
The Divide Between Diversity Training and Diversity Education: Integrating Best Practices

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Abstract

The fields of diversity training and diversity education have developed in a disconnected manner. This divide ensures that each field advances slowly and with narrow focus. The authors argue here that the divide should be bridged with attention to the best practices that diversity training and diversity education offer. By integrating the best that each perspective has to offer as outlined here, both fields of inquiry and practice may be enhanced.

Keywords

diversity education, diversity training, best practices in education, best practices in training

A research divide occurs when two seemingly related lines of inquiry exist independently with little to no integration between the two. Despite being fairly common, such divides in literature can be problematic. The principal drawback concerning divides is their tendency to generate scholastic redundancy, in that

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researchers on opposite sides of the divide tend to produce seemingly “new” findings that the other has previously discovered. This redundancy results in (a) inefficient use of time and resources, (b) underutilization of existent research, and (c) smaller extensions of our knowledge base. Consequently, researchers (e.g., Knights & Willmott, 1997; Ryan & Tippins, 2004) have acknowledged several divides (i.e., science vs. practice; disciplinary silos) in the hopes of stimulating the development of bridges to span them.

Although many of these counterproductive divides have been recognized and discussed, an important one has not—the divide between diversity training and diversity education.

Both types of programs, diversity training and diversity education, have become increasingly common. For instance, roughly two thirds of companies (Esen, 2005) and more than 60% of colleges and universities (Schneider, 2000) have implemented some form of diversity training or education initiative, respectively. Although training and education programs often represent the “essence” or central purpose of broader diversity initiatives (Arredondo, 1996), the implementation of such programs is not yet supported by theoretical development or empirical tests of their effectiveness (see Avery & Thomas, 2004). Perhaps an even more fundamental issue is that the nascent literature in the area is characterized by disconnected streams of research in the diversity “education” and “training” areas. In some cases, the terms *training* and *education* are used synonymously, but in many ways, research and practice in these areas are quite distinct. Indeed, an examination of 25 syllabi from Ferdman’s (1994) compilation of diversity management education resources revealed that course content was not aligned with the skills HR professionals reported as being necessary for managing a diverse workplace (Day & Glick, 2000); in other words, the content of diversity management courses does not seem to match practical, organizational needs. Diversity training programs face similar challenges; executives, consultants, and trainers reported that little learning resulted from most training programs and many see a great deal of room for improvement (Hemphill & Haines, 1997; Rynes & Rosen, 1995).

In the current article, we argue that emerging research and practice should take advantage of the frameworks supported by these parallel research streams by integrating these previously isolated areas. Though many of the most accomplished educators and trainers probably already (inadvertently or purposefully) use such practices (indeed, such themes are now common in the *Journal of Management Education*), individuals who are inexperienced in these areas may benefit from explicit articulation of the linkages between diversity training and education. We will begin this article by discussing the

practices within each paradigm that have been considered to be most effective. Next, we will draw conclusions about the practices that might be beneficially shared among trainers and educators. Thus, our article makes a significant contribution to diversity trainers and educators by illuminating the potential contributions each stands to offer the other. The manner in which these distinct perspectives and respective literatures can inform one another is detailed below.

Best Practices in Diversity Training

As stated above, empirical research evaluating the effectiveness (as assessed by improvements in trainee knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, or organizational outcomes) of diversity training programs remains scarce (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Rynes & Rosen, 1995). In fact, it consists predominantly of subjective and conceptual discussions and personal anecdotes or observations (Hanover & Cellar, 1998; Rynes & Rosen, 1995). However, despite the dearth of empirical research, scholars have suggested several best practices relevant to diversity training. Drawing on information from multiple sources, and recognizing that it is impossible to capture the diversity of diversity training programs in a few paragraphs, we present three themes that emerged across previous work on best practices in diversity training.

First, the basic tenants of training theory and research dictate effective training programs begin with a needs assessment. Conducting a needs analysis prior to instituting a diversity training program may enable organizations to identify and meet the needs of the organization and its employees (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003). At its best, diversity training will take this approach, thereby allowing trainers to tailor the initiative toward the needs and levels of the trainees.

A second and related theme that can be derived from training research is that effective training programs take into account the context in which they are situated. Best practices involve obtaining visible upper-management and organizational support, requiring management participation, rewarding attempts to promote diversity, embracing a broad organizational definition of diversity, making training a part of a larger strategic diversity management initiative, and conducting long-term training evaluations to ensure training transfer (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Rynes & Rosen, 1995; Von Bergen Soper, & Foster, 2002; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). The centrality of obtaining top management support in descriptions of diversity training best practices is indicative of the extent to which context is considered in diversity training. Top management support includes providing the necessary resources

to conduct diversity training as well as demonstrating commitment to diversity by personally participating in training, modeling behavior (“walking the talk”), responding to employee concerns, holding people accountable for outcomes at all levels (not just the top), and providing incentives (Velásquez, 2008; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1999; Winters, 2008).

Third, the explicit focus on competency development may allow learners to achieve behavioral goals to a greater extent than focus on awareness or knowledge alone. Generally, experts agree that the objectives of successful training programs should advance trainee effectiveness at both the organizational and individual levels (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). In the case of diversity training, the implicit extension is that trainees should engage in effective intercultural behaviors. The majority of diversity training programs (>70%; Bendick Egan, & Lofhjelm, 2001) include behavioral activities (e.g., role playing) that involve practicing relevant skills. It is this focused attention to skill development, and the opportunity to practice appropriate behaviors (Garavan, 1997), that may be most likely to lead to behavioral changes outside of the training session.

Based on a survey of more than 100 diversity trainers, Bendick et al. (2001) developed a comprehensive list of benchmarks for diversity training that echo the three themes described in this article: linking diversity to main organizational goals, tailoring training for clients, possessing strong support from top management, including employees from all levels, influencing the corporate culture, employing experienced and qualified trainers, discussing discrimination as a general process, addressing individual behavior, and aligning training with HR practices. Many of these characteristics are helpful for the successful implementation of most HR interventions, but the complexity of the content in, and extremity of reactions to, diversity training make these benchmarks necessary. In each of these ways, research and practice regarding diversity training informs an understanding of effective approaches for communicating information regarding diversity. Research and practice in diversity education takes a somewhat different approach, thereby offering an additional perspective.

Best Practices in Diversity Education

In accordance with the expectation of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the importance of effective management education regarding diversity has increasingly emphasized that business schools demonstrate “commitment and actions in support of diversity in the educational experience” (AACSB, 2004, p. 9). Management teachers often strive to create

and increase the awareness of diversity so that graduates will be prepared to work in a diverse organizational context (Day & Glick, 2000; Muller & Parham, 1998). In other words, an effective diversity course may support the creation of students' diversity management competency, which according to Avery and Thomas (2004) is a

level of awareness and knowledge of how culture and other aspects of one's group identity are crucial to an informed professional understanding of human behavior in and outside of work and the interpersonal skills necessary to effectively work with and manage demographically diverse individuals, groups, and organizations. (p. 382)

Although traditional models of university education emphasized rational thought and intellectual capacity (Harrison & Hopkins, 1967), more contemporary educational perspectives have integrated experiential-based forms of learning that include the acquisition of knowledge, awareness, and skills. Best practices in education include student-faculty contact, cooperation and reciprocity among students, active learning, prompt feedback, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991). With regard to diversity education, drawing from Raelin's (1997) model of learning, Avery and Thomas (2004) suggested that diversity courses should address both explicit and tacit knowledge through strategies such as making the business case for diversity, encouraging self-evaluations and the application of concepts through experiential learning, and providing structured opportunities for intergroup contact.

Several important themes can be extracted from work in diversity education. High-quality diversity education is explicitly characterized by attention to developing awareness and understanding of differences through self-evaluation, feedback, and active learning. Of particular importance for consideration are the implicit qualities of this approach. First, the educational model demands that the instructor have a minimum level of competence (i.e., an advanced degree) prior to engaging in the activity of teaching. Although a degree does not ensure teaching effectiveness, it does convey a minimal level of knowledge and expertise in the topic area that may not be required of instructors in diversity training frameworks.

Second, student enrollment in such classes is typically elective rather than required. This may be seen as a positive component of the educational approach, as some degree of openness may facilitate the goals of diversity education (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Nevertheless, it also may be seen as a drawback, because self-selection could lead those students who would benefit

most from the course to elect not to take it, as is the case with voluntary diversity training (Kulik, Pepper, Roberson, & Parker, 2007). Some evidence suggests that positive outcomes of diversity initiatives may be most likely under conditions in which the entire system is involved (Kalev et al., 2006; Wentling, & Palma-Rivas, 1998).

Third, the educational system is structured in such a way that feedback and accountability are expected and obligatory. For example, educators integrate individual assessment through assignments, papers, tests, and in-class performance. Passing grades are required to obtain credit and, ultimately, a degree. This system has the benefit of providing external sources of motivation for learners, as well as specific indicators of their progress toward relevant outcomes. However, this system may be considered faulty because it rewards outcomes other than behaviors and, potentially, could reduce intrinsic sources of motivation regarding diversity (see Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). In the context of diversity, motivation (whether intrinsic or extrinsic in nature) may play a key role in facilitating skill acquisition and implementation (Combs & Luthans, 2007; Wiethoff, 2004).

Fourth and finally, despite the integration of behavioral activities, the focus of most educational settings continues to be on self-reflection, awareness, and knowledge rather than skill development. Research in social psychology (e.g., Pronin & Kugler, 2007) suggests that *attitude* change may require an awareness and understanding of the cognitive structures and biases which underlie our beliefs, thus supporting the need for educators and trainers to attend to awareness and knowledge. However, research on training and development (e.g., Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993) also clearly specifies that *behavioral* change may require practical information that closely mirrors relevant real-world situations and allows individuals to practice appropriate behaviors. Including content and activities that allow trainees/learners to improve their behaviors may be a practical approach to improving diversity education. In addition, behavioral change may ultimately lead to attitudinal change thereby creating a positive cycle (see Wiethoff, 2004).

Integrating Training Best Practices in Education

We encourage selective borrowing across the disciplines of diversity education and training; the best practices of each might inform the other (see Table 1). A training framework underscores the need for careful analysis of the needs of participants, the importance of context and top-down and bottom-up influences, the benefits of focusing on skills and behaviors, and the importance of demonstration and practice. Unlike the training framework, the educational

Table 1. Integrating Diversity Training and Education Best Practices

Training Best Practices	Education Best Practices
Analysis of the needs of participants	Frequent and structured feedback
Consideration of context and top-down influences	Required performance metrics
Emphasis on skills and behaviors	Exploration of cognitive and affective processes
Use of demonstration and practice	

model highlights the need to address awareness, appreciation, and understanding of one's personal attitudes and beliefs, as well as global and specific knowledge regarding diversity. In the next sections, we will describe specific ideas regarding the manner in which these best practices may be implemented.

Needs Analysis

In accordance with the advice given to diversity trainers (Roberson et al., 2003), educators might consider implementing precourse assessments of student characteristics. Individual-level needs analysis would facilitate understanding of students' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) regarding diversity competence. In particular, Roberson et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of assessing the strength and direction of trainees' attitudes toward diversity (e.g., how committed trainees are to gender equity), exposure to diversity-related issues (e.g., previous diversity training experience), potential inconsistencies between diversity-related attitudes and behaviors (e.g., desire to be egalitarian but engagement in unintentional discrimination), and trust in the instructor and classmates (e.g., whether students are familiar with each other). The work of Wiethoff (2004) suggests individuals' motivations regarding diversity might also be of relevance for assessment. These constructs might be assessed through self-report survey methods with existing scales such as the Receptivity to Diversity Survey (Soni, 2000), the Pluralism and Diversity Attitude Assessment (Stanley, 1992), diversity-related variations of the Implicit Associations Test (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2008) or the attitudes toward workplace diversity scale (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). The nature of this assessment could vary depending on the preference of the instructor; an e-mail could be sent prior to the first day of class, or the first class assignment might be to complete a series

of measures. Moreover, the questions and/or scores on these measures might serve as a springboard for classroom discussion.

In diversity training, needs analysis is used to specify challenging and attainable goals for trainees; similarly, diversity educators who conduct a needs analysis will be equipped with knowledge that can inform the development and implementation of diversity courses. For example, knowledge of students' attitudes toward a range of socially disadvantaged groups can help to guide the focus of efforts for improvement. As another example, knowing that most students in a class have little exposure to diversity or diversity-related topics would clarify that the class should begin at a basic level. When heterogeneity in attitudes, experience, or demography exists in a classroom, instructors could enact approaches that capitalize on such differences (Roberson et al., 2003) such as role modeling, perspective sharing, or privilege exercises. In the case of both education and training contexts, it is critical to protect the identities of individuals through anonymous and/or confidential assessment procedures.

Two specific practices we have found useful in our own courses involve the assessment of Universal Diverse Orientation (UDO; Miville et al., 1999) and the administration of a true/false precourse exam containing facts and common stereotypes regarding group differences. UDO captures an individual's attitude toward diversity of all sorts (e.g., race, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion) and is often predictive of stereotyping and prejudice along a variety of demographic bases (Miville et al., 1999). By assessing incoming students' UDO, we have tailored our instructional approaches to meet students' demonstrated needs. For instance, the items identify students' aversion and openness to members of particular identity groups (e.g., older people, racial minorities, disabled persons, citizens of other countries), which can be used to identify topics requiring more or less attention, respectively. Moreover, students with limited exposure to certain groups could benefit from immersion experiences pertaining to, or guest speakers who belong to such groups (Avery & Thomas, 2004). Similarly, we have administered true/false tests on the first day of class to acquire a sense of which topical areas require greater coverage during the course. In addition to identifying deficiencies for instructors to address, these exercises also give students insight regarding their strengths and weaknesses and what they might gain from the course.

Consideration of Contextual and Top-Down Influences

Brewer and Brewer (1995) argued that university efforts to manage diversity must be supported by top administrators and include efforts to improve the

overall climate of the university; an implication of this argument is that characteristics of the institution can influence diversity education. Diversity trainers have also emphasized the importance of top management support (Bendick et al., 2001) in creating and sustaining positive climates for diversity as well as enhancing outcomes of diversity training programs. Although it is not necessarily typical for instructors to involve the overarching university in their classes, consideration of the status of the university with regard to composition and climate may be critical (Avery & Thomas, 2004). In addition to this macro-level consideration of the institution as a whole, it may also be helpful to focus more narrowly on the composition and climate experienced directly by students; for example, it is important to consider not only the cultural composition of university staff but also the student population. An organizational needs analysis might be implemented to formally evaluate contextual and top-down influences that emerge from the overall institution as well as the student subpopulation of the institution. This would elucidate relevant factors by examining the results of employee and student climate surveys, university equal employment opportunity statistics, and written statements regarding institutional values and missions related to diversity among faculty, staff, and students (Roberson et al., 2003).

Understanding the nature of the institution as a whole will help instructors predict student expectations and, perhaps more important, the barriers that students might encounter in enacting the KSAs achieved in the course. Research on training outcomes has demonstrated that the climate of the organization dictates the likelihood of posttraining transfer (see Salas & Canon-Bowers, 2001), or in other words, that the implementation of trained knowledge and skill is most likely in conditions that enable and support practice of these behaviors. This logic can be applied to diversity education; instructors must give students a realistic preview of the world in which their diversity competency will be implemented after the conclusion of the course. There are two primary dimensions that instructors might consider: demographic diversity and climate for diversity in the organization (see Cox, 2001). Institutions characterized by high levels of demographic diversity and support for diversity likely represent ideal environments for the transfer of diversity management competencies obtained in diversity courses. This type of environment can be contrasted with universities wherein the representation of diverse individuals is scarce despite genuine effort to create a supportive climate. In such contexts, educators may need to offer students opportunities to engage with communities external to the institution to practice and master the skills they have learned (e.g., service-learning experiences). Instructors teaching in universities where a positive climate for diversity has not yet

been established might incorporate a case study assignment that requires students to critically analyze the school and develop suggestions for its improvement. Like diversity training, diversity education may benefit from careful consideration of organizational-level influences.

In one example of this technique, there was an especially ugly race-based exchange on a campus where one of the authors was teaching a diversity course. Students read the school newspaper's report of the events and subsequently prepared a one-page statement on each of the following: the perspective of the Caucasian students involved, the perspective of the African American students involved, and the role of the university climate in the incident. In class, students engaged in a role-playing exercise wherein they were assigned (randomly) to represent the perspective of the Caucasian students, the African American students, or the university. At the conclusion of the exercise, many students indicated that they had never thought about how the "other group" (i.e., the racial group to which they did not belong) felt on campus and developed many insightful ideas regarding how the campus climate could be enhanced.

Focus on Skills and Behaviors

In addition, instructors might consider expanding the goals, activities, and assignments of their courses to directly address diversity-related skill acquisition. This requires that instructors give students examples of situations in which diversity management competency might be helpful and allow students to explore strategies for implementing the most appropriate behavioral response. This might begin with basic interactive activities regarding nonverbal communication, such as that described by Mausehund, Timm, and King (1995). As skills are built, instructors could integrate simple role plays or role modeling exercises and later integrate out-of-classroom assignments. The choice of any exercise should involve careful consideration of the context and audience (as argued in the Needs Analysis section) to minimize potential backlash.

An "action learning" approach (e.g., Paluck, 2006) might involve students identifying a diversity-related issue they have encountered, discussing the problem and options for its resolution, formulating an action plan, and monitoring of outcomes. An instructor might also include an action-oriented project that integrates classroom topics by requiring students to develop and implement a diversity-related program in their school or workplace. The first author of the current article requires graduate students in a diversity seminar to develop a program that would address a diversity-related issue that they have encountered in their daily lives. Group projects have included brochures

outlining strategies for confronting peers about their prejudice, recruitment materials designed to appeal to minority job applicants, and blueprints for an organizational change initiative. Student evaluations of these projects are generally positive with regard to both learning and enjoyment; they report feeling challenged but excited about the opportunity to apply the information that they are learning to real-world diversity-related obstacles. The assumption that underlies these projects, as well as many of the strategies employed in diversity training, is that providing learners an opportunity to apply their knowledge will enhance the likelihood that they will do so once the course has concluded.

Practice

One strategy trainers use to increase the likelihood that diversity-related skills are implemented beyond the class itself involves practice. Research has demonstrated that the timing and type of practice can influence its effectiveness (e.g., Holladay & Quinones, 2003). These findings have direct implications for education; it is critical that instructors incorporate sufficient opportunities to practice the diversity-related skills. Moreover, it is important that students are exposed to a wide range of practice experiences so that they do not automatize a particular set of responses that may not generalize outside the classroom or across situations. This means that instructors in diversity management courses must not rely on a single case study or role play exercise but rather include multiple and diverse opportunities for students to practice diversity-related skills.

In our own classes, we have found service-learning projects particularly useful in this regard. Working with students and contacts in the community, we have designed projects that allow students the opportunity to interact with and learn from individuals who are demographically different than themselves. For instance, we have established volunteer programs at homeless shelters and retirement communities and a tutoring program at a local school for the blind. Participating in these ventures allowed our students to apply and refine knowledge and skills they learned in the classroom in real-world settings.

Integrating Education Best Practices in Training

Attitudes and Cognitions

Our primary focus here is on informing diversity management education, but we argue that parallel contentions can be made with regard to the implications

of diversity education on diversity training. For example, the focus in education on knowledge and attitudes highlights the possibility that diversity training may move too quickly to skill development without sufficient exploration of the cognitive and affective processes that underlie prejudice and discrimination. Trainers might benefit from integrating exercises and activities that educators use to address diversity-related attitudes and beliefs such as the brown eyes/blue eyes activity (see Stewart et al., 2003), a racial awareness exercise (e.g., Kulik, 1998), or one of the dozen activities described by Muller and Parham (1998). Focusing solely on behaviors without addressing the attitudes underlying them may prove ineffective in reducing bias in organizational decision making.

Performance Standards

In addition, the education model encompasses testing procedures that require learners to achieve a standard (i.e., passing) level of performance. Progressive organizations (e.g., Sodexo) have begun to integrate metrics related to diversity competence in performance management systems. Kalev et al.'s (2006) findings suggest that these efforts might not increase the representation of minorities in managerial roles, but rewarding behavioral indicators of diversity management competence may be a powerful way to ensure that employees enact the objectives of training. Thus, performance standards may be helpful outside the classroom.

As an interesting example, a university for which one of the authors worked required Web-based diversity training seminars for faculty and staff. In addition to mandatory "attendance," participants also were required to pass an online proficiency exam at the conclusion of the seminar to receive credit. This provided the university some degree of quality control in assuring that attendees of the training program met or exceeded the preset performance standard.

Feedback

Finally, high-quality diversity education includes frequent and structured feedback that may not be common in diversity training. Feedback can include performance scores on tests and assignments, but the term is used here to refer to the broader process of advising individuals on the areas in which they might be strong as well as those in need of improvement. Many organizations rely on annual review systems that do not incorporate assessment of diversity-related behaviors, and diversity training evaluation systems do not typically

assess longitudinal effects. This type of feedback can easily be included in assessment tools such as 360-degree feedback, where an individual is rated by supervisors, peers, and subordinates on their exhibition of appropriate and desired diversity-related behaviors. This information provides individuals with feedback on their current behavior and can provide the opportunity to monitor progress over time, if assessed at multiple time periods. Feedback is an integral component of behavioral change; thus, provision of constructive and immediate feedback regarding performance of diversity-related behaviors may help improve the efficacy of diversity training programs, as well as potentially enhance trainee motivation.

In a highly relevant study, Sanchez and Medkik (2004) found that attendees of diversity awareness training were seen by other employees as engaging in *more* discriminatory behavior after the training than were matched employees who did not attend. The authors interpreted this as a product of resentment and demoralization on the part of the participating employees. Although this conclusion is logical, an alternative explanation could be that the trainees did not understand how to effectively implement the skills and knowledge gained in training. Employees attending diversity training may have misinterpreted information they received during the session leading them to engage in more disparate treatment inadvertently. Employing the type of detailed feedback that is more common in diversity education could help lessen the likelihood of diversity training producing negative effects such as those found by Sanchez and Medkik.

Conclusion

The amalgamation of these and other best practices in education and training may guide future research and practice. Moreover, bridging this divide should result in more effectual diversity instruction across settings, producing more informed graduates and more effective organizations. We contend that careful consideration of the strengths of each approach will provide insight into future efforts to improve university and organizational settings.

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