

## Multicultural Literacy: Need of the hour!

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As we are entering into a new phase of education in the country with New Education Policy 2020 in place, there is something which needs more attention than ever. The need of the hour is multicultural literacy.

Multicultural literacy refers to the aptitudes of looking and understanding something without any cultural biases. It is also the ability to accept the various viewpoints to achieve a better compassionate assessment of any situation. It is important for the current and future generations of students to be knowledgeable multiculturally because India in itself is very multicultural. Students need to be able to take views of different cultures to allow themselves to mature as responsible citizens, who reflect upon other people's opinions.

Multicultural literacy consists of the skills and aptitude of understanding the creators of knowledge and their interests while trying to expose the assumptions on which the knowledge is based, to look at knowledge in separation to the diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives, and to apply the knowledge towards more responsible actions that will help create a more compassionate and fair world around us.

Thus, multicultural literacy pays attention to diversity, equity, and social justice to promote cultural consciousness by focusing on difficult issues like prejudice and cruelty towards other ethnicities. The education of multicultural literacy should help students develop the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and attitudes that are required to become active citizens who will act towards achievement of social righteousness within our societies.

We can create big changes in the mindset of students by bringing small changes in the classrooms. As diversity and mobility of people within the country and out of the country grows, there is a pressing need for beginning of multicultural education in a way that is more representative of the students in today's classrooms. By teaching students to be campaigners for multiculturalism, we can also send the message of empathy and tolerance in schools and colleges as a need to develop intense awareness of others and admiration of different cultures. With this being communicated, it involves fundamental knowledge prior to teaching students how to critically evaluate the assumptions about cultural knowledge and how to question them about the issues being created because of various cultures.

### **Tool for Multicultural Literacy: Multicultural Literature**

Literature belonging to multiple cultures, called as multicultural literature works as a powerful tool in

empowering students in gaining a better understanding of both their own cultures and cultures of others. Through this richer knowledge, the gaps between students of various cultural backgrounds can be bridged and relationships can be strengthened. As the students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are global participants, even if they choose not to leave their own country, it is imperative that they acquire cultural sensitivity.

Research has shown that when students can relate global events to the themes, contradictions and characterizations found in multicultural literature, it helps them to better understand current world issues. Students therefore cultivate greater reasoning skills as they learn to engage with and analytically appraise the texts that they read.

Multicultural literature promotes positive self-esteem and precludes students from feeling separated. It has the power to cultivate respect, compassion, and acceptance among all students. We need to introduce those books which focus on commonalities instead of differences in humans, so students understand that all children feel the same sentiments no matter where they live in the planet, what dialect they speak, or how they seem. Such books indicate that though people have many variations, there are many shared traits that have the power to unite people. Stories depicting cultural variety can nurture the idea that race is not an impediment, but rather a part to the beauty of our multicultural world.

When students vicariously encounter the emotions and sentiments of others through literature, they are inspired to look critically at the world and gain a better insight of the global community. Multicultural literature can also support students in their identity creation. Identity formation is vital in the social advancement of all children, as it provides them a sense of belonging and acceptance in society. Inclusion of multicultural literature in library collections prove that the opinions and experiences of minority students are valued. When students go to see themselves mirrored in the pages of literature, they are expected to engage more with a text.

Thus, creating a responsible citizen requires knowledge of multiple cultures along with the respect for all the cultures. A person who has knowledge but doesn't know how to critically examine that knowledge, will not be able to convert that knowledge in wisdom. For making knowledge transferable, multicultural literacy is the need of the hour and one of the most helpful tools for the same is multicultural literature. There are abundant online resources that can be utilized to engage students and expand their literary encounters. The International Children's Digital Library offers free access to quality digital multicultural and multilingual texts from all over the world. This resource

offers a great addition to the school library fiction collection, especially for bilingual students.

The quote by Helder Camara, very well explains the importance of multicultural literacy.

*“Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world.”*

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