

Chapter 27

TIPs to Maximize Meaningful Professional Development Programs and Initiatives: A Case Study in Theoretically– Grounded Diversity Education

Stephanie L. Sanders
Old Dominion University, USA

Mark P. Orbe
Western Michigan University, USA

ABSTRACT

At no other time in higher education have scholar researchers been called to demonstrate the value added of theoretically grounded diversity education. This signals the need for higher education to make deeper linkages between diversity education, learning outcomes and academic mission statements. By highlighting a few “TIPs” - attempts to move “theory into practice,” - the authors seek to answer the call to action. Through a case study approach the authors highlight a professional development program that fosters interactional diversity and serves as a catalyst for increasing awareness, mindfulness and positive organizational change. First, a diversity education initiative at a large mid-western university referred to as “The Institute” is described. Second, the theoretically grounded frameworks of anxiety/uncertainty management and relational dialectics theory is presented. Finally, the case study concludes by advocating for more robust professional development programs and initiatives that positively impact organizations. Implications for organizational leaders are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps at no other time in higher education have researchers been called on to demonstrate the value added of theoretically grounded diversity education (Hurtado, 2005; Paluck, 2006; Milem 2003). The value added of diversity related programs and initiatives and formal infrastructures is in question across many institutions of higher education. With rapid changing demographics, there is pressure on a national level to identify the added value of institutional diversity programming efforts and a call to share best practices that contribute to the changing landscape and cultural milieu of higher education (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Hurtado, 2005; Paluck, 2006). According to Hale (2004), higher education has a “duty and responsibility” (p. 3) to advance diversity related dialogues, advance social progress and prepare leaders for a global workforce. In fact, the extant research on diversity has created a space for scholars to write about diversity related concepts that highlight the complexities of institutional culture and climate. As diversity research continues to flourish across disciplines and institutions, highlighting this gap in the literature will help reinforce its benefits and place its value at ground zero in the academy. In developing this chapter, the authors sought to answer the call to action and highlight how theoretically grounded diversity education can be used to enhance and maximize educational practices - namely through professional development programs and initiatives.

EXTANT REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has an early history of supporting diversity in higher education. Beginning in 1976, AAUP declared their commitment to affirmative action by supporting the use of structural [numerical, compositional] diversity necessary to create working and learning environment beneficial for *all* faculty and students (AAUP, 2015). According to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin (2002) this position has lacked theoretical grounding as well as empirical evidence that connects diversity to favorable educational outcomes. This claim suggests that not only must higher education grapple to make deeper linkages between diversity, learning outcomes and their academic mission statements, but it also signals the need for researchers to provide empirical evidence on whether diversity programs and initiatives positively impact individuals and organizations. The purpose of this case study is to provide a theory that supports maximizing professional development programs and initiatives related to diversity, which is perhaps the next critical challenge in the process.

Historical View of Diversity

Although early discussions regarding differences did not appear under the guise of diversity, they were critical in promoting awareness, shifting perceptions and forging positive change. During the 1850s, Harvard University aspired to move from a regional institution to an international university. In an effort to forge such a movement, Neil Rudenstine (2004) discovered the theory of diversity education, as penned by former President Felton, which was to, “promote better understanding across the kinds of geographical, cultural, and social barriers” (p. 63). In the context of a Civil War, there was evidence of “a theory of the educational benefits of diversity” (Rudenstine, 2004, p. 64). In a similar vein, and more than a century later, Freire’s (1974) pedagogy of critical conscientization focused on the liberation of oppressed Brazilians. The frameworks of both Felton, as noted by Rudenstine, (2004) and Freire (1974)

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