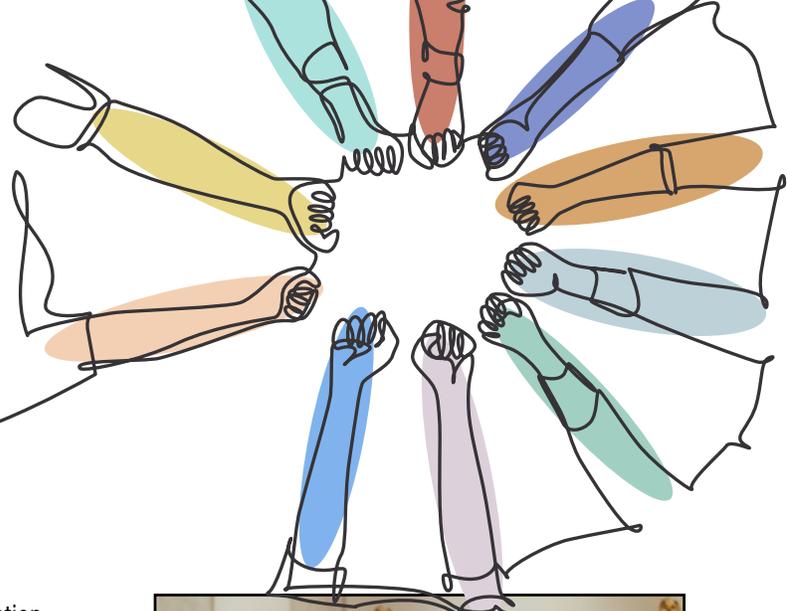


THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION EFFORTS

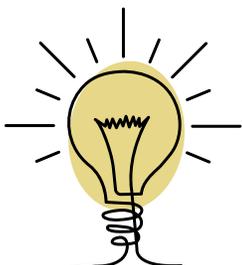


On April 7, 2022 Ketanji Brown Jackson delivered her Supreme Court confirmation acceptance speech surrounded by President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Neither Justice Jackson nor Vice President Harris would have had the opportunity to stand as they did on April 7th based on the rights spelled out when the U. S. Constitution was ratified on June 21, 1788. Both have benefitted from legislation and policy efforts since that date that have addressed the exclusion of women, people of color, and other minority groups women from full participation in many social, political and economic aspects of American life. While the term "human rights" was not part of the lexicon of most of these efforts, one can clearly see its principles embedded in them.



Educational initiatives, grounded in the morality of human rights, have played a particularly important role in efforts to address the many forms of injustice endemic in this society. In the late 1960's, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs emerged to support corporate implementation of workplace requirements called for by Affirmative Action policies and equal opportunity laws, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited employment discrimination. Over the last few decades, there has been growing popular recognition of the inequities suffered by people subjected to discriminatory policies and practices. Additional laws and policies have extended beyond race and gender to include age-

related rights (Age Discrimination in Employment Act, 1967) and disability rights (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990), and more. In response to this increased level of concern, DEI programs have been implemented in educational institutions, as well as in businesses and governmental agencies, to help create environments that value each person's presence and contribution to the whole. Following are some of the many available links that provide information about the history of DEI programs and the changes that have taken place to address the harms resulting from a long history of exclusionary policies and practices:



The History and Growth of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Profession

>> insights.grcglobalgroup.com/the-history-and-growth-of-the-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-profession

The History of Diversity Training and Its Pioneers

>> diversityofficermagazine.com/diversity-inclusion

University of Alabama, at Birmingham, UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog

>> sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2017/11/10/diversity-equity-inclusion-united-states

Fast Company A Brief History of Diversity Training

>> fastcompany.com/40579246/a-brief-history-of-diversity-training



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HUMAN RIGHTS UDHR DEI

To understand the links between human rights, as articulated in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and DEI initiatives, let's begin with some definitions.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION EFFORTS

WHAT DOES DEI MEAN?

The University of Washington, Office of Research: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has provided us with useful definitions of these terms.

Diversity is the presence of differences that enrich our workplace. Some examples of diversity may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis) ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective in our workplace. There are many more.

Equity is ensuring that access, resources, and opportunities are provided for all to succeed and grow, especially for those who are underrepresented and have been historically disadvantaged.

Inclusion is a workplace culture that is welcoming to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, age, abilities, and religion and everyone is valued, respected and able to reach their full potential."

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEI?

The United Nations offers the following definition of human rights:

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, was the first legal document to set out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

The principles of justice, fairness, and respect for the dignity of every human being, as found in the UDHR are evident in these DEI definitions. DEI programs can be instruments in advancing human rights goals.

WHY ARE DEI EFFORTS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS IMPORTANT AND WHY DOES THEIR CONNECTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS MATTER?

John Terry, K-12 Supervisor of Social Studies of the Bernards Township School District in New Jersey, offers a valuable perspective on DEI efforts in educational settings, noting the human rights perspective on the value of these efforts:

The 2011 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN DHRET) calls on educators to promote learning "through" and "for" human rights. This means fostering a school climate and culture that celebrates all children and employees in the school district. This can only be done through honoring the diversity of the student and staff population, as well as being inclusive of traditionally under-represented groups, and making equity goals a focus for a school district. DEI efforts include such questions as: Are there certain groups of staff or students who consistently do not achieve as highly as other groups? If so, are there historical reasons for these disparities? Moreover, the language of social and economic rights sets standards for our society for which equity-driven work can strive.

The language of human rights also describes the standard to which we aim, and not just the means required to get there. Moreover, the language of human rights calls up a specific historical narrative and agreed upon set of international norms, to which the United States has often set the tone and participated in to some extent. The language of human rights can thus be a sound strategic means by which DEI can be achieved, and also a way of framing DEI to ensure that its aims are directed at sound humanistic principles, and not at pitting groups of people against each other.

The principles of human rights are clearly supported by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in school districts. For example, DEI activists can draw on language in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ratified by the United States in 1994, in its efforts to advance racial justice. Those engaged in the work of DEI can indeed be human rights educators, and recognizing these connections can strengthen the positive impacts of all of their endeavors.



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