

# Adult education: workplace training and diversity



## Diversity in the Workplace

Diversity in the workplace starts with students who are taking business courses and learning diversity within each of their courses. Learning and understanding diversity will prepare students for their desired professions in business. Whether students decide to become a manager in human resources, finance, or sales, they need to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills in dealing with diverse customers, colleagues, and management (Morgan Consoli, Marin 2016). Today's business environment is very competitive, therefore, students need to understand the global nature of business and learn to accept all people in order to be successful.

The workplace is constantly changing where more women, minorities, and older workers occupy several top positions in major corporations. Now more than ever, diversity is a critical topic in the workplace. The #MeToo and "Time's Up" movements are currently placing a spotlight on sexual harassment and abuse of power in many industries (Grissom 2018). In addition, there is evidence to suggest that many faculty members feel they are not prepared to teach some multicultural concepts such as power, dominance, access, and privilege in their courses (Booker, Merriweather and Campbell 2016). These movements and faculty feeling ill-prepared to teach diversity have exposed the lack of diversity training in business courses at many educational institutions.

## Overview of Diversity in the Workplace

The goal in teaching diversity is to develop mindfulness of diversity in our societies/ professions, while inspiring discussion between all students in the

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classroom (Morgan Consoli, Marin 2016). This allows students to start understanding other's views, opinions, cultures, and backgrounds and it starts the critical thinking process. Promoting critical thinking while learning diversity will create a foundation in which students will carry this into their adult work life. The students' diverse backgrounds and experiences clearly added to the discussion and analysis of the role of gender, race and life experience of those in the classroom (Grissom 2018). This transfer of skills creates a workforce that has empathy and understanding for coworkers, supervisors, and customers. This allows the workforce to value cultural differences and celebrate them (Stevens and Miretzky 2014).

#### Diversity in the workplace related to Specialization

Diversity in the workplace allows the organization to achieve its goals and makes good business sense. Many organizations have tried different diversity initiatives and have found that many of them do not work. However, if diversity is taught to college students within their courses then those skills can be transferred to the workplace (Stevens and Miretzky 2014).

This topic is important in the field of education because professors/instructors are responsible for their student's learning. Students who are taught diversity in the classroom setting can use those skills in the workplace (Fredrick, Alfred, Chakraborty, Johnson, Cherrstrom 2017). This paper includes an examination of research literature regarding the importance of teaching diversity in college classrooms to business students. Also, diverse classrooms play a crucial role in career preparation. Integrated classroom is important in helping students learn to collaborate and

communicate with the different cultures and backgrounds found in the current workplace. (Phillips and Wood 2017).

## Review of the Literature

### Creating a more productive workforce

Teaching diversity in college classrooms to business students creates a more productive workforce which meets the organization's goals. When the workplace does not value diversity, the workplace breaks down as the employees do not know how to engage others from different culture and ages. A considerable body of work has determined that diversity courses in college courses are connected to a range of positive results for college students including an openness to cultural understanding and even satisfaction with college (Morgan Consoli and Marin 2016). Morgan Consoli, M. L., and Marin, P. (2016) in their article " Teaching Diversity in the Graduate Classroom: The Instructor, the Students, the Classroom, or All of the Above?" researched students who participated in graduate-level diversity courses expressed growth in new ways of thinking, self- reflection, skill development, and career preparation. Students made comments " the class helped me focus on what I would like to do after graduation" (Morgan Consoli and Marin 2016).

### Train faculty to teach diversity

The student body of America's schools has dramatically changed, adding significant complication to teaching and helping teachers to " differentiate" their skills in order to serve a broader range of students. In Booker, K. C.,

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Merriweather, L., & Campbell-Whatley, G. (2016) article “ The Effects of Diversity Training on Faculty and Students’ Classroom Experiences”, they researched training faculty in teaching diversity. Students have various backgrounds, histories, speak different languages, political and religious affiliations, and sexual orientations. In response to this multitude of cultural changes, colleges and universities have had to change traditional methods to instruction, assessment, and collaboration. Due to the academic and social needs of diverse groups, professors/instructors are expected to teach and integrate diversity within their courses (Book, Merriweather, Campbell-Whatley, 2016).

InStevens and Miretzky (2014)article “ The Foundations of Teaching for Diversity: What Teachers Tell Us About Transferable Skills”, explored the concept of a transferable skills orientation for teaching diverse students. In teacher education, teacher educators should emphasize the social and cultural forces influencing teaching and learning, and they are in a unique position to contribute to the development of the successful transfer of skills for working with diversity. Teacher educators need to teach future teachers’ cultural contexts in order to successfully motivate students (Stevens and Miretzky 2014).

#### Using Service-Learning to teach diversity

According to Rice and Horn (2014), service-learning has been shown to be an effective approach for teaching diversity in a higher education setting. In their article, “ Teaching Diversity through Service-Learning: An Integrative Praxis Pedagogical Approach” they exam service-learning as a broad

technique to teach diversity and how cultural immersion experiences allow students an opportunity to engage with and develop relationships within a community that, in turn, fosters a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity (Rice and Horn 2014). Research examining service-learning to teach diversity within a specific curriculum includes the disciplines of social work, speech communication and mass communication, business, and psychology (Rice and Horn, 2014).

This is not a new concept. This is the basis of internships for business students. Business students obtain an internship to learn business skills and they learn the corporate culture. Many corporations include community service activities, for example, each department at Motorola, Incorporated participates in different homeless shelters for women providing cellular phones that only allows two numbers to be dialed; one number is a significant other and the other is the police. When business students partake in an internship, they have to write a reflection of what they learned from completing their internship. This allows the student to take what they learned in class and what they learned on the job and discuss it. The internship provides the opportunity to learn diversity through their place of work and develop skills that allow them to be successful in the workplace.

### Challenges Posed by Diversity

In Warhurst and Black's (2015) article "It's never too late to learn," they researched later-career workers, workers over 50, and concluded that personal growth through continued learning makes later-career workers a growing asset (Warhurst and Black 2015). However, most people stereotype

older workers and say they cannot learn. We all know the adage, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Warhurst and Black's research points to older workers being motivated by their work, but can they learn new skills at work that will benefit the organization?

While understanding later-career workers wanting to continue to learn, diversity programs need to include research that points to older workers being an asset and not a liability.

### Conclusion

The researchers from all five articles addressed diversity and learning. The key findings included teacher education programs needing to include diversity training in order for teachers to feel comfortable about teaching diversity. In addition, teaching diversity in college courses teaches students needed skills in the workplace. One way to teach diversity is through service-learning activities like internships. Internships teach students the needed workplace skills but also the company culture. Another is to teach the value of the older worker and how much the older worker can contribute to the organization.

The implication for educators in the adult education specialization of adult post-secondary teaching is to teach diversity so students of any age, race, gender, sexual orientation can accept others, and this is a requirement in today's business environment.

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