What is Diversity?

Diversity has various definitions and thus cannot be easily defined. The term often refers to the great variety of distinctions that exist between persons and groups, yet the ambiguity of these distinctions entail an exhaustive list of attributes. The following quotes demonstrate a few of the numerous definitions of diversity:

“Diversity is differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences.” – Kathy Castania

“[Diversity] means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.” – Office of Equity and Inclusion Oregon Health Authority

“Diversity’ as used here [in this sentence] refers to human attributes that are different from your own and from those of groups to which you belong.” – The University of Michigan

By considering these definitions, we acknowledge only a few of the various attributes associated with diversity. In a more general sense, these attributes may differ in particular environments such as academia, healthcare, or the workplace.

Diversity in Academia

Academic institutions throughout the nation consider diversity knowledge imperative to student success. Academic scholar James Banks contributes to diversity understanding through developing an educational model comprised of five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. This model, known as the Multicultural Education Model (depicted below), encourages teachers to acknowledge the importance of diversity in the classroom.

[Diagram of Banks's Multicultural Education Model]

Multicultural Education

Content Integration

- Content Integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching.

Knowledge Construction

- Knowledge Construction: Teachers need to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed.

Equity Pedagogy

- Equity Pedagogy: An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social-class groups.

Prejudice Reduction

- Prejudice Reduction: This dimension focuses on the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and how they can be modified by teaching methods and materials.

Empowering School Culture

- Empowering School Culture: Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and the interaction of the self and the students across ethnic and racial lines must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups.
Other initiatives to promote diversity in academia are evident in Geneva Gay’s *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, a publication recognizing “the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning” (Ladson-Billings 2004). A more national initiative known as 21st Century Skills seeks to prepare students of the 21st century for the various demands of today’s global economy. Furthermore, Dr. Sandra Mayo of Texas State University and Dr. Patricia Larke of Texas A&M University recently edited the text *Integrating Multiculturalism into the Curriculum* which advocates the recognition and appreciation of diversity as it relates to each college and school department.

### Diversity in Healthcare

The increased heterogeneity of modern American culture demands healthcare services reflect a diverse patient base. The immediate need for healthcare professionals to recognize and accommodate diverse populations is widely known as cultural competence. Salisbury (2006) defines cultural competence as a “defined set of policies, behaviors, attitudes and practices that enable individuals and organizations to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.”

### Diversity in the Workplace

Today, numerous employers require candidates to be diversity competent. A study conducted by American Progress (2012) affirmed diversity in the workplace stimulates economic growth, broadens the consumer market, and allows businesses to operate at full potential. As a result, many contemporary vacancies mention diversity as a necessary attribute for prospective applicants. Careers such as protective service occupations, management occupations, community and social service occupations, and education, training, and library occupations are just a few services acknowledging the importance of diversity in the workplace.

Diversity Manager  
Chief Diversity Officer  
Diversity Recruiter  
Diversity Consultant  
Global Diversity Strategist  
Workforce Diversity Director  
Diversity Trainer  
EEO Specialist  
Diversity Analyst

“Diversity is the range of ways people differ. I subscribe to a broad definition that goes beyond race, ethnicity, and gender—the groups we often think of when the term "diversity" is used; to include age, religion, disability, veterans status, sexual orientation along with socioeconomic status. I also consider different ideas, values, and perspectives as components of diversity.”

Texas State University - San Marcos  
Chief Diversity Officer  
Dr. Herman Horn
REFERENCES


