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Directions

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Definitions surrounding multicultural awareness and bias

Multiculturalism is a practice which promotes teaching, learning, and understanding of cultural, social, political, and human differences. We are including topics of race, gender, sexual identity, disability, religious difference, class, and their complex intersections as they are addressed in questions of social justice, patterns of oppression, and the institutionalization of prejudice. As synonymous with multiculturalism, diversity functions as a critique of glib universalism, and affirms the search for a dialogue to find common ground.

Multiculturalism is an approach to education that prepares students to take social action against social structural inequality. It emphasizes understanding, the causes of oppression and inequality, and ways in which these social problems might be eliminated. Adherents to multiculturalism try to use their power for collective betterment.

(Sleeter and Grant, "Multicultural Education." Facing Racism in Education. 1990)

Multiculturalism promotes the strength and value of cultural diversity, human rights and respect for cultural diversity, (and alternative life choices for people). Social justice and equal opportunity for all people, and equity distribution of power among members of all ethnic groups. It is a process which engages institutional racism, unequal power relationships among so-called racial groups, and economic stratification, and social class.

Social Justice: Having the perspective that allows one to take social action against social structural inequality; having an understanding of oppression and inequality and gaining greater insight into methods of eradicating them. Social justice demands that issues of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, disability be emphasized as well as culture.

(Clarke and Sanchez, 2001)

Diversity: A situation that includes representation of multiple (ideally all) groups within an environment, such as a university or a workplace. This word commonly refers to different cultural groups, although it is also used to describe differences within cultural groups, e.g., diversity of the Asian-American cultural includes Korean Americans and Japanese Americans. An emphasis on and respecting differences by recognizing that no one culture is intrinsically superior underlies the current usage of the term.

(Diversity Database-Moving Towards Community, University of Maryland, diversity@umail.umd.edu, 10/21/99)

Bias is an act – verbal, written, physical, psychological – that maligns, threatens, or harms a person or group on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, or veteran status. Acts may not always be in violation of civil, criminal, or University codes but may warrant intervention if they cause students to lose confidence in their ability to participate in the educational mission of the University.

(Office of University Counsel, Rutgers University, 1998)

Bias Prevention: An organized system of monitoring, intervening in, and restoring in the aftermath of bias incidents in an environment, e.g., University or workplace. Monitoring includes the reporting of incidents when they occur. Intervention includes counseling persons victimized by bias acts as well as persons witnessing the same. Intervention also includes addressing persons who perpetrate bias acts either through systems of adjudication or reprimand. Restoration often involves educational programs that help to prevent acts from recurring. Persons in authority and leadership usually comprise bias prevention teams. Prevention must constantly be revised and updated.

Anti-bias Stance: Assuming an "anti-bias stance" means adopting leadership strategies that enable one to interrupt bias acts, e.g. interrupting sexist jokes in a male locker-room, correcting stereotypes such as "Gays are child molesters," with assertiveness.

Intercultural relations: More than "diversity" or "multiculturalism" the descriptor "intercultural" signals action and interaction, exchange and integration of difference into one's everyday institutional life. "Intercultural relations" defines the ways persons lay their differences on the table as a matter of course and work, communicate, and coalesce across them in order to understand and be understood.

(Clarke and Sanchez, 2001)

Cross-cultural communication: The term "cross-cultural" implies interaction with persons of different cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, religious, age, class backgrounds. "Cross-cultural communication" is a process of exchanging, negotiating, and mediating one's cultural differences through language, nonverbal gestures, and space relationships. It is also the process by which people express their openness to an intercultural experience.

(Clarke and Sanchez, 2001)

Global education: Global education debunks the exclusivity of a world order conceptualized in Western thought. It espouses the core principles of a liberal education in the context of cross-cultural, cross-national, and multi-paradigm learning.

(Jonell Sanchez, 2001)

Multiculturalism (n): The practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, ethnicities, attitudes and opinions within an environment.

(Diversity Database-Moving Towards Community, University of Maryland, diversity@umail.umd.edu, 10/21/99)

Taking a multicultural stance is taking an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-heterosexist stance.

(Beth Richie, 1989)

I resist anything better than my own diversity, And breathe the air and leave plenty after me, And am not stuck up and am in my place.

(Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," 1891-'92)

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