Diversity and Multicultural Education: Racism, Bilingualism, Disabilities and LGBTQ Students

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Abstract Diversity and multicultural education have a serious impact on the student's behavior and success. Embracing diversity is a challenging task for many educators. In this paper, we discuss diversity issues and professional standards for educational leaders that should be adopted to promote individualism, equity, and student engagement. Discussed diversity-related issues are: (1) Racism: Racial incidents towards black race in Oklahoma State University and towards indigenous rugby players in Australian sports were analyzed to have inclusive and racism-free environments through positive relations and multicultural reform; (2) Bilingualism: Ideas from both advocates and criticizers of linguistic diversity were evaluated to reach the end result that bilingual education programs must be adopted to develop students understanding and success; (3) LGBTQ students: Schools should enforce inclusions and support GSA clubs; (4) Disabilities: Accommodations for deaf and/or hard-of-hearing students must be provided for use in instruction for English-language learners. Lastly, strategies to embrace diversity like effective communication, equality and engagement with others were proposed to overcome challenges that face educators in creating a diverse and inclusive campus.

Keywords: *leaders, educators, diversity, racism, students*

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1. Introduction

Diversity refers to different culture, race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion and social-class of people within the community. An individual belongs to several different groups at the same time; the behavior of every individual is determined by both macro-culture and micro-culture where macro-culture is often mediated by micro-culture [1]. However, minorities with opposite cultural views (frame of reference) of American mainstream culture have greater inflexibility to learn at school [2]. Multicultural education includes programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language, minorities, low-income groups, LGBT, and disabilities. It is important that diverse groups should have an equal opportunity to learn in educational institutions because it is believed that "all men are created equal". Hence, there should be no racism and discriminations towards women and people with disabilities. It has been identified that student's behavior is a result of different social categories (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, class, and exceptionality). Commonly, social class is determined based on several variables like income, education, occupation, and lifestyle; whereas exceptionality refers to students with special talents and abilities who need special programs to develop their creativity [1].

Embracing diversity might be a challenging task for many educators. This is because many educational leaders fail to understand their students' culture and therefore their projected behavior. It has been observed that putting culture to work depends completely on knowing culture; which means that educators will not be able to identify students' culture unless they are familiar with their culture. This requires an in-depth understanding of their students' participation in community practices outside schools. Moreover, educators have to realize that variance in students outcomes might be related to the mismatch between home and school culture, hence, in-depth knowledge of student's everyday lives will be useful in addressing this issue [1].

2. Leadership Standards

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) standards outline the foundational principles of leadership in educational organizations which guide leaders to promote each student's academic success and well-being. Those standards are designed to effectively meet today's educational challenges/changes with the ultimate goal of improving student learning, education equality and diversity. Effective leaders follow professional leadership norms and ethics (standard 2) by promoting democracy, individualism, responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity

as well as understanding every student's backgrounds and cultures. Recognition of each student's culture, strengths and diversity ensures that students are treated fairly, respectfully and have equal learning opportunities (standard 3); [3].

Applying PSEL standards in educational organizations helps effective leaders to support diversity in education in many ways, and one way is by engaging students' families and the community in various school's activities. For example, international students and their families, who have diverse backgrounds and cultures, should be strongly involved in school's activities to understand their cultural differences and create collaborative and productive relationships with their families. Back in Saudi Arabia, and since I am assigned as a teaching assistant in the Chemical Engineering Dept., faculty members and I usually accompany students in the pre-arranged sports activities, e.g. soccer and basketball matches, and get engage with every student's background, culture, thoughts and family as an attempt to understand every student personality and diversity to overcome culture differences and achieve student's academic success [3].

3. Racism

Oklahoma State University (OSU) faces a huge diversity challenge in dealing with students' racism on campus. Earlier this month, Snapchat posts showed documented examples of racial incidents between OSU students from decades ago. Racism at OSU is not a new thing to many individuals as spokesman of the group, James Sullivan, reported that "These things are reoccurring and we don't feel we are being heard"; and what Sullivan meant by not being heard is that nobody is taking action towards the change. Moreover, two other racial incidents at OSU happened in the last year for female students who posted photos in blackface on social media; as they are making fun of the black race on campus [4].

Lately, a group of black/concerned students at OSU reacted against the previous incidents and met with administrators to make the change. Minority/black students at OSU, which accounts only 4% of total students, seek to change the university culture and demanded top management and administrators to have a clear plan of action to address racism on campus because they have been undermined/racially oppressed by their peers and faculty members. However, OSU President Burns Hargis did not respond immediately, but after the blackface incidents, he met with a few concerned students and discussed their needs for change and to take action towards racism. Tiffany Thurmond who was a senior and head of the African-American Student Association (AASA) said: "You can't sit and be silent, we want to help fix the problem so future students don't have to deal with it". Also, the students asked the management to engage both students and administration in finding the proper solution to the racial competency problem at OSU. It was suggested that an action plan based on perspectives of both parties would be more effective than an established plan from the administration side only [1,4].

The University reform/change should be antiracist and anti-biased keeping in mind that identities and cultures are not static and they change and evolve according to curriculum and instruction. To have a better university reform/change and ensure both black/white students have equitable environments for learning, students are encouraged to share their racism experiences with administrators and there must be engagement from students, parents and faculty members to resolve racism [1].

Hence, OSU administration/students suggested an action plan to address racism on campus. According to the plan, OSU considered the following: hiring more faculty and staff of color to enhance race relations, meeting with concerned students and campus organizations to improve diversity and inclusion, training prospective/current students, faculty and staff to understand/embrace diversity and imposing punishment for racial activities and behaviors made in public. Through applying this plan, students must feel comfortable, welcomed and safe during the time they are on campus; otherwise, graduated students will apply for other universities to complete their studies in a much safe/diverse campus. The ultimate goal of the action plan is "to bring about the best OSU possible; a university that is a true model and one that is loyal and true to all its students" [4].

In educational institutions, there are many challenges and opportunities for embracing diversity in sport. Sport is a major part of the culture and global communication; sports activities should be managed well to avoid negative attributes such as jingoism, sexism, and racism and to facilitate understanding of the 'other', mutual respect and a cosmopolitanism ethos. Sports like soccer, basketball, cricket, and hockey provide important cultural connections between students/people [5]. Hence, sport plays a key role in shaping/impacting one's culture, behavior, thinking and/or communication skills.

Diversity and racism in Australian sport are directly associated with race, ethnicity, and indigeneity of the participating sports players. Players are either indigenous peoples (from Australia, New Zealand and Canada) or people of different color, ancestry and religion (from places as diverse as North America, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Brazil and South-East Asia). The theme of our study focuses on "Indigenous sport and racism". Indigenous players/athletes in professional rugby league struggle with racism; especially when they are making progress towards winning [5]. Though indigenous players/athletes are eligible to take part in any sport, lack of awareness, commitment, and knowledge towards racial/cultural diversity may compromise their inclusion [1]. Another case study by Thangaraj showed that basketball is a male-centered sports game with virtually no active role for females. In other words, basketball is male-dominated and only heterosexist are welcomed. Thangaraj's case study illustrates how ethnocultural sporting environments can be liberating for some but disempowering to others [6].

Tensions and conflicts which arise from racism, exclusion, and marginalization between students may be addressed by including/engaging aboriginal students/people in sports activities; and ensuring that there are positive relations between different ethnic and racial groups. Positive relations give the opportunity to build a more inclusive and cohesive community of all comers. It is suggested that contemporary sport is more likely to tackle racism than propagate it [5].

Moreover, a multicultural reform and curriculum transformation techniques of the mainstream curriculum should be adopted to overcome ethnicity/race cultural differences. Teachers should have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes about their students' races and deal with different ethnic groups. Teachers must be very sensitive to their own ethnic attitudes as well as their student's (or sports players) ethnic attitudes in order to have a more harmonic environment that is free from racism [1].

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Australian Sports Commission (ASC) adopted (in summer 2005-2006) a racial and religious vilification code, which has been initiated for all national cricket/and other sport competitions; the code states that: "a player will not engage in any conduct, act towards or speak to any other player in a manner, which offends, insults, humiliates, intimidates, threatens, disparages or vilifies the other player on the basis of that player's race, religion, color, descent or national or ethnic origin" [7].

4. Bilingualism

Bilingual education refers to the use of two (or more) languages of instruction at some point in a student's school/university career. Linguistics believe that the complexity of language in education is due to a multitude of sociopolitical, sociolinguistic, psychological, economic, administrative, and instructional factors [8]. Introduction of linguistic diversity in the US community initiated from immigration, indigenous populations and dialect variation in indigenous languages. In 1965, a Bilingual Education Act (BEA) was signed by President Johnson to support linguistic diversity and to equally educate students who were both economically and linguistically undermined in schools. However, critics of bilingual education have adopted the argument that students will not learn English if they use their own language at school and/or university. Criticizers also argue that the United States must be unified by having English and only English as the official language in education [1].

On the other hand, advocates of linguistic diversity suggested a creation of planning quality programs for bilingual students to develop English language skills and embrace the added benefits of different languages [1]. Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) has successfully implemented a bilingual education program which taught students two languages equally and at the same time. Deaf students at WSD learned both American Sign Language (ASL) and English language and were more successful to learn, understand others and express their own thoughts [9]. Advocates reported that students taught in bilingual schools had much better performance than student taught in English-only schools; meaning that dual-language immersion programs, where language-majority and language-minority students are taught together, resulted in more successful students. Other instructional programs for promoting linguistic diversity in educational institutions include transitional bilingual education (TBE) and maintenance bilingual education (MBE); where students receive academic instructions in their both languages (primary and English languages) to develop their academic proficiency in both languages [1].

According to Tariq in his previous study on "The Impact of The American English Language on the Saudi Education System", it was found that most of the Saudi students agree (for the most part) that studying both the English language and its culture are necessary for developing their English skills and their understanding of schools/universities curriculum [10]. The issue of using L1 in L2 classrooms has been an area of interest in bilingual education research. In a previous male-school (in Saudi Arabia) study that investigate the attitudes of students towards learning English, 62% of the students (out of 600) preferred to be taught in English language by Arabic teachers; and 32.8% disagreed with the exclusion of Arabic in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The majority of the students were in favor of the Arabic language because of their feeling of comfort with their primary language (resorting to L1 is a natural phenomenon) [11].

Educators should identify the preferred language of instruction for their students prior to the beginning of the class. By doing so, they can accommodate the needs of their students and ensure equality in learning by having a more flexible and bilingual learning environment. However, teachers and professors should stick to the English language as the language of instruction (since it is already perceived as the international language for learning; most available research papers are in English) and only use the other language, such as Arabic in Saudi Arabia, for explaining vague ideas, translating words, contrasting the two languages, explaining grammar, asking and answering questions and participating in pair work. Bilingual education programs must be adopted in both schools and higher educational institutions to develop students understanding, engagement, participation, and success.

5. LGBTQ Students

Universities/schools should support the LGBTQ groups and enforce inclusions by the following: (1) Confront bias ideas present in textbooks and ensure there is no stereotyping, (2) Provide educators and students with the required knowledge about LGBTQ groups and reflect them in positive cultural views and (3) Send a clear message to students, parents and school employees that there should be no discrimination to LGBTQ students [1].

Having a GSA (gay-straight alliance) club in educational institutes would bring LGBTQ and straight students together to support each other, provide a safe place to socialize and create a platform to fight for racial, gender, LGBTQ, and economic justice for safer schools and healthier communities. Educators should protect LGBTQ students from harassment and violence and make sure they are not oppressed by schools policy, administration and/or students racial behaviors [12].

The liability that any educational institute would have against attacking LGBTQ students off campus should involve suspending the attacker's study and sending awareness emails about the situation to other students on

campus. The suspension of the attacker may not occur if there is no evidence of the attack that should be provided by having a cooperation between the City security department and the school administration.

A plan of inclusion that may resolve the above issues must include: (1) Train staff members to coach their colleagues on topics like diversity, gender-equity and preventing bias-based bullying (2) Confront stereotyping and discrimination and punish students with racial behaviors, (3) Provide educators with the required knowledge about different cultures, statuses, and interactions between genders and (4) Host parent/student panels to share LGBTQ students' experiences with staff, and community events [1,13]. A more general approach for having an inclusive environment and reducing the liability of violence was suggested by Gonzalez (2017) as the following: (1) Teach students inclusively, (2) Support students diversity, (3) Support GSA clubs, (4) Revisit school policies, (5) Educate staff members and (6) Respond to anti-LGBTQ behaviors [14].

6. Disabilities

Disabled students are defined as students with mental, physical or emotional problems (e.g. autism, deafness, visual impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, and speech/language impairment, etc.) which require special services and programs approved by the department for meeting students' needs and education equality [15]. In every school and/or university, there are various resources which define and address students with disabilities or exceptional needs. For example, the Ohio operating standards for the education of children with disabilities identify the state requirements for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Ohio Department of Education established Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD) where students are appropriately assessed in various fields such as English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; where these subjects are selected based on the student's grade level. AASCD is aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards–Extended (OLS-E) which allow for knowledge development of students with significant cognitive disabilities. Administrators, educators, students, and families can find resources about AASCD from the public system "Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal" [16].

Disabled students should be taught and accommodated by the school and/or university in different ways, as requested by parents and/or education systems, as an attempt to develop education equity. However, parents and families should also note that accommodations must be reasonable and not every request will be filled. Also, parents/families should know that the university is not required to provide personal items for disabled students such as a wheelchair, hearing aid, eye-glasses, etc. At Tiffin University, the most common services/reasonable accommodations provided to disabled students include, but not limited to, alternative testing, note-taking, sign language/interpreting, deaf and/or blind services, counseling and housing services [17].

Deaf and/or hard-of-hearing students receive many services from the university to improve their learning experience. Office for Disability Services (ODS) at Tiffin University coordinates sign language interpreting and/or transcribing services for deaf and/or hard-of-hearing students in classroom and lab requirements, academic-related activities and University events. Available resources include American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, C-print (video captioning), Virtual Reality Interpreters (VRI) and UbiDuo (a communication device that enables communication via texting) [17]. Moreover, accommodations for use in instruction for English-language learners (ELL) with hearing impairment in Ohio University (Ohio Department of Education) include the following: (1) Sign language, (2) Screen reader in other languages, (3) Written notes and notes from a classmate in the native language, (4) Videotape, descriptive video, and videos with scripts, (5) Sign interpreter instructions and (6) Spelling and grammar-assistive devices [18].

Recently, Trump's administration proposed a two-year delay of the so-called "significant disproportionality" IDEA rule which was finalized in the closing weeks of the Obama administration. It has been claimed that the equity in IDEA regulations may not appropriately address the problem of significant disproportionality. The IDEA rule requires states to identify schools with high rates of disabled students from particular racial or ethnic groups in order to be placed in restrictive settings or subjected to discipline for better learning environments. Civil rights advocates and school administrators expressed their disapproval of delaying the IDEA rule and mentioned that the delay would bring high costs and burden on administrators [19].

7. Strategies and Challenges

The key steps for incorporating students/employees to learn to deal with diversity issues include the following: (1) Communicate effectively: understand university policies, other's opinions and ideas, and ask for more information and clarification to avoid misunderstandings others; (2) Treat others equally: make sure that you are treating everyone equally, regardless of his/her gender, race, ethnicity, culture (remember that you are accountable for your own actions and words) [20]; (3) Engage yourself with others: join diverse teams with individuals of various culture and arrange relationship-building exercise, involve yourself in diversity workshops to lessen bias and discrimination (diversity workshops have been tried by 81% of U.S. colleges and universities, and that 70% were using diversity workshops in 1996-1997) [21]; (4) Be aware and sensitive to certain groups: respect different religions and religious groups and respect their ritual and beliefs that may pose various challenges and may need extra consideration; (5) Share knowledge and learn others culture: explain what it is like being in a certain age group, a different cultural or social background, listen to other's ideas carefully and respectfully and ask for more knowledge about other's culture; (6) Celebrate differences: diversity should be the norm and, once in a while, students/employees need to celebrate their diverse

campus/classroom and/or workplace by having arranged events and gatherings since celebrating differences leads to improved harmony; (7) Respect, tolerate and be compassion: respect and be compassionate to other's ideas, opinions, beliefs and do not try to prove your ideas, argue respectively and tolerate other's differences [20].

Challenges that face educators to create a diverse and inclusive campus are associated with something called "unconscious bias" in which studies show that even those who value equality may unconsciously behave in discriminatory ways. An unconscious bias refers to a prejudice we are unaware of holding; previous studies found that every person brings a lifetime of experience and cultural history into his/her interactions with others. Examples include the following: (1) Gender bias: it is perceived that women are less likely to be seen as capable of leadership; (2) Racial bias: faculty of color feels undermined and that they have been hired for affirmative action purposes; (3) Sexual orientation bias: students believe that their peers hold negative attitudes about LGBTQ individuals. Unconscious bias has a negative impact on both students and faculty; retention and academic development are the most common issues that affect all students while lower job satisfaction, tense relationships with colleagues and an unequal division of duties are some of the real problems for faculty [22].

8. Conclusion

Embracing diversity in schools and higher educational institutions would advance student's success. Diversity-related issues such as racism, bilingualism, LGBTQ, and disabilities have been reviewed and discussed throughout this paper to overcome the challenges that face educators in creating a diverse and inclusive campus. Racism issue has been discussed through two racial incidents (scenarios) which were triggered by color, ethnicity and nationality differences. Bilingual education programs were found to be the ideal choice to develop students understanding and success. Educational leaders must support LGBTQ students by enforcing inclusions and supporting GSA clubs. Disabilities like deaf and/or hard-of-hearing students should be properly accommodated to ease their study journey. Different strategies to embrace diversity include, but not limited to, effective communication, equality, and engagement with others.

Acknowledgments

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