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## Preparing instructors of adult learners to address the needs of minority students

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## Preparing instructors of adult learners to address the needs of minority students

### Abstract

In predominately Caucasian educational systems, diversity in the classroom is becoming a fast-growing phenomenon. With this new phenomenon, adult instructors now have a new challenge of facilitating learning in an environment where the learners not only have different learning capabilities, but also language and cultural differences. The reviewer answers the following questions: what are the important considerations for instructors to prepare diverse adult learners for corporate work environments, higher education, and K-12 professional development? And what are the appropriate cultural specific media and literature resources to include in training?

The literature collected focused on resources related to teaching adult minority learners, instructor challenges of teaching diverse adult learners, instructional strategies for trainers and teachers to use, and characteristics of African American student communication. The reviewer also documented the influences of media such as: uses of current materials, uses of films in the classroom, stereotypes in television and Hollywood films, and ethical considerations.

Being an effective instructor means acknowledging that there are students with cultural differences. Culturally responsive instructors know that diverse learners also use slang or Ebonics in formal settings because that language is common in their homes or community. Instructors must design curriculum to include non-Caucasian writes, stories, pictures and films. The reviewer concludes that by understanding an individual's characteristics, instructors can make informed decisions on how to structure the curriculum.

PREPARING INSTRUCTORS OF ADULT LEARNERS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF  
MINORITY STUDENTS

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Division of Instructional Technology

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

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Travell Unique Brock

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## ABSTRACT

In predominately Caucasian educational systems, diversity in the classroom is becoming a fast, growing phenomenon. With this new phenomenon, adult instructors now have a new challenge of facilitating learning in an environment where the learners not only have different learning capabilities but also, language and cultural differences. The reviewer answers the following questions: what are the important considerations for instructors to prepare diverse adult learners for corporate work environments, higher education, and K-12 professional development? And what are the appropriate cultural specific media and literature resources to include in training? The literature collected focused on resources related to teaching adult minority learners, instructor challenges of teaching diverse adult learners, instructional strategies for trainers and teachers to use, characteristics of African-American student communication. The reviewer also documented the influences of media such as: uses of current materials, uses of films in the classroom, stereotypes in television and Hollywood films, and ethical considerations.

Being an effective instructor means acknowledging that there are students with cultural differences. Culturally responsive instructors know that diverse learners also use slang or Ebonics in formal settings because that language is common in their homes or community. Instructors must design curriculum to include non-Caucasian writes, stories, pictures and films. The reviewer concludes that by understanding an individual's characteristics, instructors can make informed decisions on how to structure the curriculum.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

In culturally diverse workplaces, employees represent different national backgrounds and groups than managers and colleagues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In predominately Caucasian educational systems, diversity in the classroom is becoming a fast, growing phenomenon. Typically, instructors are faced with the challenge of facilitating learning amongst adult students of differing learning capabilities. With this new phenomenon, adult instructors now have a new challenge of facilitating learning in an environment where the adult learners not only have different learning capabilities but also, language and cultural differences. Overcoming and mastering these challenges are crucial to the quality of education learners of diverse backgrounds receive. “For companies and individuals who can take advantage of the trend towards increasing diversity, the opportunities are great” (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005, p.41). The literature reviewed includes an emphasis on the parallel worlds of corporate trainers and K-12 teachers in relation to a multi-cultural society.

Cross (2003) states that “America’s teaching force is becoming increasingly White; teacher educators are overwhelmingly White, [yet] classrooms are increasingly composed of students of color” (p. 203). The problem is the imbalance of the ratio in multi-cultural teachers to the multi-cultural learners. Geneva Gay articulates the effects of this matter as follows:

The mismatch is manifested in virtually every component of teaching. The fact that many [teacher education] students do not share the same ethnic, social, racial, and linguistic backgrounds as their students may lead to cultural incongruities in the classroom which mediate against educational effectiveness. These incompatibilities



are evident in the value orientation, behavioral norms and expectation and styles, social interactions, self-presentation, communication and cognitive processing. (Cited in Cross, 2003, p. 204)

The question arises: Are these instructors properly prepared to effectively facilitate learning in this multi-cultural environment? Cross (2003) offers that “for years, it appears that neither the race of a teacher nor a teacher’s ability to teach in multiracial environments is considered a component of teacher quality” (p. 203).

New educational standards should be implemented to better prepare adult learners, of all cultural backgrounds, to meet the challenges of educating a multiracial group of learners. Those standards should include race relations, cultural competency, and multicultural communication.

Based upon research and practice, the reviewer will answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the important considerations for instructors to prepare diverse adult learners for corporate work environments, higher education, and K-12 professional development?
- (2) What are the appropriate cultural specific media and literature resources to include in training?

### Definitions and Terms

The reviewer feels that there are terms that instructors of adult learners and corporate trainers should become familiar with when teaching students of color or minority students. The following definitions of these key terms will be used throughout the review: adult learners, culture, minority, and racial ethnicities.

### *Adult Learners*

Scholars such as Malcolm Knowles, Stephen Brookfield, Dale Carnegie, and others have studied the definition of adult learners. The term *andragogy* is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Edwards, Hanson & Raggatt, 1996, p.83). Learning is an ongoing process that ends with death. Coates (2007) describes the *generational learning* periods as:

1. The Veteran Generation (born between years 1920 – 1933)
2. The Silent Generation (born between years 1933 – 1946)
3. Baby Boomers (born between years 1946 – 1964)
4. Generation X (born between years 1964 – 1980)
5. Generation Y (born between years 1980 – 2000)
6. Generation Z (born after 2000). (p.9)

Adult learners are in the workforce, higher education, and K-12 schools. Adult learners vary in age, but all learners share six common principles in learning. According to Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson, “the six principles of *andragogy* are (a) the learner’s need to know, (b) self-concept of the learner, (c) prior experience of the learner, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation to learning” (2005, p.3). The purpose for defining *adult learners* is to establish an understanding for readers and to identify how these learners are motivated in a learning situation. Prior experiences of adult learners are derived from cultural experiences and community activities.

### *Culture*

The term *culture* has multiple meanings. Culture can be defined as “the ideations, symbols, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared by a human group” (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. 449). Culture does not simply refer to values and beliefs native to specific racial

groups; it also is prevalent within many organizations. Adler and Elmhurst define *culture* as “a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (Adler & Elmhurst, 2005, p.41). For example, culture is identifiable in many Greek organizations, in their clothing, lettering, and name. Multiculturalism an inclusive cultural term that deserves defining as well.

Banks and Banks (2004) define multiculturalism as:

...a philosophical position and movement that assumes that the gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalized structures of educational institutions, including the staff, the norms and values, the curriculum, and the student body. (p. 451)

When designing instruction, instructors must approach it with cultural sensitivity.

“*Cultural sensitivity* means being aware that every group or community has its own set of values, attitudes, or beliefs, even though individuals within the group may have different views” (ARC, 1999, p.79). For instance, African Americans may take offense at being referred to as people who mainly speak in Ebonics. Though some African Americans communicate using this uniquely developed lingo, this does not apply to all African Americans. “Just as the concept of cultural sensitivity is applicable to the human condition, it is equally important within the realm of instructional design and [training]... it is critical that educators value these alternative styles, and see them as viable and valid assets to instruction” (Jian x., 2001, p. 299). A simple implementation of this would be that a trainer or an instructor could conduct a class discussion about different cultural observations to generate curiosity among the students to learn about cultures other than their own. This could facilitate understanding of each other within the work and the learning environments.

It is important to know and understand diverse adult learners. “*Cultural specificity* requires that consideration be given to the languages, customs, world views, sexuality, and family relationships of communities” (ARC, 1999, p.80). For example, some students wear scarves or head dressings in honor of their religious practices. Many instructors believe that it is inappropriate to wear caps, scarves or sun glasses in the classroom; however, the students that practice a specific religion may be permitted to wear their head garments. After defining the term *culture*, the reviewer believes that the term *minority* should be defined as well. This will give the readers a better understanding of who are considered *minorities*.

### *Minorities*

According to Merriam-Webster Online, minority is defined as “a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment” (Webster Online, n.d., p.1). Minority is defined for this review as a person or group of people who are racially different according to mainstream society by ways of income, demographical region, skin color, sexual preference, gender, or cultural background and language. Banks and Banks (2004) express that mainstream Americans are “U.S. citizens who share most of the characteristics of the dominant ethnic and cultural group in the nation; such an individual is usually White Anglo-Saxon Protestant and belongs to the middle class or a higher social-class status” (p. 450). The reviewer will describe how mainstream Americans identify other ethnic groups or minorities.

### *Racial Ethnicities*

Racial ethnicity is a term which distinguishes individuals by their nationality and race. The following definitions will identify racial ethnicities. Banks and Banks provide descriptions of race as is used by mainstream society.

African Americans [are] U.S. residents and citizens who have an African biological and cultural heritage and identity. This term is used synonymously and interchangeably with Blacks and Black Americans.

Anglo Americans [are described as] Americans whose biological and cultural heritage originated in England, or Americans with other biological and cultural heritages who have assimilated into the dominant or mainstream culture in the United States. This term is often used to describe the mainstream U.S. culture or to describe most White Americans.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders [are] Americans who have a biological and cultural heritage that originated on the continent of Asia or in the Pacific region.

Hispanic Americans [are described as] Americans who share a culture, heritage, and language that originated in Spain. Most of the Hispanics living in the United States have cultural origins in Latin American. Many Hispanics in the United States prefer to use the word Latino rather than Hispanic.

Native Americans [are] U.S. citizens who trace their biological and cultural heritage to the original inhabitants in the land that now makes up the United States. The term Native American is sometimes used synonymously with American Indian.

People of color [are] groups in the United States and other nations who have experienced discrimination historically because of their unique biological characteristics that enabled potential discriminators to identify them easily. African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics in the United States are among the groups referred to as people of color. (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. 448-451)

## METHODOLOGY

Finding relevant and reliable resources relating to preparing diverse adult learners for corporate work environments, higher education, and K-12 classrooms was a challenge for the reviewer. Several online databases were searched. The databases searched were Wilson Web Education Full Text Resource Database, ERIC's Silver Platter Database, ERIC's U.S. Department of Education Database, JSTOR, Business Source Elite, Project Muse, and Expanded Academic ASAP InfoTrac Database, and the UNI Rod Library catalog. The reviewer used UNISTAR, which located multiple books, journal articles and statistical analysis.

Key terms that were used to search for resources are: adult learners, minority students, culture identity, adult classroom, adult characteristics, adult motivation, adult challenges, lifelong learning, teaching minorities, teaching technology, curriculum development, minority programs, educational needs, multicultural curriculum, cultural awareness, cultural instructional design, multicultural education and technology, learning or unlearning racism, generational diversity, negative stereotypes, Hollywood films, multicultural materials, visual literacy, minorities in multimedia, teaching equality, teaching diversity, and diversity in education.

The criteria used for this review included current online educational research, reliable sources, and experts with backgrounds in this educational field. The reviewer evaluated the resources by answering the following questions: (a) how current was the resource published, (b) if the author is an expert in that field with supporting credentials, and (c) how close does the resource match the reviewer's research questions.

The literature collected focused on resources related to teaching adult minority learners, instructor challenges faced when teaching diverse adult learners, instructional strategies for trainers and teachers to use, characteristics of African-American student communication, and learning styles. The reviewer also documented the influences of media such as: uses of current materials, uses of films in the classroom, stereotypes in television and Hollywood films, and ethical considerations.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Instructional Overview

With the reviewer's experience as a minority student and corporate trainer of a minority audience, examples of recommended instructional strategies have been included to support the literature findings. Important considerations that adult instructors need to include when training and teaching diverse adult learners will be discussed. In addition, the appropriate types of media resources used in training and teaching will be discussed. The following paragraphs will include information on: characteristics of minorities, strategies for teaching minorities, and instructional challenges.

#### *Training and Teaching Considerations for Diverse Learners*

Minority learners have cultural perspectives, social customs, and values that stem from heritage or family traditions that mainstream learners may not understand while engaging in learning environments. For example, members of Mexican and German cultures address professors with formal titles to show respect for authority; where as American cultures address professors in less formal ways such as using abbreviation names or addressing them by first name (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). Characteristics of minorities within each ethnic group vary.

#### *Characteristics of Minorities*

There are learner characteristics that instructional designers, trainers, or teachers should consider when working with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Jian X. (2001), American Indians, Asian Americans, African Americans and Hispanic Americans all have unique learning styles and different attitudes toward participating in a



learning environment. The following information documents learning styles of four minority groups: American Indians, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and African Americans.

*American Indians.* American Indians believe “honor and respect is gained by sharing and giving” (Jian X, 2001, p. 301). These students are strongly tied to family or cultural group beliefs; therefore, the individual student is less likely observed in a class setting. American Indian students could be perceived as unmotivated because they do not choose to compete with other students in the classroom. In addition to cooperation and sharing, Indians are very mindful to not interfere with others or disrespect their rights. Instructional designers should be aware of American Indians relationship with time. “Indians are very much involved in the present rather than the future; [therefore] ideas of punctuality or planning for the future may be unimportant” (p. 301). A final note about American Indians is they are harmonious with nature. They seldom seek to control a situation or the environment because they accept things as they are (Jian X., 2001).

*Asian Americans.* Americans of Asian descent have been cultivated into mainstream America and they are stereotyped by their success economically, educationally, and socially (Jian, 2001). Asian Americans respect authorities, especially in a classroom. “Traditionally obeying is the major part of the culture that defines whether or not one is a good citizen” (p. 302). As students, this group take notes carefully and avoid asking the instructors questions. It is considered disrespectful to challenge teachers or leaders. Giving honor to one’s family is another characteristic of Asian Americans. “Sometimes cultural differences can cause problems for classroom participation. For example, Asian students feel the instructor should talk as opposed to the students’ speaking. (Mellow, van Slyck, & Eynon, p.15) Both American-Indians and Asian students do not volunteer to answer questions or speak to the

teacher. These students are fearful of disgracing the family. However, Asian students are very competitive with other students. Among their own race, they do not share information such as family recipes or homework. The main challenge for Asian Americans is respecting their ancestry and family values in mainstream society where both cultures are so different. Unlike Americans Indians and Asian Americans, African Americans are frequently stereotyped as being members of dysfunctional families (Jian X, 2001).

*Hispanic Americans.* Some Hispanic Americans do not like the term 'Hispanic'. They prefer to be called 'Latinos', 'La Raza', 'Mexicano', 'Mexican-American', 'Chicano', or 'Spanish-American'. (Jian X, 2001). Many Latino students are first-generation college students who enroll in community colleges to get acclimated to higher education. In addition, some Latino students come from low-income and have less education than peers. Latinos, in general, are nontraditional students who work while enrolled in evening courses to support the family. Latinos rely on career counselors, teachers, and family to help them traverse through higher education. (Brown, Santiago & Lopez, 2003).

*African Americans.* African Americans are known for their strong bond with their extended family members. The extended family provides shelter, emotional, and economic support (Jian X., 2001). For example, it is very common for a family of first cousins to grow up in the same household. Cousin identification is replaced with terms of *brothers* or *sisters*. According to Jian X (2001), instructional designers should develop instructional strategies to address how African Americans cooperate and behave in class. These students work well in groups because they share ideas and support each other. African-American students are sensitive to feeling disrespected by authority or teachers. When an African-American student is singled out in a classroom, then the student may not pay attention to you for the remainder

of the class period. In addition, African Americans have distinctive communication characteristics from the other minority groups (Jian X., 2001).

### *Characteristics of African-American Communication*

White (2000) identifies six communication characteristics of African Americans in the American Red Cross AIDS/HIV Manual for African Americans. The characteristics are: (a) emotional vitality, (b) realness, (c) resilience, (d) interrelatedness, (e) the value of direct experience, and (f) distrust and deception. With understanding of how African Americans communicate, trainers and educators can develop activities where African-American students effectively engage in group discussions.

*Emotional vitality.* African-American language is filled with emotions and a sense of animation. “Speakers are expected to make words come alive – to use rhymes, symbolism, figures of speech, and personification in order to inspire the imagination. African Americans use language to touch the heart, soul, and funny bone” (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000, p. 54). For example, Dr. Maya Angelou recites poems with such poise and distinction that people are transcended inside the lines of her poems (ARC, 1999).

*Realness.* Many African Americans expect people whom they communicate with to *keep it real*. According to White (ARC, 1999), African Americans may talk openly about the pain and hardships of life and prefer that messages be *broken down* simply and concretely without intellectual wordiness or pretension: *Give it simple; give it straight*. Delivering bad news to a student who is failing class should be a simple task for instructors. However, many teachers use overanalyzed terms to explain the grade to Black students. This may cause students to become frustrated with the teacher.

*Resilience.* African Americans have the strength to laugh in the face of misfortune without denying its seriousness. It is heard in the words of African-American comedians, preachers, blues singers, poets, and others as they share experiences and use words to uplift, heal, inspire, and revitalize. Richard Pryor's stand-up comedy performances, for example, contained references to the struggles of African-American issues such as drug addiction, debt, and anger towards White people.

*Interrelatedness.* African-American communication is often characterized by a distinctive style of interaction between the speaker and listener. This type of communication is similar to an unscripted play. The key parts are already memorized by the actors and audience. "Speakers evoke feelings with jokes or rhymes or with metaphors and similes. Listeners respond with words and phrases such as 'Amen... Yes, sir... Right on' " (ARC, 1999, p. 217). These emotional exchanges become a shared psychological experience, not merely an exchange of words. This type of communication can take place on street corners, playgrounds, barbershops, places of worship, and classrooms (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000). When this technique is applied in the classroom, it is more of an assurance that the instructor-delivered concepts are clearly understood by the students. The interrelatedness is considered a form of feedback.

*Value of Direct Experience.* Among many African Americans, common sense and direct experience often carry more weight than *book learning*, White writes (ARC, 1999). The voice of experience may be perceived as more real and concrete than academic knowledge. For instance, once an African-American male leaves the inner city to go to college or work, he must explain the benefits of his decision to the males remaining in his neighborhood. The explanation normally includes: exact figures of his income growth, time

involved to succeed or provide for family needs, or future contributions to the community (ARC, 1999). African Americans have difficulty sharing information with individuals whom they distrust.

*Distrust and Deception.* Many African Americans distrust White Americans and therefore the *system* associated with the mainstream culture. As a result, African Americans may spend considerable time talking about their distrust and perceived justification. In the presence of White Americans, many African Americans speak in *code* using Standard English with culturally different semantics to conceal meaning. They will then *decode* the meaning in settings with other African American. This language pattern of coding and decoding messages is a technique that African Americans have used to survive, and it demonstrates an ability to communicate in multicultural, White and African American communities (ARC, 1999). For example, many African Americans refer to the White people in authority as *them people*. The term includes White police officers, government officials, welfare caseworkers, administrators, teachers, and others who all pose a perceived threat to Black people.

### *Strategies for Teaching Minority Students*

There are effective strategies that trainers and educators should develop in their curriculum to address the needs of diverse learners. An example of these strategies include preparing the training room or classroom with comfortable seating, taking breaks between presentations or lessons, and allowing students to apply the knowledge learned in small group discussions (Backes, 1997). There are additional instructional strategies that instructors should consider when working with culturally-sensitive topics or literature.

According to Cross (2003), there are some critical instructional strategies that instructors should consider when teaching in racially-diverse classrooms: (a) respect the student's language, (b) use diverse literature, (c) recognize cultural diversity, (d) acknowledge background knowledge and experiences, and (e) accommodate their learning disabilities. Discussion of each of these considerations for inclusion in a classroom follows.

*Respect the Student's Language.* Many students are entering classrooms from other countries where English is their second or third language. When students are speaking, do not criticize or humiliate students who speak another language or another form of English (Cross, 2003). For example, Black English or Ebonics is another form of English. "As a system of behavior, speaking is organized in culturally specific ways" (Sulentic, 2001, p.25). This means members in shared communities express a common language code, which is unique to their neighborhood or community. In addition to respecting the language, teachers should find ways to incorporate the student's language into class lessons (Cross, 2003). When discussing visual artifacts such as maps or signs, instructors may allow a Hispanic student or an Asian student to pronounce the terms in their native language. This approach provides a unique learning experience for all the students. This is another way for non-English speaking students to actively participate in open discussions or forums. "Recognizing and prizing the diversity found in many of today's learners is prerequisite to the successful incorporation of cultural pluralism into instruction" (Jian x., 2001, p. 299). Using this technique also invites instructors to present materials or books from other cultures.

*Use Diverse Literature.* Instructors should use materials and teacher aids that incorporate students of all races. "A curriculum that focuses on the experiences of mainstream Americans and largely ignores the experiences, cultures, and histories of other

ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and religious groups has negative consequences for both mainstream students and students of color” (Banks & Banks, 2004, p.242). When teaching African-American students, in particular, the instructor should use “culturally specific and age-appropriate language and communication techniques” (ARC, 1999, p. 6). As stated earlier, instructors should have a deeper understanding of their learners. Instructors should become further acquainted with African-American literature, magazines, music, poetry, performers, and scholars (ARC, 1999). For example, Dr. Maya Angelou has written many poems about women and how they are viewed in society. It is appropriate to recite the poem *Phenomenal Women* when addressing gender specific issues in the classroom. This technique allows students to connect with or identify with an author or producer of his or her own race. History is a subject that traditionally included biases against multicultural students. For instance, the discovery of America has a perceived notion that suggests Native American cultures did not exist until the Europeans explorers discovered them (Banks, 2004). Experts suggest that instructors use books written by Native Americans when discussing this historical period of time in class. Although the efforts to include culturally responsive materials and books in all classes are still a struggle for K-12 teachers, higher education instructors and trainers are responding more quickly to the needs of their audience because an increased number of students of color are in training sessions or in the classrooms.

*Recognize Cultural Diversity.* Teachers, corporate trainers, and college professors often admit that they know how to identify cultural diversity, but they do not know how to relate it to their teaching strategies (Cross, 2003). According to Knapp, “A large number of our pre-service teachers are unaware of how different the lives of many children are from their own” (Knapp, 2005, p. 203). There are visible differences such as food habits, dress,

language and religions, but there are less obvious differences that instructors should recognize. Erickson believes that teachers must understand that “implicit and invisible aspects of culture are important” factors in education (Erickson, 2004, p.40). For example, people differ in how they display pain or sorrow, how they express interest or dissatisfaction, and how they speak or listen to one another. This is true for K-12 students as well as adult learners. Adult instructors can relate to diverse learners by acknowledging the learner’s background, prior knowledge, or life experiences.

*Background, Knowledge, and Experiences.* Because people come from all walks of life, instructors should encourage their students to share their home or community experiences. According to Keegan et al (2001), “knowing the students means more than being aware of their prior knowledge or life circumstances; it means acknowledging that the adult learner is distinctly different from the younger learner” (Cited in Swaminathan & Alfred, 2002, p. 29). Adult learners value being treated with respect. “Students do indeed become richer and happier when classroom readings and practices are responsive to their experiences and backgrounds” (Nowak-Fabrykowski & Price, 2001, p. 25). Minority adult learners, in general, prefer assignments that represent *authentic* experiences which can be applied to their prior knowledge (DeVaney, 1994). This helps students relate information to their own lives. Using these instructional strategies will help instructors of adult minority students. Unfortunately, they will continue to face challenges with training and teaching minority learners.

### *Instructional Challenges*

Instructing minority adult learners may present challenges on many levels. First, an instructor must examine personal beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and stereotypes that



may be felt about minority adult learners. “The stirrings that faculty may themselves feel can create a sense of clouded perception that produces doubt about one’s judgment and can make it difficult to maintain a focus on learning” (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000, p.23). Trainers and teachers should be prepared to share personal life experiences to add value and meaning to class discussions. If an educator’s personal life experiences or peer-student’s comments offend adult learners, it is appropriate to take the time to discuss the issue in detail to clarify negative perceptions or stereotypes.

Dore Hollander believes:

...working well with diverse populations entails an understanding of what constitutes culture, scrutiny of one’s own background and how it has influenced one’s assumptions about a range of issues, and sensitivity to what is important to the individuals one is seeking to serve. (Cited in ARC, 1999, p.19)

As trainers and teachers begin to embrace diversity within curriculum, there are still barriers to face on college campuses and training rooms. One barrier is lack of faculty, students, or staff members of color in education to create a diverse learning environment. For example, small-rural cities such as Crete, NE; Shiprock, NM; or Cedar Falls, IA have limited exposure or experience working with minority students. “Geographic location, limited pool of faculty applicants, unspoken or even unacknowledged prejudices, and historical pattern of student recruitment from selected regions or population clusters are reasons for diversity of faculty or the student body is limited” (Hegler, 1997, p.74). Having faculty members of different genders, races, or cultures give graduate and undergraduate students a better learning opportunity when they experience different leadership styles (Hegler, 1997).

Another challenge for instructors is incorporating a “culturally response instructional practice [such as] negotiating the tension between [the] within-group variation versus [the] whole-group stereotypes” (Ginsberg, 2005). The *within-group* and *whole-group* learners are better described by the culture of power scenario. According to Kivel, a *culture of power* is established when an accepted group creates parameters such as environment, status, and/or gender dominance over persons that do not share equal parameters (as cited in Hale, 2004, p. 26). Thus, the persons not holding power feel misplaced or outside the circle of power. A personal example of this is when my male colleagues engage in conversation about politics and sports and I attempt to interject my thoughts about the shared comments. There is a long pause after my interjection and then the conversation resumes without me. I feel awkward because I cannot participate in the dialogue and it is a disadvantage to me because “misjudged, not valued, and nor given credibility as a women on men terms” (Hale, 2004, p. 26). There are various types of *cultures of power* such as language, gender, and race and the effect on the unaccepted group is generally the same. Each institution has its own culture of power and it is up to leaders or professionals to observe the existence of a power struggle and challenge the hierarchy of its nature. Kivel suggests some ways to identify cultures of power based on gender, race, age, etc. such as: “(1) who is in authority, (2) who is treated with full respect, (3) whose voices are being heard, (4) what languages are being used, and (5) who makes decisions” (as cited in Hale, 2004, p. 30). Using this technique will help trainers and educators to manage group discussions that are dominated by opinionated learners. This technique may even assist with engaging adult minority learners in open discussions.

A final barrier that instructors face is actively engaging in an uncomfortable environment. Working with adult minority learners to create a comfortable learning

experience can present challenges when attempting to respect values and orientations (Ginsberg, 2005). Icebreakers, which are used to break the monotony in class, have limitations. Adult minority learners often feel pressured into sharing things intended for family or close friends within their culture. Instructors must be cautious by not intruding on learner's personal thoughts because it contributes "lack of trust, discomfort, or outright alienation" (Ginsberg, 2005, p. 220). They must address their own personal values and stereotypes before addressing the needs of the learners. Sharing experiences and examples help diverse adults appreciate similarities and differences among all learners. Building an inclusive environment reduces the lack of trust and *culture of power* dynamics in training rooms and classrooms. To build such an environment, the instructor must be careful when selecting appropriate media resources for use with diverse learners.

### Media Resources

Trainers and educators use media such as textbooks, television, films, charts, graphs, and other drawings to present realistic views of the subject being taught. Parks (2004) noted, "discussion about Europeans-based cultures and how they have influenced perceptions of representation and racial difference have typically not been a part of educational practice in the United States" (p. 15). In the past, many instructors used examples of media that did not represent a diverse audience. Because training rooms and classrooms comprise many different racial ethnicities, it is imperative that instructors use media that is *culturally-sensitive* and *culturally-specific* to the adult learners (ARC, 1999). The following section will address types of materials to be incorporated in adult classrooms and ethical considerations.

### *Print Media References*

According to Woods (2004), Marshall McLuhan is named the *Oracle of the Electronic Age* or *the Prophet of Media* because he fused both media and the style of presenting ideas to humans (p. 238). McLuhan also determined the difference between *hot* and *cool* media. “Radio, printed material, photographs, and films are [considered] hot media because they require limited effort to interpret. Cool media demands involvement for individuals such as telephoning, computer games, class discussions, rapping or crossword puzzles” (Wood, 2004, p. 242). Since media has been dominated by Caucasian Americans, instructors must use materials which identify current instructional settings (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). By examining curriculum materials for bias, instructors are actively seeking to remove stereotypes and barriers from learning, which allows non-Caucasian students a voice in textbooks, presentations, and open discussions (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Finding literature to support culturally diverse learners can be a difficult task for some instructors. Depending on the subject matter being taught, they can use books by Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Maya Angelou, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., or Toni Morrison to gain clues of “authenticity, communication styles, and manners of representation of African Americans” (DeVaney, 1994, p. 358). To gain a better understanding of Asian American culture, instructors can incorporate the works of David Henry Hwang, Allen Say, John Woo, Yo Yo Ma, and Ann Curry (Infoplease, n.d). Learning to include American Indian or Native American literature will require in depth research. Russell Means, a Lakota activist and founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM), suggests other ethnic groups and the government should not refer to American Indians as Native Americans because “... we were enslaved as American Indians, we were colonized as American Indians, and we will gain our freedom as American Indians, and then

we will call ourselves any damn thing we choose” (Infoplease, n.d., p. 1). In other words, Russell Means is one of many in the Indian culture that chose to remain identified as American Indian. However, in the academic environment, Native American is used to remove stereotypes and inhumane references, which was common in texts used to describe American Indians in the colonization period. Instructors should try conversing with these students to see how they prefer their culture to be referenced. Literary works written by Christina Berry, Tom Arviso, Jr. and the American Heritage Book of English Usage are places to learn about the Native American culture (Infoplease, n.d.).

### *Using Films in the Classroom*

Because of the increased diversity in classrooms, trainers and teachers must consider what factors may inhibit a student’s learning when using visuals and audio in a classroom setting. Presently, instructors must go above and beyond to ensure that visual resources and related materials do not portray stereotypes or negative images when working with students. Hall argues “against, but sees some value to confusing ‘authentic’ with ‘real.’ African American people communicate better with peers and instructors that present realistic examples or experiences. The manner in which Afro-American culture has sought to define itself through history is an authentic response to the very real effects of conditions and restraints imposed by dominant White culture” (Cited in Rocchio, 2000, p. 212). Moreover, teachers who use movies or films in the classroom must carefully choose samples that represent authentic cultural events to support the accurate representation of diverse cultures in movies. It is essential to observe the symbolic nature of a culture’s identity and culture with respect to its authenticity, but include instructional strategies to combat the effects of negative behavior and oppressive scenes.

Producers market films to capture the original, cultural images that depict modern times. DeVaney believes that instructors may use the images for the classroom “to implement goals of diversity and equity” (1994, p. 356). This means that instructors can integrate issues related to diversity as portrayed by many Hollywood films. DeVaney focused on African Americans because of the sudden rise in the creation of films by African American writers and accessibility of minority films for teachers in the classroom. Because today’s students represent many different cultural backgrounds, instructors must be cautious of existing stereotypes and choose appropriate material that depicts positive images when selecting instructional resources.

### *Stereotypes in Hollywood Films & Television*

Television, commercials ads, and Hollywood films are culturally-related sources of imagery and knowledge for students of all ages. DeVaney (1994) concludes, “to confront the new racism instructors must ‘go out of their way’ to create and select credible, non-stereotypic visuals in the classroom” (p. 356). Because of the vast amount of exposure to cultural icons, trainers and teachers are faced with bridging the gap between popular culture and classroom knowledge. West (1993) suggests that to begin understanding Black culture, you must start with the flaws created by American Society. Wood (2004) states that the media is a constant force behind “cultural stereotypes about race and ethnicity” and it is worth assessing when used in training, higher education, and K-12 classrooms (p. 19). Furthermore, trainers and teachers need to address the negative impact and ideas in television and movies when discussing issues in the classroom. “The contemporary status of race in mainstream American culture is intimately bound to the process of representation within and through the mass media” (Rocchio, 2000, p.4). Stereotypes or negative imagery in television

and film are sometimes consciously or unconsciously targeted against African Americans. For instance, the film, *Crash* (2005), which exposes stereotypes among all races, depicts African-American males, in general, as common criminals. In one representative scene, Sandra Bullock's character clutches her purse and her husband's arm as two black males walk towards her. According to Hall (1997), the "regime of representation" is what Anglo-American (White) cultures solely relied on stereotypes and other racist strategies to depict Black folks (p. 245). Racial stereotypes have been in marketing products like Aunt Jemima's pancake syrup, Uncle Ben's rice, and Lysol cleaning liquid for example. The advertisements create stereotypes of African Americans in subservient type roles. This stereotyping behavior implies African Americans hold low-income jobs and are not worthy of succeeding in higher education. Moreover, television commercials and major network programs have often depicted minorities in a negative light.

Television commercials today are overpopulated with *get rich* schemes, athletic apparel, cell phone providers, automobile ads, and payday cash advance loans. The commercials sometimes target both kids and adults with subliminal messages that can have negative impacts on the audience. Media, including commercials, often present information in the following scenarios: men make the big decisions, women do child care and clean house, [and] white males possess technological expertise" (Fox, 1996, p. 16). For instance, every MAC vs. PC commercials includes two white males mimicking the founders of each operating system. Although, the commercials are humorous; they fail to include minorities and women. There are some positive representations of minorities and women on television. Macy's, for instance, has commercials with all types of minorities and each celebrity featured in the commercial represents a variety of products. Instructors should consider the ethical

reasons for choosing books, television programs, music, and films and other forms of media to use in classrooms.

### *Ethical Considerations*

According to Webster's online dictionary, ethics is described as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation" (Webster online, n.d., p. 1). The Code of Ethics is the bylaws and principles by which organization, [companies], or institution agrees to follow throughout the existence of its operation. "The Code of Ethics is very critical when establishing a company, organization or project" (Seels & Richey, 1994, p. 153). According to The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), there are three types of ethical commitments that individuals must adhere to: (a) commitment to the individual, (b) commitment to society, and (c) commitment to the profession.

*Commitment to the Individual.* In corporate work environments, higher education institutions, and in K-12 classrooms, individuals have an obligation to "guarantee individuals the opportunity to participate in any appropriate programs" (Seels & Richey, p.152). This means any minority can join mentoring and leadership initiative programs that prepare professionals for management and supervisory roles. When developing curriculum and specialized training, materials selected and designed should avoid or promote racial stereotypes against gender, ethnicity, class or religion. There is also commitment to society that individuals should consider.

*Commitment to Society.* Any company, institution, or organization must practice fair and equitably to groups when rendering services to the members. For instance, corporate guest speakers at job fairs should share career development services and job opportunities to



all students visiting their booths. This means that any student should receive fair and honest feedback while conversing with the company representative. Job openings should not be held for only a specific group of students such as minorities, students with disabilities, or students without majors relating to the company's industry. In addition, no representative of any company, organization or institution should accept bribes, gifts, favors and other inappropriate gains from prospective students, employees or institutions that will serve as *shoe in deal*. Favorable gains lead in to a discussion about committing to the profession (Seels & Richey, 1994).

*Commitment to the Profession.* As a professional educator, it is an implied duty to inform all students about re-creating products, projects, papers, and presentations without gaining permission from the owners or original masters of the copied work. Music, patents, and ideas are other forms of original work that cannot be copied, distributed, or manipulated without obtaining a written communication from the owner. Encouraging compliance with copyrighted material saves time and possible law suits. An oath to the profession ensures that all trainers, teachers, and administrators be vigilant by acknowledging copyright laws and explaining the rules to all learners and users (Seels & Richey, 1994).

The essence of ethical consideration guides and encourages healthy relationships between trainers and educators to employees and students. It encourages an environment of equal opportunity that fosters inclusion, accountability, and transformation. Adhering to the Code of Ethics would reveal the impact of how the individual relates to the society and represents the profession. Operating ethically, trainers and educators demonstrate fairness, trustworthiness, integrity, and equity.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this literature review was to develop a basic understanding of how instructors should prepare future corporate trainers, higher education teachers, and K-12 teachers to effectively instruct adult minority learners. In addition, this review addressed selecting current classroom materials with an emphasis on textbooks, visual aids, and Hollywood films.

### Adult Minority Students

Research from Malcolm Knowles, Barbara Cross, Julie Coates, and others describe adult learners as learners who expect their instructor to present accurate information that relates to prior experiences and prior knowledge. Adult minority learners are generally non-traditional students who have responsibilities such as work and families. Non-school related responsibilities could cause additional pressures for learners, which is important for instructors to understand to motivate learners and make meaning while including instructional strategies without wasting their time.

Instructors should understand the characteristics of the audience of minority learners. The identified minority learners in this literature review are: Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. Each group of learners has unique cultural practices, beliefs, and learning styles that an educator should consider when designing instruction. Jian X., explains that “teachers, [trainers], and designers are urged to recognize those psychological characteristics that set one student apart from apart” (2001, p. 300). By knowing an individual’s characteristic, instructors can make informed decisions on how to structure the curriculum.

## Instructional Strategies

Cross suggested four instructional strategies to use when teaching adult minority students: (a) respect the student's language, (b) use diverse literature, (c) recognize cultural diversity, and (d) acknowledge background knowledge and experiences. In respecting the student's language, remember that English may be the student's second language and the student may have not learned to properly conjugate verbs or use English jargon. Also some students may have learned English from non-English family members and friends, which could increase the chances of pronouncing words incorrectly. When using diverse literature, refer to the experts such as poets, writers, teachers, and musicians of that culture to understand what books, movies, and visuals are appropriate to use in the learning environment. Part of recognizing cultural diversity means participating in activities that are not practiced in your own culture. This, for example, means going to worship services of a different culture or religion. Part of learning is to get out of the comfort zone. Share personal experiences or backgrounds that relate or differentiate from the adult learners. This activity creates discussions and provides an opportunity of self-reflection.

## Media Resources

Today textbooks, visual aids, television programs, and Hollywood films are using stories from cultures differently than mainstream society has done in the past. So far, media has removed many of the stereotypes of white male-dominated roles to include women. Unfortunately, racial stereotypes are still obvious to African American and Hispanics cultures. Other ethnic minorities are rarely included in main roles; therefore, instructors must learn how to incorporate culturally-sensitive and culturally-specific forms of media in adult environments. Producing and creating Hollywood films has given minorities opportunities to

share backgrounds, experiences, and prior knowledge from their own eyes. Films such as *Crash* (2005), *Higher Learning* (1995), *John Q* (2002), *Pride* (2007), *Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *American Gangster* (2007), and *The Great Debaters* (2007) depict the plights of people of color and Caucasian Americans. Instructors should review films and literary resources before introducing them to adult minority learners. If the media resources chosen for learning represent negative stereotypes, be prepared to have open and honest discussions with adult learners who make comments to perpetuate stereotypes or learners who have emotional and sometimes painful memories of images seen in the classroom. Instructors of adult minority students should consider ethics when instructing students.

Think ethically when representing the profession and sharing personal views with students and colleges. Teach students to cite the works of others rather than plagiarize. Be fair and honest about the industry and what it offers. Give all learners the opportunity to succeed and do not show favoritism to students that actively engage in class vs. non-engaged learners.

In summary, the literature shows that instructors have made some advances in creating more inclusive learning environments. However Johnson-Bailey (2002) writes, “learning environments are not neutral sites...the race of both the instructor and the students drives the dynamics of interactions that take place in a teaching-learning environment” (p. 45). Being an effective instructor means acknowledging that there are students with cultural differences. One cultural difference is learning to speak English as an adult. Instructors should understand that students from other cultures pronounce words meant in the singular form as plural form. Culturally responsive instructors know that diverse learners also use slang or Ebonics in formal settings because that language is common in their homes or

community. Instructors must design curriculum to include non-Caucasian writes, stories, pictures and films. A culturally-sensitive instructor shares examples that relate to the student's background and prior knowledge. Effective instructors attend community and campus events that students organize during diversity week. Finally, culturally-responsive instructors give minority students the opportunity to correct or challenge generalizations and stereotypes that are mentioned in discussions.

### Recommendations

Based on the literature, I suggest the best ways for instructors to meet the training needs of adult minority students is to learn about the adults and their culture. The first topic addressed in this literature review was identifying the characteristics of adult minority learners. Each learner may come from different regions of the world and may have a different reason for attaining higher education. Hispanic Americans, for example, value higher education but many learners are first-generation college students. Many Hispanic family members cannot share experiences with college bound students because they have not attended college themselves. Instructors should provide support systems and resources for students to assimilate in higher education institutions.

In the corporate sector many companies have diversity training and programs. My present employer mandates all new employees complete diversity training within thirty days of employment. This initial training establishes that this company acknowledges its diverse employees and promotes inclusion of all individuals regardless of race, class, gender, sexual preferences, disabilities, or religion. In an effort to comply with ethical considerations, both higher education institutions and corporate businesses should encourage equality and foster culturally responsive environments.

## Final Thoughts

There are an increasing number of adult learners seeking corporate training, higher education courses, and professional development to meet the needs of their minority students. These individuals have different learning styles and attitudes about learning which should be taken into consideration when designing, developing, and implementing curriculum. In an effort to meet the needs of adult minority learners, instructors should understand how to incorporate culturally-specific materials and media in learning sessions, how to teach using culturally-sensitive language, literature, and experiences, and how to create inclusive environments which engage all learners to converse without the fear of stereotypes, overt racial monologues, and meaningful discussions of being different. With this understanding, instructors can conquer barriers to instructing adult minority students and model ethical practices to the individuals, society, and profession.

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