

HOW DOES DIVERSITY, OR THE LACK THEREOF, AFFECT THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

***"Diversity: the art of thinking independently together."* – Malcolm Forbes**

Today with the almost ubiquitous presence of phones and electronic media, people are just a phone call or an email away. This shrinking of the world has brought people from different parts of the world closer and underscored the diversity of humanity more than ever. The human population is diverse in race, color, nationality, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identification, education, food habits, and follows multitudes of customs and traditions while speaking different languages. Every individual is genetically unique and is endowed with natural skills and abilities. Moreover, human behavior and psychology have been shaped by evolution and individuals are influenced by their life experiences. Our daily life routinely brings to the fore the diversity of the people we interact with and accentuates this rich, complex, and intricate interdependent environment we live in today.

***"Respect is what we owe; love, what we give."* – Philip James Bailey**

Interacting with people from across the world, even if remotely, is becoming the norm at workplaces. People are now visiting foreign countries more than ever. To be able to understand and appreciate people from around the world, one needs to understand the importance of diversity and inculcate the benefits of the same in every human being. The ability to accept someone differing from us in appearance, background, and views is an inalienable part of being respectful. Being respectful of others fosters diversity. Our education system should become the fountainhead for teaching children right from infancy the importance of mutual respect and the need to understand, appreciate, and empathize with fellow human beings. Care, concern, and empathy for the differently abled stem from this respect for human life. This leads to constructive and mutually beneficial outcomes resulting in more peaceful societies and communities while strengthening the foundations of the education system and institutions.

***"A person's a person, no matter how small."* – Dr. Seuss**

In an education system that fosters diversity, teachers from diverse regional, cultural, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and national backgrounds bring the richness of their experiences and myriad perspectives to the classroom. The fact that people differing from themselves are on a pedestal and a source of knowledge subconsciously shapes impressionable minds into accepting and appreciating diversity. Likewise, students from diverse backgrounds turn the classrooms into melting pots of cultures and experiences. Students learn and experience firsthand the culture, traditions, food habits, and perspectives of their fellow classmates. Screening foreign movies and organizing food fairs in elementary and middle schools help students relate to their classmates, fostering camaraderie. High school clubs organizing and promoting cultural events, exhibitions, and seminars on important past and present issues go a long way in exposing students to other cultures while sensitizing them to both local and global issues. Inviting eminent personalities from diverse backgrounds and fields of study, including from local communities, as guest speakers at schools and colleges broadens horizons and fosters inclusivity. This passive learning is often more effective and long-lasting compared to active learning from prescribed books thus supplementing the curriculum. This creates a positive and healthy learning atmosphere in educational institutions while ensuring the well-rounded development of students.

***"History is not a burden on the memory but an illumination of the soul."* – Lord Acton**

The curriculums at schools and universities, irrespective of the field of study, continuously revised to include contributions to the pertinent fields of study from both past and contemporary inventors and discoverers, irrespective of their countries of origin leads to the recognition of the contributions of diverse civilizations, cultures, nations, and regions to the advancement of mankind leading to building an innate respect for diversity in every student. For example, Africa is the cradle of human civilization, the ancient Egyptians were expert engineers and builders, the Indus Valley civilization mastered town planning, etc. to name a few.

***"Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies."*
– Martin Luther King Jr.**

Student-to-student interactions between schools from different regions and countries facilitating research, including in-person visits, and foreign student exchange programs in high schools and universities promote people-to-people contacts that act as living bridges between cultures and nations. This leads to a greater understanding, thus promoting diversity and fostering mutual love, respect, and tolerance while keeping the education system relevant catering to the needs of the modern world. Education institutions become the confluence of new thoughts, ideas, and breeding grounds for innovation and progress.

***"We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion."* – Max De Pree**

Embracing diversity is inevitable and indispensable in the modern world. Education institutions that foster diversity become the pillars of modern societies and nations. They become the perpetual beacons of hope and progress fostering equality, diversity, and inclusivity across generations. Empowering individuals, through an education system promoting diversity, with the knowledge and tools to work constructively and effectively with others to build a better tomorrow leads to peaceful and harmonious coexistence while ensuring rapid and balanced development of mankind.

***"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"* in Sanskrit translates to *"The world is one family."* – Maha Upanishad (a Vedic treatise)**