

An Enquiry into the Psychosocial Exclusion in Classrooms

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Abstract

Education is an instrument to replicate the social system. The social practices are reflected in the classrooms and it is the classrooms that create tomorrow's society. People are excluded by institutions and behavior that reflect, enforce and reproduce prevailing social attitudes and values, particularly those of powerful groups in society. Classroom experiences, especially during the initial years of education can have lasting impact on the psychological and sociological identity formation of the learners. The objective of the study is to identify the emotional and social exclusion that occur in educational contexts. Study identifies the exclusion practices occurring in classrooms and teaching learning process.

Key words: Psychosocial Exclusion, Classrooms, Instructional Discourses, Learning Partnerships

1. Introduction

John Dewey (1966) remarks that social reproduction take place through education. Education is an instrument to replicate the social system. The social practices are reflected in the classrooms and it is the classrooms that create tomorrow's society. So there is a symbiotic relationship between these two. Hence, how the society determine the classrooms (education) and how classrooms decide the society are critical in the current Indian context.

People are excluded by institutions and behavior that reflect, enforce and reproduce prevailing social attitudes and values, particularly those of powerful groups in society.

Classroom being a shared environment, there everybody must have the right to participate; get adequate attention, right to express etc. But, whether the current classroom structure and social order facilitate such an atmosphere or not is a critical issue in the field of education.

Education system being a social institution does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of caste, economic status and gender relations,

cultural diversity as well as the uneven economic development that characterize the society also deeply influence access to education and participation of children in school (NCF, 2005).

Attainment and achievement is twin aspects of marginalization. When it comes to attainment, children from marginalized groups are often hard (physically and metaphorically) for education systems to reach and retain: they are often out-of-school, at the bottom end of the distribution for years in basic education, and heavily under-represented.

2. Significance of Social Atmosphere of Classrooms

Learning may not take place without meaningful connections between teacher and student. Classroom experiences, especially during the initial years of education can have lasting impact on the psychological and sociological identity formation of the learners. Classroom experiences resulting from good teacher student relationship is at the crux of student success.

Hamre and Pianta (2005) argue that in student–teacher relationships, both parties bring an assortment of goals, feelings, needs, and behavioral styles that will ultimately affect the quality of the relationship they form and, in turn, influence the value of their experiences with one another in the classroom. They also argue that student teacher relationships are fundamental to students’ success in school.

Liberante (2012) suggests that within the learning environment, importance needs to be placed on the development of positive teacher–student relationships, as these relationships have immeasurable effects on students’ academic outcomes and behaviour.

3. Objective of the Study

The paper focuses on the emotional and social exclusion that take place in classrooms and other education settings. The objective of the study is to identify the emotional and social exclusion that occur in educational contexts.

4. Methodology

The methodology used in the present paper is inductive and the conclusion has been justified by citing cases, observations, research finding, related theories etc. The design of the study is explorative in nature and it aims at finding the broader issues to be addressed. The

study specifically used data from focus group discussion, field survey, content analysis etc. The study is qualitative in nature.

5. Some Exclusion Practices in Classroom and other Educational Contexts

5.1. Exclusion from Classroom and Instructional Discourses

The learners belongs to tribal, *adivasi* and other marginalized sections of the society receive less attention from the part of the teachers and it results in a kind of exclusion from the learning and socialization process. They are given less (or no) participation in the class room discourses. Sometimes even their existence are not considered and recognized in the classroom. Being excluded by school peers is a truly painful social and emotional experience.

Case : The Case of a Tribal Girl Child in Wayanad, Kerala

Wayanad, is an economically, educationally and socially less developed district in Kerala, Where the farmers' suicide rate is very high, where the number of unmarried and minor mothers are high, where there is comparatively large population of *adivasis* and tribes.

A tribal girl studying in class XII of a village higher secondary school, come to her teacher and reported that he is the first teacher in her life who smiled at her during her 12 year of schooling.

What should be the nature of learning taken place in this girl and among other learners having similar experiences? What understanding she might be developed through her education? What will be the outlook and frame of references such students develops? All these question demand special attention due to the multi dimensional aspects of the issue.

Inference from Focus Group interview: The attitude and behaviour of teachers toward learners are influenced by the (i) Fairness of and skin complexion of learners (ii) The socio ethnic identity of the learner (iii) Gender of the learner and many other social constructs.

5.2. Exclusion from Learning Partnerships and Collaboration

Peer rejection is one of the more serious problems in the schools today. Being excluded by school peers is a truly painful social and emotional experience. Sometimes the teachers and parents contribute to the torment with their direct and indirect comments and opinions.

In the classroom learning activities and outside leisure time activities students belongs to tribal, *adivasi* and other marginalized strata of the society are less or not preferred by their counterparts as partners or for collaborators. (Inferred from the sharing of critical lived classroom experiences by students). Friendship comes before fairness. But at school, fairness comes before friendship. (Paley, 1992)

5.3. Exclusion Emerge due to Prejudices of Teachers and Other Stakeholders

Teachers have preconceived and biased concepts about the academic competence of learners belong to tribal, *adivasi* and other marginalized sections of the society. The deficit theory still controls the thoughts, attitude beliefs of teachers and other stake holders.

This preconception will have an impact on the performance of learners belonging to that particular stratum. Psychological research (Rosenthal, R. & Fode, K, 1963; Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L., 1963) prove that the belief of significant persons have an impact on the performance of organism/learners. This will also have a self fulfilling prophesy.

In a survey conducted among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala, more than 85 percent supported the argument that students studying in the science stream have more academic competence and language competence.

The (faulty) belief systems of these teachers are: (i) Science subjects are meant for learners in upper strata (high SES, high academic score etc) (ii) Majority of students belong to lower socio economic strata opt humanities for higher studies (iii) People with low SES have less academic achievement as they have only low level of intelligence.

What is the rout of this kind of arguments and opinion? The students learning science stream often belongs to upper strata of the society compared to their counterpart who are opting humanities and social science subjects. This may due to different factors: (i) The higher financial expenditure in terms of private cost of education, like higher rate of fees, donations, cost of learning materials etc. (ii) The lower socio economic status may have interfered with their access to quality educational opportunities and it adversity contributed to the development of their competence. It may in turn results in the lower achievement of learners and hence, in a competitive environment, they may be compelled to opt the less '*preferred*' subjects. The belief systems of teachers are based on the very wrong idea that some academic disciplines are elite. There is no sound research evidences to prove that people with low SES have less academic achievement as they have low level of intelligence.

5.4. Exclusion from Instruction

Many times the life, culture and language of the marginalized are not represented in the text books, its illustration, language used and the very classroom discourses. This result in the alienation of the learners belongs to the marginalized strata of the society. As remarked by Freire (1970) they became dehumanized.

6. Issues to be attended

Exclusion has to be discussed in a wider and larger context. Social exclusion relates to the alienation or disenfranchisement of certain people within a society. It is often connected to a person's social class, educational status and living standards and how these might affect their access to various opportunities. Anyone who deviates in any perceived way from the norm of a population can become subject to coarse or subtle forms of social exclusion. People are excluded by the act of some agent.

Many times these types of exclusion prevail in the classrooms and educational practices are unaccounted because of their very nature. Observation reveals that often the learners from the marginalized section are subject to this type of emotional exclusion and hence, the exclusion of learners from the deprived group became multiple in natures, both contributing and complementing each other. The pedagogy, as pointed out by Freire (1970) became a tool for oppression and imbibing the culture of silence. But, definitely education has to be a strategy for emancipation.

Social rejection by peers and teachers increases childhood depression, the need for therapy, and adulthood disorders. Longitudinal studies show a link between peer relationship problems and delinquency and crime. Children's sociometric status is associated with academic achievement, truancy, retention in grade. One of the best predictors of leaving school in adolescence is the combination of aggressive behavior with low peer and teacher acceptance. In the early childhood years, sociometrically rejected children have trouble meeting teachers' expectations.

Why are children excluded? They are excluded because they are different: disabled, racial and ethnic minorities (especially for girls), unattractive, obese. Children often take their cues from teachers and teachers do not treat all children equally. Children excluded in their early years continue to be excluded even when their behaviour changes.

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