

Diversity Training by Miriam Jefferson

*NOTE: This article is reprinted with permission from Aug-Sept 1997 issue (Vol. 79 pp. 17-19) of **The Fourth R**, the Newsletter of the National Association for Mediation in Education*

Many young people leave home for the first time at age 18 to attend college, suddenly to live alongside people from a wide variety of backgrounds, some for the first time. Not surprisingly, a new set of understandings and skills are needed.

The National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) is an international organization which leads diversity programs on college campuses. It has been able to bring together people who had been at odds each other and create a safe environment for them to explore their own backgrounds, examine the information and misinformation they had acquired about each other, share their stories, be heard, and find common ground. NCBI found that bringing professional consultants in meant that universities had great workshops, but too often, the work ended there. The campuses were ill equipped to use their new awareness and skills to move their entire institutions forward.

In response to this need, the NCBI campus affiliate program was born. The goal of the program is to train a new kind of leader—one who can build bridges in the face of highly controversial issues, one who can take powerful stands to end oppression, and one who has a set of skills to bring people together across differences.

NCBI campus teams are groups of students, faculty, and staff from all sectors of a college who lead diversity workshops, intervene in tough politicized controversial issues, and support each other to take ever more effective leadership toward the elimination of all oppression. To launch each campus team, NCBI goes to the specific

campus and provides a three-day training of trainers. The program emphasizes the emotional and institutional impact of discrimination and teaches how to remove the hurt, misinformation, and powerlessness which keep racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination in place. In those three days, participants learn to lead one-day workshops which welcome diversity, unfreeze prejudicial attitudes, and interrupt oppressive remarks and actions. Specific tools are taught in the workshop which empower individuals to be constructive allies on behalf of other groups. Campus team members also learn a conflict resolution model which powerfully transforms tough politicized controversial issues in a way that builds bridges between all concerned. By the end of the training of trainers, a campus team has been launched, ready to lead workshops and take on the challenges of their specific campus community.

Many campus teams are using the various workshop models to shift their campus climates. At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the NCBI team has led workshops for over 3000 participants, including orientation for all incoming medical students, dental students, and social work students, and workshops for the faculties of many departments, various classrooms, and a variety of staff programs. At Gallaudet University, the NCBI team is using the workshops to build bridges between deaf students, hard of hearing students, and interpreters. The University of Albany NCBI team trained a group of African-American, Latino, Jewish, and Asian students who then ran programs on campus for fifth graders from the same groups, ending the program with a kosher soul-food dinner. The University of Puget Sound NCBI team made a commitment to break down class barriers on their campus. They offered NCBI training to all the support staff divisions: physical plant, food services, security, and the library -- training support

staff, as well as powerfully addressing issues of classism at all of their general community workshops.

Historically, students of color often have not embraced diversity work on college campuses because they did not see racism being addressed powerfully enough. Stacey Robinson Bailey of NCBI has offered several workshops at national conferences on students of color taking the lead in diversity work. NCBI campus teams often have separate caucuses for students of color to address issues of internalized oppression. As a result, students of color have often functioned as key leaders on their campus teams.

Last year, the National Coalition Building Institute made a powerful commitment to stretch beyond leading workshops to promoting activism for diversity, and the campus teams have embraced this challenge enthusiastically. Many teams are playing a powerful role in their communities. Chadron State College in Nebraska is very close to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the second largest reservation in the U.S. A week after their training of trainers, they sent a team of people to the City Council meeting to support the leadership of one of their team members who was also a member of the City Council. That night, the City Council was discussing potential responses to a violent racial incident targeting Lakota young people in their community. The NCBI campus team members spoke with such passion, sharing their pain, without blame, at this meeting, that the City Council committed itself to a number of ongoing projects to end racism. The City Council was so moved by the evening that they also made a proclamation that the traditional Columbus Day holiday be celebrated next year as Native American Day.

The University of North Texas NCBI team launched a Community Unity Rally in response to the rash of church burnings last year.

They pulled together leaders from throughout the Dallas area to make a powerful statement as a community. The University of Hawaii NCBI team has used the Controversial Issues Model to bring together people on all sides of the gay marriage Issue and provide an opportunity for them to truly listen to each other and seek common ground. At Colby College, the team felt so empowered by leading workshops that, when a Black family's home was burned in an incident of racial violence, the group decided to mobilize a community-wide effort to rebuild the home. The family will be returning to Maine soon.

There are now NCBI teams on forty campuses. Team members come together annually at a national conference to exchange ideas, do healing work on their own leadership challenges, and become more effective campus leaders.

The National Coalition Building Institute also works in a wide variety of other settings, from providing corporate diversity training programs to elementary school programs on handling teasing. It has chapters in fifty cities.

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