

Division of Developmental Disabilities

Issue Brief on Diversity

During the past year the Critical Issues Committee of the Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD) worked with the Diversity Committee to structure an Issue Brief focused on the role of diversity in the field of Developmental Disabilities. The following Brief reflects the work of several DDD members and seeks to clarify the fit of diversity within the Division. I would like to thank those who worked on this Brief, as well as all those persons who provided input over the past year. If you have questions or would like to comment on this Issue Brief, please address yourself to stodden@hawaii.edu - thanks, Robert A. Stodden, Chairperson, Critical Issues Committee, Division on Development Disabilities, Council for Exceptional Children.

Introduction

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) Board concluded that the Division should recognize the importance of addressing diversity issues from the following perspectives: (a) how the diversity of families impacts potential responses to the educational system, and the educational system's response to that diversity; (b) the diversity of views that diverse families may hold about mental retardation and other developmental disabilities; (3) the necessity of meeting the needs of the changing and growing diversity within the membership itself; and (4) the responsibility of the Division to assist its membership in meeting the needs of diverse students and their families.

During the past year, the Diversity Committee of the DDD Board worked with the Board and the Issues Committee Chair to develop an issue brief addressing diversity, its impact on the membership and the wider community that is served by the work of DDD, resulting in recommendations that will influence policy and program/initiative changes within DDD. (Look for policy, program and initiative changes from the Board/Diversity Committee to be forthcoming in another format at a future time.) The diverse membership of DDD is made up of administrators, educators, students and faculty within higher education. This membership is comprised of individuals who implement best and promising practices. This brief is designed to give the membership opportunities to engage in structured and facilitated conversations about diversity issues

that impact them professionally. All have a shared role in the identification and implementation of services that reflect best and promising practices for individuals with developmental disabilities, including those who are from diverse cultures.

Discussion Topics

DDD is an organization composed of persons committed to enhancing the quality of life of individuals, especially children and youth, with developmental disabilities, including those with cognitive disabilities/mental retardation, autism and related disabilities. The Division seeks to further the knowledge base of the field, thus ensuring the continued advancement of positive educational and quality of life outcomes for those with developmental disabilities. The topics under discussion within this issue brief on diversity address the following: (a) Division mission statement, (b) Division diversity definition, and (c) development of board leadership on issues of diversity.

1. Mission Statement

The expanded language provided in the Division's mission statement serves as a basis for including new language that is inclusive of diversity and furthers opportunities for global/international and other Divisional collaboration. The mission statement serves as a guide to: (a) enhance the quality of life of individuals with DD, (b) further the knowledge base of the field, and (c) ensure the advancement of positive educational and quality of life outcomes for persons with developmental disabilities and those persons supporting them.

Enhance the quality of life of individuals with developmental disabilities - In order to enhance the quality of life of individuals with developmental disabilities the organization must be responsive to diversity. This responsiveness includes the following: (a) assisting educators and other professionals with new expertise and knowledge as they teach and support persons with developmental disabilities; (b) assisting families, especially those families who are culturally and linguistically

diverse, gain an understanding of their needs, including improved communication, and access to more appropriate assessment, intervention, transition planning, caregiver support and community involvement services and supports; and (c) impacting the education and life skills development of individuals with developmental disabilities. The mission of the Division is to support the membership as it seeks to enhance the quality of life of individuals with developmental disabilities. This endeavor is similar to that occurring in other countries, often driven by an international agenda which includes diversity issues that directly impact upon an individual's "quality of life."

Furthering the knowledge base of the field - Educators and other professional and practitioners can acquire skill and knowledge competencies that lead to the development of best and promising practices which are supportive of quality services for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals. This typically occurs through three avenues: (a) conduct of research, (b) dissemination of information, and (c) demonstration and implementation of relevant educational programs. These types of activities interface internationally between different countries and cultures which can further support efforts with the U.S. These activities can also open up dialogue on best and promising practices that can be shared across countries and cultures.

Ensure the advancement of positive educational and other life outcomes – Those outcomes that might be viewed by a person with developmental disabilities and/or his or her family as a "positive" educational and life outcome will likely vary across cultures. For example, some families may view a positive life outcome as one in which their children develop skills for independent living. Others may not wish to consider the option of their children with developmental disabilities living outside their home; therefore independent living would not be considered a positive educational or life outcome. Understanding these differences is what educators and other professionals must demonstrate through diversity competencies to be developed and acquired in focused training. Educators and professionals must apply those competencies when working with culturally and linguistically diverse individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members. Advancing positive educational and life

outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities can force international discussions and shared expertise. Discussion of these universal issues will result in diverse responses from different countries, organizations and or agencies.

2) *Diversity definition*

The DDD affirms the standards set out in international human rights declarations and domestic laws as they apply to national origin, ethnicity, culture, human rights, disability, age, class, gender, sexual orientation and race. DDD believes that individuals with developmental disabilities share the same global issues as individuals in other countries. As DDD works to meet the needs of those individuals that they represent and/or serve, it believes these shared issues will provide opportunities for global engagement, and collaboration with CEC and its Divisions in joint problem solving.

3) *Board leadership on issues of diversity*

Initial leadership actions on the part of the Division were to recognize the importance of this issue which resulted in a change in the Committee from *ad hoc* status to standing committee status. Further, the DDD Board supported the development of a position statement and an Issues Brief on the topic of diversity and diversity issues.

Further, leadership around issues of diversity will be provided to the membership through the development of new expanded policies, programs and initiatives that are inclusive of the concept of diversity as discussed in this Brief. The DDD Board will work with the Diversity Committee on the specifics of these new efforts and information will become available to the membership in the near future.

The three discussion topics have been presented in this format to assist the board and the membership in engaging in open discussions regarding the initial steps for making diversity important to the work of DDD.

Summary

Given the importance of diversity as a part of “our everyday reality” and the increasing pressure to address diversity issues in the context of globalization, this Brief provides the membership a forum to discuss diversity and opportunities to problem solve the issues that have been identified in this Brief.

The global perspective of diversity is important to the international flow of people, ideas, images, and resources that impact/influence the work of DDD and the membership. The world has some 6,000 communities and as many distinct languages; such differences naturally lead to diversity of vision, values, beliefs, practice and expression, which all deserve equal respect and dignity. If we take the discussion closer to home, the differences are apparent because of our diversity. We have diversity across and within regions, states, counties, communities, neighborhoods and families. All of these differences add up to a diverse culture.