

A National Exploration of Diversity and Culture in Schools and Corporations

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ABSTRACT

Diversity is a common initiative across the United States and the purpose varies drastically. Diversity is incorporated into public education, higher education, corporate, and a multitude of other employment arenas. Although the term diversity is loosely used, the unclear areas of the term allow for unique interpretations of the word. Diversity is far more than hiring people who look differently, but entails accepting the cultures of people from different backgrounds and fostering an environment focusing on talents and providing opportunities in an equal and fair way. The authors discuss diversity issues and offers ways for improving effectiveness.

Diversity Is Not a New Concept

Diversity is the buzzword in most industries as the goal of innovative thinking stretches in a multifaceted manner. Diversity is not a new concept and has been a goal of corporate businesses for many years. Although diversity has been the initiative for the new millennium, the success rate lags far behind the initial excitement.

The purpose of this article is to briefly explore diversity and to review its purpose while discovering how it can be truly effective.

All Cultures Should Be Celebrated and Accepted Everyday

Cultures need to be taught to everyone all the time. There should be no differentiation when the time is appropriate to celebrate a certain group. For example, celebrating Black History Month and Hispanics Heritage Month are ineffective ways of promoting diversity. Although on the surface, the celebrations seem positive, there are not months designated to celebrate all groups, so realistically, all cultures should be celebrated and accepted everyday. Whites, who are considered the majority do not have a time where their culture is celebrated as a separate entity of society and this can be considered unfair. The truth is, blacks in America have not lived in Africa for hundreds of years and the cultures of blacks and whites have been similar for the past 30 years. Although these groups may not be treated equally, differentiating the cultures may be a self-inflicted division.

Similarities Must Be Acknowledged and Differences Minimized

More common ground must be shared and less separation created if we are to truly attain diversity. When the lives of Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites and others are explored in great detail the results may be surprising. If families of these different groups were shadowed for one month and the following aspects were considered, the results would be interesting: foods eaten, music choices, movie selections, entertainment choices, home décor, wardrobe, education levels and daily routines. Although the monthly activities may differ by the socioeconomic status amongst the groups, those in the same income range engage in similar daily activities. Similarities must be acknowledged, and differences minimized in order to generate a multicultural climate for all people. In relation to students, teachers and administrators must acknowledge cultures and strive to learn and appreciate all students. According to Sonia Neito, language, literacy, and

culture must be linked both conceptually and programmatically in programs preparing teachers.

The Cultural Plunge

Jesus Nieto discusses the Cultural Plunge, which is a cultural immersion as a means of promoting self-awareness and cultural sensitivity among student teachers. Professors at San Diego State University began using the cultural plunge activity in the teacher preparation program, but since then, a number of professors use the cultural plunge for their classes. A cultural plunge is individual exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture (ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and/ or physical exceptionality (Neito, 2002). Typically, the plunges last for one hour and there are a total of four required in a class. The criteria for the plunge are: 1) the majority of the people are from the focal group; 2) the plungee is on the turf of the focal group (not school or a restaurant); 3) this must be the first time for the experience; 4) the plunge takes place after the course begins; 5) the plungee does not take notes; 6) the plunge last at least one hours (Neito, 2002).

The objective of the cultural plunge is to accomplish four major objectives that are stated in the class syllabus: a) have direct contact with people who are culturally different from oneself in a real-life setting which represents the target group's turf; b) gain insights into circumstances and characteristics of the focal community; c) experience what it is to be very different from most of the people one is around, and d) gain insight into one's values, biases, and affective responses (Neito, 2002). Some professors require specific plunges such as attending a service at the largest African American church in the city, attending a religious ceremony in a language the student does not understand, interacting with a homeless person, and interacting with people with disabilities (Neito, 2002).

We Must Look Deeper Into the Mental Strength of Diversity

According to Tatum, cultural identity makes life secure and meaningful (Tatum, 1997). Culture allows us to maintain our sense of identity and how we perceive ourselves, and represents the lens through which we view and evaluate the behaviors of others. In relation to corporations and employment, hiring individuals other than whites has been the misconception of diversity. True diversity lies in the thinking and mindset of an entire organization, not scattering Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and others into a company where they serve mediocre positions and are placed in the limelight when it is time for the company to showcase their diversity. We must look deeper into the mental strength of diversity and not dwell on what a person looks like. Companies must look at possible individuals to hire as a search for great talent and step away from the token mentality. In 2006, companies should not still be planning to hire a few minorities to place on

brochures and commercials to portray themselves as providing equal opportunities for all people.

Companies Must Hire and Promote the Best Person for the Job

Success in diversity can be measured by a company's willingness to accept cultural and racial differences for the good of the company. Profit drives most companies, but some companies create a self-inflicted glass ceiling by not promoting diversity. Failing to hire or promote the best candidate based on race, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and so forth, weakens a company's profit margin. Some companies do not discriminate in hiring because they understand the long-term goal that is to increase profits by accepting and promoting diversity. Companies that hire and promote on what is best for the mission of the company understand the value of good sound talent and are not chasing "minorities" to meet a quota.

Recruitment must be done so diverse candidates are aware of job opportunities. Companies need to know where to find the best candidates, not the best minority candidates. A company should not feel good about hiring a black woman, and feel they have gone above and beyond to hire a female and a minority all in one. This is the thinking that holds back the success of diversity. A company should feel good about hiring the best candidate for a position after giving all candidates a fair and just opportunity. Fair and just may not be equal, because more money may have to be spent to reach diverse candidates than what was typically spent advertising a position in mainstream recruitment. Desire and commitment are the driving forces needed to maintain successful diversity recruitment.

Corporate American and Public Education

Corporate America has been tackling diversity for several years, and the notion has recently entered into public education. Public education is now diverse with students no longer being black and white, but from all over the world. It is alarming that students from other countries are welcomed into American public schools and black and white students are still riffing. Is the bitterness from slavery still deeply embedded into our society? Are Blacks still being mistreated? Are whites getting advantages? These questions arise as we wonder how Hispanic students and black students are able to become friends and Hispanic students and white students are able to become friends, but at the same time the rate of black and white students making friends is not increasing. According to Verna Ford, a diversity Council should be chaired by the CEO of the company, and in schools the superintendent. It is important that a diversity initiative starts with the head of the company and be intertwined into the culture of the organization.

A company may not find success after stating, “We are starting a diversity initiative,” this leads people to believe the company is out looking for minorities. The approach must be natural, genuine and consistent. All positions must be given the same consideration to the diversity initiative from upper level executives, to mid management, supervisors, janitors, kitchen attendants, and landscapers. Lower level positions tend to be flooded with Blacks and Hispanics, and the higher paying positions are still being led by white males. Diversity is the vehicle in achieving employment equality, but there is no remedy of magic potion in meeting this goal. Diversity equality has to be a conscious effort that will require a different thought process. Everyone must look deeper than skin color and search for the best candidate for the job.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, schools and corporations must aim to achieve diversity that is beneficial to all people. Diversity initiatives are not fair if white males are excluded from career advancements because a company is trying to reach a quota. Diversity is effective when all people are given a fair and equal opportunity for success. One group should not have priority over another and other groups should not be considered a minority. A cultural plunge may be an action that provides people with the opportunity to see how it feels to be different and to feel like an outsider. The United States is a diverse country and all Americans must be treated fairly and given equal opportunities. If the goal for diversity is to promote equality, a change in terminology must occur, and a major redefining of acceptable and preferred diversity practices must prevail.

References

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