

DEI

In the recent past, the USA has witnessed a high rate of shifting demographics of societies, so it has become challenging to maintain a conducive environment in the country. I keep listening about hate crimes against immigrants and the opposition of people of color, especially from my college-going sister. These movements are fomented by feelings of exclusion. The tension is widespread; it's does impact even students at the middle school level.

Schools being the smallest yet the most sensitive unit of society, have failed to keep pace when it comes to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in education. Schools have learners of all backgrounds, religions, races, and ethnicities. In my school, we have a maximum number (46%) are Asian students but little conscious effort is done to bridge the gap with non-Asians.

This essay suggests an **inclusive education program** to create better learning opportunities. It will operate on three domains for fostering DEI. The goal of this program is to ensure that diversity is valued, inclusion is assured, and equity is achieved.

At the Students' level- Students should be encouraged to invite different people of different races to playdates, parties, group projects, and more in an informal setting! During summers I lose touch with all non-Indian friends because we do not get to have frequent play dates with them. Parents can play a big role in this.

At the teachers' level- A lot of potential for conflict or misunderstanding arises because we do not know about other cultures; this knowledge gap can be filled by 'educating the educators'.

Teachers should be trained to be culturally sensitive and respectful to students of diverse backgrounds. Staff development training can be designed which focuses on cultural issues like different ways of greeting adults, child naming, vegetarianism and how it impacts student's food choices, topics such as implicit bias about students cultural backgrounds. Once my teacher was telling us a story about how she used to go hunting with her grandpa and kill animals and how she has a great collection of guns! She didn't realize that a newly immigrated Indian student was not comfortable with guns and shooting animals!

I remember how in Kindergarten my teacher used to bring artifacts from all around the world like Russian Matushka dolls when she told a Russian tale and Japanese kimono for a Japanese story; but why did that teaching style end? Can we have a culturally sensitive curriculum that teaches us about Gandhi and non-violence?

Why do we only get to learn about a few festivals in school? I never learned in school that Cinco de Mayo or Passover have historic significance. Why only Chinese Americans participate in Chinese New Year celebrations? Diwali is being gradually introduced to our non-Indian community; a welcome change! Teachers have to present multiple perspectives on American history. Once when my teacher was talking about the American Revolution, I wondered why the American Indians chose to fight on Great Britain's side!

DEI could be enhanced by being more open to the curriculum. For instance, the celebration of Black History and Asian heritage months, lessons on amazing leaders, philosophers, and scientists from world history, stories and plays enacted in theaters from world literature,

international movie watching events, a showcase of musical or dancing traditions of other cultures, and display of images of world leaders instead of just those from America in schools corridors and cafeteria, etc. How about having more international cuisines as our lunch options in the school cafeteria!

At the administration level- DEI should be embedded in the school's mission, philosophy, and core values. Schools must work within the context of their local environments and student populations. Why not give a higher rating to a school district that has better DEI policies, practices, and resources for effective teaching and learning environments! Also, we need teachers from different ethnic groups for a more diversified education.

To conclude, together we can create an Inclusive Climate! This inclusive program may guide us in creating a better educational program for diverse populations. Research affirms that a student's sense of belonging is linked to academic achievement and motivation (Osterman 2000). Strong actions today will ensure positive results tomorrow!

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