
Original Paper

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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Abstract

There are three words that have been bandied about over the last few years that have fostered much encouragement, discussion as well as antipathy. There is concern about the actual definition of these words, how they are fostered and what college instructors believe that they can do to foster and nurture these three items. A mixed methods study was conducted at a southwestern university to discern the thoughts and feelings of faculty as to the importance of these three words. The results are reported and discussed.

Introduction

Across the United States over the past few decades, there has been much discussion of the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. In many states, separate departments have been established to foster and nurture the embodiment of these three words. There has been much discussion and debate as to how to foster and promote these three key constructs as well as how to develop these things in elementary, middle school, high school and college.

A preliminary study was conducted at a southwestern university regarding the relative importance of these three words and respondents were given the opportunity to indicate how they would promote or go about promoting these three words.

It should be noted that Cupchik (2024) has offered the following definitions of diversity, equity and inclusion, although these were not offered in the actual online study.

“Diversity is a multifaceted concept that encapsulates differences in race, culture, ethnicity, and sexual identity among others. For some, it is about the coexistence and acceptance of various racial and ethnic communities; for others, it encompasses a broader spectrum including sexual orientation, represented by the LGBTQ+ community, and even a diversity of religions such as Anglicanism, Methodism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism. This wide array of definitions shows that diversity is celebrated in numerous ways across different demographics—ranging from Hispanic to Irish, Polish to German, and Canadian contexts. However, these examples are not exhaustive, indicating that diversity can extend into countless other identities and affiliations (p. 99).

Inclusion in educational settings often refers to 'full inclusion', where students with special needs, whether physical, mental, or cognitive, are integrated into general educational environments. This integration typically involves formal evaluations and the provision of necessary accommodations to support each student's educational journey. These processes start as soon as a student is identified, which can be as early as kindergarten, and continue throughout their schooling (p. 99).

“Equity is defined at the University of Toronto as the process of treating all people fairly, and ensuring that policies, procedures and decisions do not disadvantage some groups or individuals based on their identities or lived experiences” (p. 98).

A commitment to equity acknowledges that disparities and opportunities are rooted in historical and contemporary injustice and systemic barriers. Redressing matters of equity can be understood as a kind of “affirmative action” that we saw in the 1960’s particularly as it pertains to hiring practices (p. 99).

Diversity is the democratic demographic mix of the community and involves a wide range of expressions and experiences, including different gender identities, ethnic or racial identities, sexual

orientations, abilities and other factors (p. 99).

Inclusion is the creation of an environment where everyone is treated equitably and feels welcome and respected. Inclusion means actively fostering the conditions in which everyone can access opportunities, fully participate and maximize their creativity and contributions. An inclusive university works to remove systemic barriers while respecting values and celebrating differences (p. 99).

Perhaps the most complex of the three, often intertwined with concepts of fairness and justice is resource distribution. Equity might involve financial aspects, such as funding educational programs equitably across different districts, or it could relate to accessibility, ensuring that all students have similar opportunities to succeed regardless of their background or disabilities.

Subjects: Subjects were full time faculty at a southwestern university and the main campus as well as two other satellite campuses. Full time faculty were sent a mass email asking for their cooperation.

There were 200 faculty members and only 31 responded to the survey.

It was hypothesized that some faculty were overworked and simply chose to ignore the request for participation and others perhaps were afraid to share their real thoughts, ideas, and reactions.

Three main realms focused on three questions:

1) How important do you think diversity is :

Very Important

Important

Neutral

Not Important

Not at all important

Respondents were then asked to offer suggestions as to how to promote Diversity in their classrooms

2) How important do you think equity is :

Very Important

Important

Neutral

Not Important

Not at all important

Respondents were then asked to offer suggestions as to how to promote Eduity in their classrooms

3) How important do you think inclusion is :

Very Important

Important

Neutral

Not Important

Not at all important

Respondents were then asked to offer suggestions as to how to promote Inclusion in their classrooms

Results:

In terms of question number one in terms of the respondents: -

46.67% (n=14) saw Diversity as “very important” and 46.67% (n=14) saw it as “important” and 6.67% (n=2) responded “neutral”.

62.07% (n=18) saw Equity as “very important” and 27.59% (n=8) saw it as important and 10.34% (n=3) responded neutral.

64% (n=18) saw Inclusion as “very important” and 32.14% (n= 9) saw it as important and 3% (n=1) responded neutral.

None of the respondents saw these three words as not important, or not at all important.

There was an opportunity for all of the participants to share their thoughts about what they believed could be done to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion.

These follow:

What can instructors, parents, counselors, and administration do to enhance "Diversity" in Elementary, High School, and Secondary Education?

Responses Regarding Diversity

1. Have a stronger understanding of Universal Design of Learning. 2. Authentic inclusive practices including classroom conversations, teaching methods, etc. 3. Individualizing student and family needs, rather than viewing students at test scores and parents as non-participants.

As much as the discipline will allow, professors need to present the subject matter in a manner that reflects the principles of diversity.

Practice and model critical self-reflection. Discuss current events related to diversity.

Teach and have inclusion without bias. Make everyone feel welcome and encourage engagement.

From the beginning - Live in a very diverse place where diversity is real - and have friends and colleagues of all diversions - allow your children to be with diverse people including color, religion, beliefs, etc.

Encourage open communication, refrain from favoring one group over another, take concerns seriously, present opportunities for all to collaborate and participate.

Include a variety of reading and visual material. Open and frank discussions must be conducted in an atmosphere of trust.

Express instructor acceptance of different groups/cultures of students and be aware of issues that might logically arise. Employ and teach a wide variety of teaching strategies.

Get to know students better by creating a student-centered learning environment. Provide opportunities for students to see themselves in the lessons.

I would encourage stakeholders to first have an open discussion related to the construct of diversity. In addition, I would also ask that educators and administrators not push any agendas that would create controversy in the learning environment.

Instructors can enhance diversity by in education by getting to know students and promoting cultural awareness which acknowledges diverse backgrounds of students. Include references and analogies to other cultures in their teaching so that students from diverse backgrounds can connect personally with lessons.

Instructors can encourage diverse people groups to enter the teaching profession.

First, we must fight against any idea of "Critical Race Theory" in education. This is a misnomer promoted by a man named Christopher Ruffo. He hijacked a law school theory and publicized it as an education requirement designed to make White kids feel bad about their history. This is not true, but it gets votes. It has affected the very important need for multicultural education in the public schools. Multicultural Education is a great way to promote diversity and to achieve equity.

Educators at the Elementary, High School, and Secondary Education level can enhance diversity by making themselves aware of individual differences in each human in their classrooms.

Educating themselves in the area of subcultures within classrooms also contributes to the enhancement of diversity in all classrooms.

Discuss it and its various forms.

Do more to train and hire diverse teachers. Students do better when they have teachers who are like them, and who share their cultural knowledge. Support diverse college students, especially indigenous and minority students who struggle in higher education. Provide scholarships and intensive support for teachers in training who want to move back to where they were raised and become a teacher in their community. Do better at recruiting and hiring diverse teachers in higher education and offer more courses in diversity and inclusion.

Include diverse texts in their classroom.

Participate in various professional development and enrichment opportunities.

Actually, strive to create an operational definition of Diversity instead of using it as a word that catches attention.

Communication seems to be important at least to me- but I do not see much of it happening.

Differentiate Instruction

Fully research texts and class content before beginning delivery of class content to consider the best materials and approach.

Share

Responses Regarding Equity

Q7 - What can instructors, parents, counselors, and administration do to enhance "Equity" in Elementary, High School, and Secondary Education?

Responses follow:

Creating a culture where students, educators, administration, and state leaders embrace the concept that "fair is not equal" such as during instruction, focus lessons, and assessments, thus creating an individualized approach to learning

As much as the discipline will allow, professors need to present the subject matter in a manner that reflects the fact that equitable societies offer the best quality of life.

Examine current policy and procedures in context of legislation and school/school district protocol.

The same as you would for elementary, teach and have inclusion without bias. When everyone is treated the same without there needing to be limitations or exceptions due to an individual or group differences, then all groups will have an equal desire for involvement.

Probably nothing

Lower the expense of higher education, from tuition to books, seek partnerships to provide funding for resources and internships

I would prefer to talk about Equality. I believe equality in providing education is very important. Equity--as equal outcomes--I think is not where the priority should be.

Provide learning opportunities for students who are falling behind. Provide equal access to technology and supplemental materials to enhance learning.

I would encourage stakeholders to first have an open discussion related to the construct of equity. In addition, I would also ask that educators and administrators not push any agendas that would create controversy in the learning environment.

Instructors can promote equity by holding all students to higher standards and expectations.

They must also avoid assumptions about the backgrounds of their students that feed into harmful

stereotypes.

Equity is vital to the stability of not just our educational system but society as a whole.

We can ensure that all are treated equally in our classes and in school. Equity does not mean that the expectations for all are equal, but that all students are accommodated in accordance with their needs, as in students with disabilities, English Learners, identifying students of all backgrounds who are gifted, etc.

We need to teach our students to not base their determinations of their students' needs on the students' ethnicities but on their true abilities.

Equity is difficult because even if we "level the playing field", giving all students the exact same opportunities, not all students are mentally capable of utilizing those resources.

Be aware of differences and create experiences that will support and meet the needs of students

Create curriculum that is more equitable and inclusive at all levels. Do not teach as though differences do not exist. Instead, acknowledge students' differences and use them as capital to enrich the learning environment. Ask students what they see is missing. Make sure people who make hiring and admissions decisions at all levels are diverse as the people they need to be hiring.

Participate in various professional development and enrichment opportunities.

This seems to be an administrative issue- but teachers can mention it as part of our democracy.

Bring on topics on equity and address it in the classroom.

Fully research texts and class content before beginning deliver of class content to consider the best materials and approach.

share

Responses Regarding Inclusion

What can instructors, parents, counselors, and administration do to enhance "Inclusion" in Elementary, High School, and Secondary Education?

Responses follow:

Equal access, and opportunities - absolutely / follow the law of the land

Treat all students as important and model that

Participate in various professional development and enrichment opportunities.

Much is already being done- but it is done quietly on a day to day basis- so we do not have a lot of what I would call PR or hoopla about it.

Make sure all students have an equal opportunity to participate in classroom activities. Make sure all students are safe in the classroom environment. Vary learning materials and methods of presentation.

Look at all class materials and content, considering all members of the course and their access to the information, activities, assignments, technology, etc.

Leverage the cultural diversity of the student population by calling out differences and celebrating them. Use them as learning opportunities for their peers.

Inclusion needs to be just that, inclusive of all ideas and perspectives. We focus on a few and forget others. This is not truly inclusive. When we put down "old white men" because of a few who failed in the past that is not being inclusive of strong white men who are choosing every day to make a difference in society. Why are they the "bad" guys because of things that happened in the past?

Include diverse texts in their classroom so students are seen and heard.

I would say a combination of approaches I listed here would work to address inclusion: Practice and model critical self-reflection. Discuss current events. Examine current policy and procedures in context

of legislation and school/school district protocol.

I would encourage stakeholders to first have an open discussion related to the construct of inclusion. In addition, I would also ask that educators and administrators not push any agendas that would create controversy in the learning environment.

I believe we need to better include all ethnicities in the public school and university curriculum. By that, I am implying a need for multicultural education, whereby the curriculum reflects a diversity of people, of cultural traits, of points of view, and of multiple experiences. This can be accomplished in any subject area. An example: Math--we teach using Arabic numerals, an interesting point of history. We teach Roman numerals in the school math curriculum.

Let's add Maya math, a different and challenging numeric system that includes the ancestors of many of our Latino students. This kind of approach helps all students feel they are contributors, and it instills pride in one's background.

Express, and follow up with actions that exclusion is not acceptable and a personal dedication to demonstrating inclusion.

Enhancing inclusion is paramount in Education as every person should be provided with the opportunity to participate in main stream classroom learning.

Be knowledgeable and create environments where all are included

As much as the discipline will allow, professors need to present the subject matter in a manner that reflects the concept that every group should be allowed to participate in society.

Approach every opportunity from the perspective of Universal Design, and encourage collaboration.

--Policy changes at the state level --Truly encourage families as participants to their child's education, rather than as non-participants

Q11 - Feel free to add any additional comments you would like to add on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the educational environment.

Our understanding starts with how we define these topics.

I believe that these questions will not illicit much in the way of insight. If everyone does not say 'very important' or 'important' then they should think about being euthanized. I stated only 'important' because the definition of important says it all. If something is important (see definition) then how can one rank something important if there are not other important things listed to compare it to? For example, I think that oral hygiene is important; I think having a warm and friendly default is important; being ethical is important ----

See above comments under Equity.

I personally and professionally believe that these terms are thrown around quite a bit and individuals act too quickly to implement plans that have not been studied to show any effectiveness. Furthermore, I would encourage some form of Delphi Study to occur (with subject matter experts) to forecast the need for clarity in the DEI discussion. Lastly, I would also support action-based research that would provide site-specific information for decision-makers.

Our public schools continue to be based on a Eurocentric curriculum. There has been a push for more diversity and inclusion since the 1960s, but the results have been minimal. Now there is serious and angry pushback against any curricular additions that could make members of the macro-culture feel ashamed. This stifles teachers and professors in their worry about being sued if they were to attempt any multiculturalism. We risk returning to the days when all ethnicities besides the White majority were marginalized. To be inclusive and diverse in our curriculum can lead to equity in our future.

The pendulum seems to swing back and forth- and there seems to be a sense that there are certain groups that feel these things are not being done when in fact they are.

Discussion:

There are many issues regarding the process of research in these fields.

Moje (2022) has provided 7 domains of concern regarding the pursuing of research. These are:

- 1) Diversity the ranks of social scientists by recruiting to the field and by engaging community members in participatory research. In other words, ask the people who have had experiences with inequalities to participate as co-researchers at every step of the research design. This approach can achieve two goals: It provides insight to researchers currently in the field, and it potentially recruits a more diverse pool of future researchers to the field.
- 2) Seek to understand researcher positionality in all research designs and methods, with an eye toward questioning one's assumptions about the constructs under study so that designs do not overlook key variables and to ensure that instruments are designed and analyses conducted, with attention to multiple perspectives on the constructs.
- 3) Deliberately seek diverse perspectives on the questions asked, the methods used, the claims made, and the solutions that result. Form collaborative teams that draw from methods beyond the social sciences. To do this work, one needs to resist talking past colleagues from other disciplines and prizing the discourse internalized in graduate education. Learn to speak across disciplinary discourse communities and in so doing, learn to question assumptions embedded in prized disciplinary practices.
- 4) Use integrated methods. Here I suggest that moving beyond the language of "mixed" methods and taking seriously the aim to integrate findings so that researchers can delineate mechanisms even as impact is being evaluated. Eschew studies that claim to mix methods by throwing in a few interviews to an impact analysis. Instead, seek ways to use qualitative findings to inform assessments of impact and vice versa. Design studies to be iterative and longitudinal, with cycles of qualitative and quantitative analyses, always targeted on reforming systems structures, practices and discourses.
- 5) Consider how to attend to, rather than control for, key variables. Instead of trying to assess whether strategies work regardless of race, for example, design studies to assess whether strategies work because of race. Center identifies associated with unequal and inequitable treatment rather than attempting to control identifies to find the transformational strategies that work for "everyone", which is, in effect, code for the people already at the center.
- 6) Examine the feasibility of interventions across multiple systems, to do this., researchers need to spend time understanding how inequalities are embedded in, and fostered across multiple systems, which implicates long-term, embedded studies designed to understand but for the purpose of transforming multiple systems-level structures, practices and discourses,
- 7) Craft feasibility studies with transformation of systems, not people and their practices, in mind. That is, aim to break down the structural barriers that make desired practices infeasible within current social systems. Think of feasibility for transformation, rather than feasibility within the system as currently structured. Consider the value of systems-focused, design-based research methods that go beyond a base determination of whether an intervention is feasible and instead focus on how to change the system to embrace and enable the design.

Moje (2022) acknowledges that her recommendations are not easy to implement, but she urges researchers to try.

Summary and Conclusions

There is much discussion as to what the terms "diversity, equity and inclusion "mean". It is hypothesized that these words mean different things to different people and may need to be seen in context.

Diversity can mean many different things to many different people. For some, it is the acceptance of different races, cultures, and ethnicities. For others, it is ethnicity, sexual identity and the LGBTQ abbreviation seems to cover the diversity of sexual preferences. Diversity can be celebrated by different

groups- Hispanic, Irish, Polish, German, Canadian and so forth.

And diversity can also include an acceptance of different religions- Anglican, Methodist, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Islamic and Catholic.

We offer these as examples as they are by no means inclusive and in the schools, inclusion can be referred to as “full inclusion” whereas all students with special needs- be they physical, mental or cognitive are included in general education or regular education. These individuals are typically formally evaluated and assessed and are given accommodations and modifications to assist them in their educational endeavors in the regular or general education environment.

This process begins shortly after identification although some students are identified as early as kindergarten and receive specialized services until they graduate.

Equity is a bit more difficult to get a grasp on as some refer to this domain as financial and others refer to it as accessibility.

References

- Cupchik, G., & Shaughnessy, M. F. (2024). An Interview with Gerald Cupchik: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*, X(X), 1-11.
- Moje, E. B. (2022). Remaking research tools: Toward transforming systems of inequality through social science research. *Socius*. January 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221081694>