

# INTEGRATING CROSS-CULTURALISM INTO TEACHER EDUCATION TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Guru Trisha Singh\*

## ABSTRACT

*This research paper explores the integration of cross-culturalism into teacher education as a means to promote education for sustainable development (ESD). Through a review of existing literature and analysis of educational frameworks, the paper examines the significance of incorporating cross-cultural perspectives in teacher training programs to effectively address the challenges of sustainable development. By emphasizing cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and global awareness, teacher education can foster a more inclusive and holistic approach to ESD. The paper highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, intercultural communication skills, and collaborative learning experiences in preparing educators to facilitate sustainable development practices in diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, it discusses the role of educational policies and institutional support in promoting cross-cultural integration within teacher education programs. Ultimately, the paper underscores the potential of cross-cultural education in empowering teachers to cultivate a more equitable, just, and environmentally conscious society conducive to sustainable development goals.*

## Introduction

Good quality education is a vital component for attaining a sustainable world. This was put forward at the United Nations (UN) World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 and the key to sustainable development was outlined to be the reorientation of the education systems across the globe (UN, 2002). Education for sustainable development (ESD) is one such tool which aids in the development of the knowledge, skills, understanding, values and actions necessary for creating a sustainable world and ensuring environmental protection and conservation, promoting social equity and encouraging economic sustainability.

To address and promote sustainable development, education has to be fostered amongst one and all. Hence, for addressing sustainability teacher education has to be reoriented first. It is important for teachers to understand the role of intercultural understanding in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and for further promoting the understanding among students about

different cultures for ensuring a peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Improving the quality of our life suggests a change in our learning. As the then UNESCO's Director General Koichiro Matsuura had stressed: "Education— in all its forms and at all levels— is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development." (UNESCO, UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014: the DESD at a glance, 2005).

## Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an interdisciplinary and learner centred concept that provides a vision to empower students towards a pro-social and pro-environmental agenda in their personal lives, communities and organisations that they would work for in the future. The main aim is to integrate Education for Sustainable Development into all forms of educational systems ranging from

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\* Assistant Professor, GHG Khalsa College of Education, Gurugar Sadhar Ludhiana.

primary to tertiary, along with vocational and adult learning. It is a conceptual tool to aid educational policy makers in authorising such educational policies that take into account the environmental, societal and economic challenges of the world.

UNESCO includes all types of learning in it, namely

- Learning to know
- Learning to be

- Learning to live together
- Learning to do
- Learning to transform oneself and the society

It is needless to say that people learn from each other and hence collectively become capable of developing their capacities to give meaning to Sustainable Development.

Various initiatives for Education for Sustainable Development have been highlighted as follows:

1990	Talloires Declaration: Role of higher education in Sustainable Development	France
2002	UN World Summit on Sustainable Development	Johannesburg
2005-14	UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development	New York, USA
2014	Muscat Agreement: Education for Sustainable Development as a target	Muscat, Oman
2015	World Education Forum Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development	Nagoya, Japan

“Education for Sustainable Development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values necessary to shape a sustainable future.” (UNESCO, World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, 2014)

“Education for Sustainable Development is essential for the achievement of a sustainable society and is therefore desirable at all levels of formal education and training, as well as in the non-formal and informal learning.” (The Council of European Union, 2010)

Education for Sustainable Development is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and of the generations to come.” (Holland, 1998).

## Culture

(UNESCO, UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001) has defined culture as “the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a social group” as well as the values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, customs, practices, identity, lifestyle, language and religious faith of diverse peoples. Along with language, the reflection of our culture is seen in the colloquial expressions, dress, food, laws, heritage, history, arts, music, dance, theatre, architecture, literature, festivals and the values or attitudes reflected in our conversations, in

the ways we relate to each other as family and friends. These determinants of culture become the face of sustainability in each society, thereby also forming the basis for the content of curriculum in cross-cultural understanding.

## Cross-Culturalism

Cross-culturalism is referred to as the systematic comparisons of various cultures, with the aim to understand variations of human behaviour as influenced by the cultural contexts. The primary concern is examining whether our knowledge about people and their behaviours from one culture may or may not hold the same and true for people from other cultures. (Papayiannis & Hadjicharalambous, 2011).

Cross-culturalism deals hence with the comparison of different cultures. The differences are sought to be understood and acknowledged to bring about collective transformations in the perceptions of individuals towards other cultures.

## Teacher Education

Teachers play a crucial role in developing a nation and hence are the backbone of the education system. The Teacher Education programs are the most important for making a good teacher. These programs are those which train the individuals to

become proficient teachers, who in turn are the torch bearers of educating generations of students, who on their part carry along with them and transform the knowledge and skills acquired in school, college or University during the rest of their lives and work.

As stated by NCTE, India in Quality Concerns in Secondary Teacher Education (1998): Teacher is the most important component in any educational program for it is the teacher who is mainly responsible for implementation of the educational process at any stage. This shows that it is essential to invest in the preparation of teachers so that the future of a nation is secured. Teacher education is a continuous process and its components of pre-service and in-service are complimentary to each other. The most common teacher education programs in India are the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and the Master of Education (M.Ed.).

### **Integrating Cross-Culturalism Into Teacher Education To Promote Education For Sustainable Development**

While culture may be highly striking in talks and thoughts, it may also be difficult to see, because it is intangible and shapes the way of our thinking, reflects our values, beliefs and attitudes and a way to perceive the world. It is reflected in our knowledge, ways of doing, being and living together. Culture is a way of life and is so intrinsically woven into our identity that we are often unaware of it. It is hence that sometimes it can be difficult to understand those who are different from us and our cultures.

For integrating Intercultural Understanding within curricula, culture has a broad definition which includes the experiences of life in the dimensions, as follows:

- physical - cultural practices of people
- intellectual – knowledge- traditional and contemporary
- emotional - various ways of expressing emotions
- spiritual or religious - beliefs, practices, faith, cosmology
- aesthetic - art, music, dance forms
- linguistic - languages spoken across various cultures

- social - social issues faced by diverse cultures, inequality, human rights, discrimination, experience of social conflict and harmony
- political - diverse political systems
- historical - the history of various cultures, migration, colonization, war, conflict and peaceful co-existence
- power relations - injustice, minorities, marginalisation
- moral/ethical - differences and similarities in moral values across cultures

### **Importance of Cross-Cultural Understanding**

The United Nations has encouraged dialogue all across the globe about common goals and shared values, starting from the establishment of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for over 60 years now followed by various international declarations, conventions, treaties on issues such as human rights, social and economic justice, equality, peace, tolerance, diversity, international understanding, environmental conservation, sustainable development and climate change. The most prevalent value arising from these conventions is that of “respect”, which is of utmost importance for cross-cultural understanding and common to many cultures and is hence central to Education for Sustainable Development.

Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR, 1948, lays out the role of education in intercultural understanding as “Education shall be directed to...respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.”

Article 27 of UDHR, 1948, also states that “everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”

Article 15 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights acknowledges everyone’s right to take part in cultural life.

The Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights (1996) addresses the role of education in:

- fostering capacity for expression of linguistic and cultural basis
- providing opportunities to all to learn any language; their own and that of the broader community
- promoting harmonious relationships in the society
- providing trained teachers, books and learning resources, equipment and teaching-learning facilities.

### **Importance of Cross-Cultural Understanding for Teachers**

Teachers should be familiar with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as it contains quite many provisions relevant to their work and also emphasises the rights of the child to:

- be protected against any and all forms of discrimination
- preserve identity, freedom of thought, liberty, expression and religion
- have access to information from diverse sources
- ensure safety and all round well-being of human being
- equal access to education.

Moreover, Article 29 of the Convention states that education shall prepare the child for “responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.”

### **Integrating Cross-Culturalism Across Teacher Education Curricula**

Following are the ways to integrate intercultural understanding into subjects in the curricula of teacher education.

#### **Cross-Cultural Understanding In The Arts** (dance, theatre, drama, media, music, visual arts)

- Exploring the meaning of diverse cultural art forms through time and their roles, purposes and importance to cultural identity.
- understanding that the arts shape and represent the cultural identities

- adapting those performances and art works which represent the perspectives of diverse and marginalized cultural groups
- adapting art forms from various cultures, understand their meaning, history and sacred significance
- exploring the diverse elements, approaches and technologies used in arts across cultures that reflect the time, place and cultural setting
- tracing the influence of the cultural works of other peoples to integrate into one’s own art practice
- exploring the connection people throughout the world through their interest in arts.

#### **Intercultural Understanding In The Sciences** (physics, biology, chemistry and other inter-related disciplines)

- becoming aware of traditional native knowledge (e.g., nature, flora, fauna, survival, herbs for medicines)
- appreciating the diverse cultural contributions to the sciences across the history
- discovering that science is built on the cultural traditions of observation, inquiry and reasoning
- becoming aware of various cosmologies across cultures, beliefs and faiths (e.g. evolution)
- viewing various phenomena through diverse cultural lenses in order to broaden and deepen the understanding in ways that can be possible from many cultural perspectives.

#### **Intercultural Understanding In Social Studies** (history, geography, human rights, civics, environmental education)

- Exploring the values and ethical issues from perspectives of diverse cultures
- learning that people are shaped by various social, cultural, religious, historical, economic, political and ecological systems and structures, in different ways.
- acquiring knowledge of diverse societies which can be local, national and global and become aware of changing environments over time
- coming to understand the nature, and interdependence of societies and environments

- becoming aware of power relationships and inequality in societies
- learning about cultural diversity and social cohesion in various societies across the world
- learning the development of diverse cultural perspectives and their change over time.

### **Intercultural Understanding in Mathematics**

- acquiring a socially constructed body of knowledge having roots in different cultures using universal symbols
- understanding many culturally diverse forms of mathematical knowledge
- learning about the contributions of various cultures to mathematics throughout history
- becoming aware of the diverse role of mathematics across cultures
- understanding the culturally diverse relationship with numbers
- exploring the diverse history of various cultural forms of measurements
- becoming aware that diverse cultural spatial abilities are shaped by an individual's environment.

### **Intercultural Understanding In Language(s)**

- Understanding the interdependence of language, culture, values and identities. Understanding that the cultural concepts and perspectives are reflected in language and also the various cultural principles, practices that influence communication
- learning about the history and culture of the people and the region whose language is to be studied
- learning about the culture while engaging in language practice
- analysing the cultural texts, poetry, literature, fiction, non-fiction stories, film and theatre, drama
- making connections between the usage of language and the cultural values.

### **Benefits of Integrating Cross-Culturalism into Teacher Education to Promote Education for Sustainable Development**

In a culturally diverse world, there is a need to

be learning to live together with harmony. Students are the foundation of each nation and if these values are reflected in them, it will contribute to a sustainable world. (Leo, 2010). Teachers can pass on these values to their students and hence the following benefits of integrating cross-culturalism into teacher education to promote education for sustainable development will be seen:

- Mutual respect, increased tolerance, increased acceptance and wide understanding
- Peace and harmony across different cultures
- Appreciating and valuing diversity across nations
- Respecting human dignity and the individual worth of one and all
- Developing compassion, empathy, caring attitude and concern for others
- Equality, equity, justice, inclusion of diversity
- Developing solidarity, cooperation, commitment to collective well-being of all
- Protection and strengthening of the cultural identity, language and heritage of minorities across various cultures
- Being responsible at local, national and global level. Believing in unity and interconnectedness of people across the globe
- Promoting peace, harmony, non-violence, dialogue in the world
- Developing values of truth, courage, commitment, love in all people

### **Conclusion**

A deep knowledge, awareness and understanding of the key issues related to cross-cultural understanding and the human rights principles supporting intercultural understanding will generate a strong sense of cultural heritage in the citizens all across the globe. By integrating cross-culturalism into teacher education to promote education for sustainable development, the ability of teachers and students to think holistically and to link intercultural understanding to the multiple dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, cultural, environmental) will be developed. Critical thinking skills to question injustice, debate on issues logically and sensitively and to advocate for the marginalized

section and the ability to engage learners in such discussions and actions of solidarity will also be developed. It will contribute in developing the ability to identify, clarify, develop and live with the values for cross-cultural understanding in a sustainable world.

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