

34th Annual Learning Symposium

Breakout Session:

Intersectionality of Belonging, Inclusion, and Identity from the Perspective of Individuals With Disabilities

Presented by Dianne P. Hengst, M.A., Psy.D, Disability Consultant and Former Executive Director/ADA Coordinator, UTSA (retired)



The Disability Rights Movement, starting in the early 1970s, joined other civil rights movements by promoting a culture of inclusion, diversity, and the capacity to appreciate and value individual differences. While the concept of diversity encompasses acceptance, inclusion, and a sense of belonging, many challenges exist as a result of a limited understanding of these individual differences and how they can provide opportunities for growth in an organization. Identity and belonging are a complex phenomenon that is often driven by one's feelings and lived experiences. This presentation will examine how disability, diversity, and identity intersect and give context to one's sense of belonging from the perspective of individuals with disabilities.

Presentation Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be able to have a basic understanding of what defines a disability.
- Participants will be able to have a basic understanding of the intersection of disability and identity.
- Participants will be able to describe the relationship between disability and various identity models.

Bio of presenter:

Dianne P. Hengst graduated with Masters Degrees in School and Clinical Psychology and a Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology and has over 30 years of counseling/clinical experience ranging from public schools to institutions of higher education, community mental health centers, rehabilitation hospitals, state psychiatric facilities, and acute care psychiatric hospitals. Dr. Hengst presents both locally and nationally on the topic of disability, diversity, universal design, and inclusion as well as trains hundreds of individuals about providing disability accommodations in an academic setting. Dr. Hengst is a co-author of a counseling textbook on the topic of "Addressing the Needs of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities" and reviewed for Disability Quarterly Academic Journal. She also served as adjunct faculty in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Arlington and continues to consult on administrative policies for students with disabilities in the postsecondary level as well as disability issues in both the education and workforce settings. Most recently, Dr. Hengst served as the Executive Director for Student Disability Services/ADA Coordinator at The University of Texas at San Antonio until December of 2023.

**NURTURING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS:
UNDERSTANDING THE
INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITY,
DISABILITY, AND BELONGING IN
EDUCATION**

DR. DIANNE P HENGST ★

1

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT DEFINES A DISABILITY**
- **BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERSECTION OF DISABILITY AND IDENTITY**
- **BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISABILITY AND IDENTITY**
- **BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A SENSE OF BELONGING**
- **BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO BELONGING AS IT RELATES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

2

THE TERM “DIVERSITY” IS EVOLVING

- **WE NEED A SHARED LANGUAGE AND COMMON UNDERSTANDING**
 - **DIVERSITY IS HIGHLY POLITICIZED, WITH MANY SCHOOLS DISSOLVING DEI POSITIONS AND PROGRAMS**
- **MOVEMENT TOWARD FOCUSING ON BELONGING**

3

THE DOUBLE EDGE SWORD OF DIVERSITY (DERRICK GAY)

4

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

- **THE INTERCONNECTED NATURE OF SOCIAL CATEGORIZATIONS SUCH AS RACE, CLASS, GENDER, DISABILITY, ETC.**
- **THERE IS AN UNDERSTANDING THAT INDIVIDUALS HAVE MULTIPLE ASPECTS TO THEIR IDENTITY.**

5

HOW DOES OUR IDENTITY HELPS US UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO?

- **PROMPTS US TO THINK CREATIVELY, INSTEAD OF MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WHAT WE ALL KNOW OR BELIEVE**
- **ENCOURAGES US TO THINK CRITICALLY AND OPEN-MINDEDLY**
 - (SOMMERS, 2006)
- **STIMULATES COGNITIVE ACTIVITY IN WAYS THAT HOMOGENEITY SIMPLY DOES NOT**
 - (LOYD ET AL., 2014)
- **CULTIVATES GROWTH RATHER THAN A FIXED MINDSET**
 - (NEALE & PHILLIPS, 2006).

6

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTITY

- **CHARACTERISTICS, BELIEFS, AND VALUES THAT MAKE AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP DISTINCT.**
- **ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT IDENTITY IS SHAPED BY VARIOUS FACTORS.**
- ***HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF EXERCISE?***

7

DEFINITION OF DISABILITY?

- **THE DEFINITION OF A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY IS A COMPLEX AND CHANGING CONCEPT**
 - **CHANGES OVER TIME**
 - **SINCE THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT, MOVED FROM PRIMARILY A MEDICAL MODEL TO THE IDEA OF ACCESSIBILITY**
- **SOME SAY DISABILITY IS “ALL-OR-NOTHING” ... EITHER A PERSON HAS A DISABILITY OR A PERSON DOES NOT?**
 - **IN REALITY, DISABILITY, IN PARTICULAR ROLES OR ACTIVITIES, IS USUALLY ENCOUNTERED IN TERMS OF DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY, LIMITATION, OR DEPENDENCE, RANGING FROM SLIGHT TO SEVERE.**
 - **CONCEPT OF “ABILITY DIVERSE” (HUTCHESON & WOLBRING)**

8

DISABILITY AS AN IDENTITY

- **DISABILITY CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT, RESULTING NOT FROM INDIVIDUAL DEFICIENCIES, BUT FROM CULTURAL DESIGN AND EXPECTATIONS OF “NORMALITY”.**
- **DISABILITY CAN ALSO BE THOUGHT OF AS AN OUTCOME OF THE INTERACTION OF A PERSON WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AS A CULTURAL LACK OF MEANS NECESSARY TO ACCOMMODATE A GIVEN CONDITION.**

METTS, 2000

9

INFLUENCE OF MEDIA IMAGES

- **OFTEN PLAYS ON FEARS**
- **ADDS TO COLLECTIVE DISCOMFORT**
- **CAN REINFORCE THE “MEDICAL MODEL”**
- **EVOKES PITY**
- **EMPHASIZES MARGINALIZATION AND STIGMA**
- **CREATES STEREOTYPES**

10

WE MUST UNDERSTAND OUR BIASES!

- **WHAT ARE OUR EARLIEST DISABILITY EXPERIENCES?**
 - **CONSTRUCTED VS. DETERMINED?**
- **HOW DOES THE MEDIA/CULTURE INFLUENCE OUR CONCEPTS OF DISABILITY?**
 - **DISCUSS CHALLENGES STUDENTS WITH INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND DISABILITIES MAY ENCOUNTER**
 - **STEREOTYPES**
 - **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING**

11

WE ARE ALL PRODUCTS OF OUR CULTURE

- **OUR INFLUENCES COME FROM OUR SOCIAL EXPERIENCE.....NOT FROM THE INDIVIDUAL WITH THE DISABILITY**

STELLA YOUNG

12

THE IMPACT OF BELONGING ON LEARNING

- **BELONGING: FEELING OF SECURITY, ACCEPTANCE, AND CONNECTION IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.**
- **RESEARCH SHOWS THAT A SENSE OF BELONGING POSITIVELY INFLUENCES ACADEMIC SUCCESS, RETENTION, AND THE OVERALL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS.**
 - **COLLEGES USE THIS RESEARCH TO DEVELOP “LIVING/LEARNING COMMUNITIES” AND PEER MENTOR GROUPS**
 - **SOCIAL SCIENTISTS STUDYING SCHOOL AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS HAVE IDENTIFIED ‘BELONGING UNCERTAINTY’ AS A MAJOR ROADBLOCK TO PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT” (HERMAN MILLER, 2017).**

13

ADVOCACY AND EMPOWERMENT

- **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN PROVIDING FOR AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**
- **EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO EMBRACE THEIR IDENTITIES AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE**
 - **TERMS WE USE (E.G. “DISABILITY”)**

14

WHAT ARE SOME BARRIERS?

- **Lack of Leadership Commitment**
- **Inadequate Professional Development**
- **Implicit Bias and Stereotypes**
- **Resistance to Change by parents, peers and for new concepts in teaching**
- **Limited Representation in Leadership**
- **Institutional Policies and Practices**
- **Limited Resources**
- **Inclusive Curriculum Challenges**
- **Resistance from Peers**

15

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

- **“BELONGING” IS AN EMERGING REALITY THAT PRESENTS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATORS**
- **EDUCATION IS WORKING TO EMBRACE A COMMUNITY THAT VALUES BELONGING AND INCLUSION AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND AS A PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE.**

16

QUESTIONS??

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17