, racial, ethnic and gender). It is the fundamental concept that acknowledges and promotes diversity and the right to it. Several studies and report have discussed the importance of multiculturalism in educational settings. Consensus from these studies suggest that multicultural education (MCE) is important because it offers tolerance and acceptance of

diversity, develops an appreciation of and respect for cultural differences, helps reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and improve critical thinking skills on topics related to social and cultural issues.

### **How It Works & Implementation of Strategy**

There are various dimensions of diversity that can be used by teachers/educators in LCT classrooms. These include ability diversity, gender diversity, age or generational diversity, ethnic diversity, religious diversity, socioeconomic diversity, experiential diversity, sexual orientation diversity, geographic diversity, disability, and educational diversity.

### **Results to Date / Implications / Impact**

Based on our experience in teaching secondary and postsecondary classrooms, we suggest the following strategies for infusing multiculturalism into LCT classrooms. To implement a multicultural classroom, educators must be aware of biases, value life experiences, comprehend learning styles, and assign multicultural projects (Alismail, 2016). Professional development in multicultural education (PDME) is a helpful and practical technique used by educational professionals to enhance teachers' readiness for instructing in classrooms with diverse student populations (Molle, 2013).

### **Future Plans / Advice to Others**

Conspicuously, we are at a crossroad, as we seek to know and understand one another. It is befitting for us to know and ascertain how different and alike we truly are. As we strive for a better America and better schools, let us become attentive to the many cultures, races and customs around us and in our classrooms. Multiculturalism is not merely a term or phrase, rather it is the conscience access required to lead global unity. Hand in hand, perhaps we can all move forward to garner the wisdom needed in 21<sup>st</sup> century institutions of higher education and public-school education. PDME is only the beginning for teachers and educators.

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