

Pluralism and Education

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10.21276/sjahss.2018.6.1.14



Abstract: In the 21st century, we live for the first time in one global community, where a community is composed of many strands which must be carefully woven together into a whole. If diversity is seen as a source of strength, societies can become healthier, more stable and prosperous. But there is another side of the coin if we fail to manage the conflicting pressures that pluralism inevitably brings. Without the institutions and policies to manage diversity, whole communities can feel marginalized and oppressed, creating conditions for conflict and violence. The philosophy and ideology of pluralism is not new but one whose time has come for actualization. Various awareness and practice on pluralistic thought has been provided by Education for students, teachers, counselors and the community to nurture. This is why pluralism is a key challenge for the 21st century.

Keywords: Pluralism, Educational pluralism, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought us together. In the 21st century, we live for the first time in one global community. But it is a community composed of many strands which must be carefully woven together into a whole. If diversity is seen as a source of strength, societies can become healthier, more stable and prosperous. But there is another side of the coin if we fail to manage the conflicting pressures that pluralism inevitably brings.

Without the institutions and policies to manage diversity, whole communities can feel marginalized and oppressed, creating conditions for conflict and violence. This is why pluralism is a key challenge for the 21st century.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the concept of Pluralistic society.
- To make an attempt to highlight pluralism and education
- To study the impacts of educational pluralism.
- To make an attempt to bring forth the various ways of actualizing pluralism in education.
- To make an attempt to introduce the perspectives of a pluralistic higher education institution.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used here is descriptive. Secondary Data have been collected from books, published literature of journals, reports published by different organizations and websites.

CONCEPT OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Pluralism can be defined in a number of ways. The definition which seems most encompassing is the following: a society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious and social groups maintain participation in and development of their traditions and

special interests while cooperatively working toward the interdependence needed for a nation's unity. The focus of most definitions evolves around the elements of interdependence, development and cooperation among diverse peoples of the world [4].

The Global Centre for Pluralism is an international centre for research, education and exchange about the values, practices and policies that underpin pluralist societies. Based in Ottawa, Canada, the centre seeks to assist the creation of successful societies and was founded on the premise that tolerance, openness and understanding towards the cultures, social structures, values and faiths of other peoples are now essential to the survival of an interdependent world. It functions as a global repository and a source of knowledge and know-how about fostering pluralistic values, policies, and practices. It aims to work with countries to nurture successful civil societies in which every citizen, irrespective of cultural, religious or ethnic differences, is able to realize his or her full potential.

On May 23, 2013, former United Nations Secretary-General and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kofi Annan delivered the Global Centre for Pluralism's second annual Pluralism Lecture. Addressing a crowd of 250 people and an online audience of nearly 400, Mr. Annan reflected on his recent experiences in Kenya and

Syria as part of the challenge of managing pluralism in a globalized world.

Mr. Annan is a member of the Centre's Board of Directors.

Pluralist societies by their nature are challenging to govern. To secure the equitable outcomes of pluralism, Mr. Annan urged governments to:

- Ensure that equal weight is given to the three pillars of successful societies, which are peace and security, development, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- Create the right institutions and policies to manage diversity and prevent communities from becoming marginalized and oppressed.
- Educate citizens to foster mutual respect and tolerance.
- Promote dialogue to combat fear, intolerance and extremism.

"My long experience has taught me," He said, "that, whatever our background, what unites us is far greater than what divides us...We have to learn from each other, making our different traditions and cultures a source of harmony and strength, not discord and weakness." But he stressed there is no simple, one-size-fits-all formula for pluralism that will solve the problems of diversity in all societies.

"The mix of policies and institutions required to manage relations between indigenous communities and a majority of long-established incomers is not the same as that required to integrate and protect 'new' minorities who have only recently arrived." Solutions must be tailored for the unique situation of every single society. "This is where the role of the Centre will be invaluable."

Mr. Annan commended His Highness the Aga Khan and the Government of Canada "for having the vision and generosity" to establish a centre dedicated to the creation of stable, fair societies where people can fulfill themselves and live together in harmony. [8]

MEANING OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Pluralistic societies are those that contain a diverse group of religious cultures and traditions. Pluralism typically contains four components which at the simplest level are diversity, tolerance, commitment and communication.

- **Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity:** Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given: it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

- **Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference:** Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underline old patterns of divisions and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

- **Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments:** The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

- **Pluralism is based on dialogue:** The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table- with one's commitments [3].

ADVANTAGES OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

- Fostering acceptance
- Understanding and preserving traditions
- Preserving cultures and finding common beliefs
- Greater tolerance for groups that differ from the dominant society, resulting in less prejudice and discrimination towards minorities.
- It promotes intellectual dualism
- It exposes the voting public and society's policymakers to multiple perspectives, which can improve critical thinking on decisions related to leading issues.
- If successful, it can help preserve the unique traditions, identities, and languages of the many cultures within a society.

DISADVANTAGES OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

- Pursuit of self-interest.
- Forces conflicts to centre stage.

Therefore, in a pluralistic society, where people respect each other, where there is opportunity for a free flow of ideas, a meeting of minds, this alone can generate an atmosphere conducive to national growth and integration. Hatred and intolerance are bound to vitiate the atmosphere and stifle economic growth.

PLURALISM AND EDUCATION

The philosophy and ideology of pluralism is not new but one whose time has come for actualization. Education is providing experience for students, teachers, counselors and the community to nurture and practice pluralistic thought. The philosophy of pluralism is not restricted to the “purist” educational environment but is being extended to encompass teacher in- service training and community –based involvement and input. Teachers and the community at large are acquiring an awareness of pluralism through subtle methods of dialog and participation. Schools are expediting the implementation of pluralism through activities, workshops, courses, and small groups. These processes often fit under the name of multicultural issues and concerns: frequently the use of the term “pluralism” is avoided. Accurate definition may assist in the transition toward truly pluralistic thought.

IMPACTS OF EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM

- Educational pluralism is not a proxy for religious education, although it does embrace religious as well as secular, philosophical, and pedagogical variety. Nor is it tantamount to “privatizing education”. Rather it affirms both the dignity of diverse commitments and society’s interest in the nurture of the next generation.
- Educational pluralism acknowledges that education always rests upon particular views about what education is for, who the child is, what role the teacher and the school play, and how the atmosphere of the school reflects those beliefs.
- Learning goals in a pluralistic society are the educational aims established by a well- defined, multi- cultural group or stakeholders that take into consideration the diversity of their community and schools when they make all of their decisions regarding academics and activities in their school.
- Educational pluralism recognizes that education is a public good, not merely an individual choice.
- An idea, an educational reform movement, and a process intended to change the structure of educational institutions so that all students have an equal chance to achieve academic success.
- A philosophy that stresses the importance, legitimacy, and vitality of ethnic and cultural diversity in shaping the lives of individuals, groups, and nations
- A reform movement that changes all components of the educational enterprise, including its underlying values, procedural rules, curricula, instructional materials, organizational structure, and governance policies to reflect cultural pluralism.
- Institutionalizing a philosophy of cultural pluralism within the educational system that is grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, and moral commitment to social justice
- An education free of inherited biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures, inspired

by the goal of making children sensitive to the plurality of the ways of life, different modes of analyzing experiences and ideas, and ways of looking at history found throughout the world

- A humanistic concept based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people, it is necessary for a quality education and includes all efforts to make the full range of cultures available to students; it views a culturally pluralistic society as a positive force and welcomes differences as vehicles for better understanding the global society
- An approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values that foster cultural pluralism; in its most comprehensive form, it is a commitment to achieving educational equality, developing curricula that builds understanding about ethnic groups, and combating oppressive practices
- Comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students that challenges all forms of discrimination, permeates instruction and interpersonal relations in the classroom, and advances the democratic principles of social justice [1].

ACTUALISING PLURALISM IN EDUCATION

- Strengthening the key contribution which education makes to personal development, social inclusion and participation, by imparting the fundamental values and principles which constitute the foundation of our societies ;
- Ensuring inclusive education for all children and young people which combats racism and discrimination on any ground, promote citizenship and teach to understand and to accept differences of opinion, of conviction, of belief and of lifestyle, while respecting the rule of law, diversity and gender equality ;
- Strengthening children’s and young people’s ability to think critically and exercise judgment so that, particularly in the context of the Internet and social media, they are able to grasp realities, to distinguish fact from opinion, to recognize propaganda and to resist all forms of indoctrination and hate speech ;
- Combating geographical, social and educational inequalities, as well as other factors which can lead to despair and create a fertile ground for extremism, by providing all children and young people with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to build their own professional futures and pathways to success in society, and by encouraging measures to reduce early school leaving and to improve the social and professional integration of all young people ;
- Encouraging dialogue and cooperation among all the education stakeholders, in particular parents, families and associative structures, and building on children’s and young people’s sense of initiative

and engagement in order to strengthen social ties as well as generate a sense of belonging ;

- Empowering teachers so that they are able to take an active stand against all forms of discrimination and racism, to educate children and young people in media literacy, to meet the needs of pupils from diverse backgrounds, to impart common fundamental values and to prevent and combat racism and intolerance.
- Incorporating Multicultural education: It is a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice. Multicultural education attempts to offer all students an equitable educational opportunity, while at the same time, encouraging students to critique society in the interest of social justice. Multicultural education is a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. It helps students develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively towards structural equality as well. [1]

Teaching and learning in a pluralistic environment

Professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of different groups of children in the Indian society and the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behaviour.

- Schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards.
- The curriculum should help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed and reflects the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work.
- 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.
- Schools should create or make salient super ordinate crosscutting group memberships in order to improve intergroup relations.
- Students should learn about stereotyping and other related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations.
- Students should learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups (e.g., justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity).
- Teachers should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students

from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.

- 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.
- 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.
- Teachers should use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills.

A pluralistic higher education institution

“A pluralistic higher education institution...” mainly focuses on: Diverse by race, ethnicity, gender; socially diverse; politically diverse; multilingual; multigenerational; international; open to different intellectual approaches and perspectives; promoting academic freedom; providing safe space for debate as well as engaged with community stakeholders.

Characteristics of a pluralistic higher education institution

- Is open to all students who can benefit— regardless of economic, cultural, or academic background. The challenge for higher education is not in selecting students who will be successful, but in ensuring success for those who chose to come.
- Strives to meet all the needs of the communities that it serves.
- Is characterized by a plurality of scientific theories and methods, by an internationalized faculty and student body, and by cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Advances our understanding of history and the importance of imagination in human progress, seeks to be both central to social stability and critical of the status quo, and is home to both traditional disciplines and competing ideas.
- Promotes the broadest range of intellectual exploration, encourages debate, is comfortable with alternative views, and welcomes people who have varied personalities and a broad range of personal, political, and demographic characteristics.
- Guarantees that different approaches, methodologies, and conflicting theories and scientific results are presented and confronted in teaching and research, thus avoiding domination by one school of thought or ideology.
- Is one in which we are open not only to persons of different cultures and countries, but also to new ideas.
- Encourages the intellectual and social interaction of multiple perspectives, born of the experiences of a diverse campus community— diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, geography, class, and age.

- Can combine many aspects of knowledge production, e.g., independent research, professional education, lifelong learning, outreach to society, innovation, and commercialization of new knowledge. It is an institution well founded in academic values, in combination with a strong commitment to sustainable development in economic, social, and ecological terms.
- Is characterized by diversity of thought, attitudes, and cultures. encourages research, scholarship, and creative activities that address or are influenced by diverse cultures within [the institution's] own boundaries and beyond; welcomes and supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds; and facilitates opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in international experiences.
- Helps students understand and celebrate the rich diversity of peoples and cultures, both within and outside their country's borders, by providing a variety of experiences, learning environments, and faculty, staff, and student role models.
- Is open to a large number of students from all generations and from all over the world, opening internal debate of all kinds, and promoting dialogue and work with all parts of society. respects a search for truth that is pursued by many voices, in many cultures, in several languages, and across the boundaries that too often divide the human family
- It offers to its diverse student population the programs and courses that meet their needs and cultures, [delivered] by an administration and a faculty that represent the ethnic, racial, religious, and social composition of the student population.
- Is focused on developing individual students to become critical thinkers and full contributing citizens, who use their ability to learn ... to assess and act on competing ideas that can enhance a community's social, cultural, environmental, and economic condition.
- Is proactive in shaping and contributing to the growth and well-being of its partners and communities, practices inclusion, celebrates diversity, and designs innovative solutions to meet its own needs and those of its partners.
- Celebrates differences and individualities while strengthening its affiliation with the community and channeling diversity towards common purposes [5].
- **Interaction:** this has to do with knowing how to facilitate good relationships among peers and among adults. There is awareness that simply being in the same physical environment is not enough. Encouragement must be given to curiosity about other people, openness and friendship, both in class and in places and times outside the school. Thus, situations of distancing between people, discrimination and conflict can be avoided and repaired.
- **Recognizing the other person:** one must avoid falling into the trap of imposing one's own views on the other person, asserting one's own lifestyle and one's own way of thinking without taking into account the other person's culture and particular emotional situation.
- **Building up a common vision:** Education can help identify within itself whatever is essential and universal, uniting individuals in their differences. The role of education today is precisely to promote dialogue, enabling communication between different people, helping them to "translate" their different ways of thinking and feeling. This is not just a matter of carrying forward dialogue as a process or method. It is a question, rather, of helping people to revisit their own cultures, with the cultures of others as their starting-point: in other words, helping people to reflect on themselves within a perspective of "openness to humanity".
- **Reasoned openness to globalization:** An educating community should not form people to be parochial. Instead, it should offer students the knowledge necessary to understand man's current condition, as citizen of the whole planet, a condition characterized by numerous relationships of interdependency.
- **Forming strong personal identities:** which are not in opposition to each other. In fact, an awareness of one's own tradition and culture is the starting-point from which one can dialogue and recognize the equal dignity of the other person.
- **The values of other cultures and religions must be respected and understood:** Schools must become places of pluralism, where one learns to dialogue about the meanings that people of different religions attribute to their respective signs. This allows one to share universal values, such as solidarity, tolerance and freedom.

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

Therefore, towards aiming for a pluralistic society following reforms can be practiced:

- **Integration:** this has to do with the ability to be adequately prepared for receiving students of different cultural backgrounds, responding to their needs regarding scholastic achievement and personal enhancement;

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