

An Appreciative Approach to Diversity Training

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Ugh. This is the typical reaction to the announcement that diversity training has been mandated for all employees. The reasons for the lack of an enthusiastic response may vary, but we believe that some people may have past diversity training experiences where they felt labeled as racist and/or perceived that they were being held responsible for past injustices that may have been committed by their forefathers. This type of resistance has been labeled as “diversity fatigue” (Reeves, 2009; Hastings, 2008). This is certainly a challenge that diversity facilitators face every day.

Although specific diversity training workshops may have a variety of learning outcomes, we posit that most diversity training sessions seek to improve relationships and understanding between people from different backgrounds. In addition, most diversity workshops seek to define diversity, help participants discover their own multiple identities, and develop their awareness of the impact their words and actions have on other people. However, to accomplish these lofty objectives, participants must be open to self-exploration and learning. Thus, a non-threatening learning environment must be established and thus we are advocating taking a new “appreciative” approach to diversity training. Positively reframing diversity training as an opportunity for growth and change can help to alleviate apprehensive feelings that participants may have coming into diversity training. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to describe how the six phases of the Appreciative Education framework (Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, in press) can be employed to design and deliver diversity training that will build on participants’ strengths.

Applying the Six Phases of Appreciative Education to Diversity Training

Building upon positive psychology theories (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987), the Appreciative Education paradigm is a powerful multi-layered approach to leading both organizational and personal change (Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, in press). Similar to Appreciative Advising (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008), in practice, Appreciative Education can be applied in six phases: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don’t Settle. The six phases of Appreciative Education represent a powerful framework for delivering impactful diversity training. For each phase, we define the phase, explain why it is important to include in diversity training, and provide sample questions and activities that can be used. We rely heavily upon experiential learning techniques that stem from the work of Dewey (1933), and more recently Kolb (1984). Experiential learning is a proven pedagogical approach to engage learners in an environment which puts everyone on equal ground. This helps establish a safe learning environment where people can work together collaboratively instead of competitively.

Disarm

The Disarm phase is crucial in diversity training due to the phase’s emphasis on establishing a safe and welcoming environment. In order for participants to begin engaging in a process about diversity, they must first find a reason to come to the table and feel comfortable

participating in the dialogue. The authors find that an effective way to draw participants into the conversation is by allowing them to examine and value their own unique experiences and establishing a safe, trusting environment where all participants trust that their opinions will be heard in a non-judgmental way.

Diversity and inclusion education is best taught with a healthy dose of humility in an effort to disarm participants. Facilitators must quickly establish ground rules for the experience because everyone comes to diversity training with their unique experiences, beliefs and values that can enrich the discussion regarding diversity issues during the training. An appreciative approach to diversity training allows people to start with their own experiences and knowledge and build from there.

Disarm phase in action. Facilitators set the tone for the diversity training experience the moment that participants arrive on site. For example, facilitators should intentionally greet people warmly as they arrive at the training and engage in small talk with people. When starting the training, the facilitators should thank participants for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend the event and explain the positive approach that is going to be taken to the training.

To further disarm participants, facilitators can use a technique from the experiential education field called a Full Value Contract (Project Adventure, 2012). The Full Value Contract is a process that gives a group the opportunity to agree upon a shared set of mutual expectations for the training. It is important for the facilitators to be open to, and fully participate in, the process. There are multiple approaches to establishing a Full Value Contract, but the most basic method is to create an open space for all parties to voice their needs. When beginning a training session with new participants the facilitators should ask them about their expectations of the facilitators and the other participants for the duration of the time that will be spent together. The facilitators have the option to write down the rules or to process them orally as a group. Typically the group's responses can be whittled down to five different categories: safety, commitment, respect, accountability, and fun.

One way to execute the Full Value Contract (Project Adventure, 2012) is to use the "Five-Finger Model." In this model the participants' hands serve as a visual cue and reminder of the commitments made to each other. Each finger represents a different tenant. The pinky is typically used to represent safety: emotional, mental and physical. The facilitators can let participants know that concept of safety is represented by the pinky since it is relatively weak on its own and needs the support of the other fingers, much like we all need the support of others. The ring finger, just like in many cultures represents commitment (think marriage). This commitment is to the group and to the processes that the group will go through together. The middle finger represents respect. Every time we are challenged and we just want blow off our time together, remember to respect others who are present, as they respect you. Elementary school teachers are known for telling students that every time they point their middle finger at someone else they have three fingers pointing back at you. This gives facilitators the opportunity to remind participants that displaying respect for others will ensure that the time spent together will be effective and meaningful. Finally, the thumb represents fun which is what emerges when all of the other aspects (fingers) are together. The acronym F.U.N.N. can be used to stand for full understanding not necessary. This reminds participants that sometimes we need to just move forward, even if we do not full understand what someone said.

After beginning to build community with participants through the creation of a Full Value Contract (Project Adventure, 2012), the training facilitators can help break the ice and

allow people to get to know each other. One of our favorite activities for this is called Greetings (Improv Encyclopedia, 2007). The facilitator first establishes the ground rule – “When my hand goes up that is your signal to raise your hand and listen for the next step.” The facilitator can use other appropriate techniques for getting the group back together. The facilitator explains that there will be a number of scenarios presented. The first scenario is one where they are at a conference and meeting new people and their task is to introduce themselves to as many people as possible. The next scenario is that they are greeting one of their best friends that they haven’t seen in years. Repeat several times, each time encouraging participants to meet new people. Some other scenario ideas include: favorite performing artist, the other person has just won the lottery, scared on the street by someone, and walking into a disciplinary meeting. After this activity has been completed facilitators can help attendees process the activity by asking which scenario was the most uncomfortable, the most fun, and/or the least authentic. Participants can also be asked how this can parallel an experience in working/interacting with an individual with different backgrounds as themselves.

Discover Phase

The Discover phase is all about helping participants discover who they are, including the elements of their identity and the strengths they bring to the team. It is also about discovering new aspects of diversity. The Discover phase is perhaps the most influential and the most sensitive aspect of diversity training. When we share elements of our identity or learn new things about other people it is normal to experience some level of discomfort. This discomfort is a natural reaction people have to difference and change, but this feeling can be positively reframed by participants as a signal of growth. When we challenge ourselves by honoring differing perspectives and sharing the thoughts and feelings that have shaped who we are, we are taking a risk. This willingness to risk produces personal and group development. The growth occurs in response to the discomfort and risk, requiring that participants avoid any defensiveness and instead embrace the experience as a learning opportunity.

Discover phase in action. There are a variety of options for facilitating the Discover process. The first step is to establish an environment of respect in which participants are all aware of the expectations of the Full Value Contract (Project Adventure, 2012) established in the Disarm phase and are willing to take responsibility for their thoughts and feelings. If the facilitator has been successful in fostering an environment of respect during the Disarm phase, the facilitator can begin to push participants to engage in critical self-reflection to learn more about themselves. This is an important step before participants can get to know others. Sample questions that facilitators can have participants pair up and ask each other to promote self-reflection include:

- Tell me about a time when you worked successfully with someone who is different than you.
- Tell me about a time you had a positive impact on someone else.
- When did you first realize that your identity had a bearing on your interactions with others?

Participant pairs should be instructed to have the one partner serve as the question asker and the other as the answerer for two minutes and then afterwards the participants should switch roles and be given another two minutes to interact. Once both partners have served in both the

question asker and answerer roles the facilitator can ask who was inspired by their partner's story? Then, the facilitator can ask for someone to brag about their partner by sharing their partner's story.

Another activity that can be used during the Discover phase is one used by the University of South Carolina's Office of Multicultural Affairs and is called Childhood Messages (see Figure 1). Groups of four to five can be assigned randomly. Each group receives a packet of worksheets, enough for each group member to have their own page. Participants should be instructed to fill out the worksheet based on their own experiences growing up. Then the groups should be instructed to discuss their experiences with one of the group labels. The facilitators should remind participants that this worksheet is designed to share messages they received from various sources as a child and what people share does not necessarily reflect their own opinions. Each packet has a different overall heading based upon a grouping in our culture. Some most often used are: African-American, Caucasian, Men, LGBT, Native American, Urban Youth, Latin@, Women, Asian, Single Parents, etc.

Figure 1. Childhood Message Chart

CHILDHOOD MESSAGES CHART	
Messages received	
1. People with Disabilities	(this could be changed to any different population)
Parents:	
Media:	
Friends or other sources:	
Educators:	

This exercise offers an opportunity for participants to begin to understand how influenced we all are as children by our family members, friends, school, and the media. This activity is a safe venue for people to express these influences without feeling judged personally. This can be a very powerful exercise for all parties involved, as many non-marginalized participants will never have heard the negative things other groups were taught about them growing up.

Dream Phase

The Dream phase is focused on creating space in which participants can begin to literally start dreaming about what a perfect reality would look like in today's increasingly diverse world. This phase, maybe more than any of the previous phases, really benefits from providing participants with good guiding questions and the helpful mentorship of an invested learning partner. The key to the Dream phase is getting participants to dream BIG. A quote that can be

used to set up students to dream BIG is from Tim Burton's adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* in which Alice proclaims, "Sometimes I believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Dream phase in action. One technique for getting students to dream BIG is to encourage participants to use visuals to represent their dreams. The facilitator then provide the following prompt, "Now I want you to draw a picture of what this organization would look like if it was a safe, inviting, and enriching environment for ALL members of the organization. I want you to dream big and to use as many pictures or words as you deem appropriate for creating the ultimate organization that values diversity."

Another training option is to divide participants into groups of two and have them ask each other the following question:

- Pretend it is 5 years from now and your institution has won an award for being an exceptionally inclusive workplace. Why will we have earned this award? What does our workplace look like? Be specific.

Dreaming is dangerous work. It allows for us to fail. It forces us to be vulnerable. The simple act of verbalizing our dreams opens others up to holding us accountable. We often do not dream enough because of this fear. One activity that is great to use with a group is to ask students to put aspects of a dream, or perhaps their Full Value Contract (Project Adventure) from the Disarm phase on post-it notes. Have the participants put them on the wall as high as they can. Continue to move forward with other activities and later ask participants to put those very SAME notes even higher. This can be repeated a few times, and each time the participants will ALWAYS find a way to put those pieces of paper (i.e. their dreams) even higher. Allow space for participants to dream and aspire and they will.

Design Phase

The Design phase is where participants begin to prioritize the ideas that arose from the Dream discussion to make progress toward a more inclusive environment. It is in the Design phase where the focus of the members shifts from diversity to social justice. Social justice is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Accordingly, the Design phase involves group members acknowledging the injustices within their system and not just appreciating them. A concrete understanding of oneself, respect for individuals, and a desire for systematic change describe the mentality of the group members in this phase.

In the Design phase the facilitators should pay careful attention to the attentiveness of some of the more reserved members of the group. The facilitators should stress the importance of open communication and the active participation of all members. It is easy for the more eager members to take control and forget about some of the more minor details that could be important to quieter participants. All of us have different communication styles that need to be honored throughout the training. To build on the positive momentum from the Dream phase, a tactful facilitator will find ways to make all group members ideas and opinions valued to preserve an environment of respect and openness.

Design phase in action. To prioritize the ideas from the Dream phase the group could try separating the ideas into thematic categories. The categories can then serve as subdivisions that

participants organize themselves into to accomplish the overall goal of a more inclusive environment. Everyone in the group should play a role because everyone in the group has an opinion and is a member of the community. Group members should be empowered to begin working on the projects they have the most interest in and for which they are most passionate. Here the facilitator should take care to ensure that the team dynamic is built on a strong sense of accountability and trust.

The sample discussion questions can help establish this trusting relationship and should be answered and shared with the entire group:

- What should be expected of me?
- What should be expected of my teammates?

These questions allow for group members to self-select the responsibility they are willing to be accountable for while also letting teammates know their own expectations. In this period of consensus building the facilitator should revisit the Full Value Contract to ensure an equal distribution of the workload and thus a higher level of accountability.

The accountability piece of the Design phase is a bit more difficult to conceptualize. How might one develop a system in which a group can hold each other accountable for the roles they choose to take on? Facilitators need to plan carefully because the accountability portion can be a source of group conflict or group solidarity. Once the importance of a respectful environment has been reaffirmed, group members can be empowered to begin working on the projects they have chosen based on their interests and passions. The goal of this phase is to move from the abstract aspirations revealed in the Dream phase to specific tasks that need to be accomplished. Some sample questions for facilitators include:

- What do we need to achieve the vision we had in the Dream phase?
- What steps must we take to get there?
- What is our role?
- Think about everything that is within your locus of control. What can you do? (e.g., unbiased language, education); What can your friends do? (e.g., volunteering in the community, holding each other accountable); How about your organization or your institution? (e.g., diversity recruitment and retention programs)

In choosing an activity to support the basic tenets of the Design phase facilitators should try to reinforce the importance of communication, teamwork and accountability. The Well-Oiled Machine activity (Mile High Youth Corps Denver, 2012) is one that works well with any group size. To try this activity, follow these steps:

1. Organize group members into a circle facing each other
2. One participant will start the machine by creating a movement and a sound. No movement or sound can be duplicated by another member of the group.
3. After the first participant has completed their movement and sound a second participant joins in making a movement and sound that compliments and adds to what the first person has done.
4. This cycle continues all the way around until it ends all have joined in to create one "Well Oiled Machine".

Each person will have a unique sound and movement that contributes to the overall product and the different sounds and movements in the circle represents the diversity that makes up that group. When processing this activity, talk a bit about how although we may sometimes feel ridiculous in what we do, by working together we can achieve great feats that we cannot accomplish alone. This exercise could be done either at the beginning, in the middle, or at the

end of the Design phase depending on the facilitator's assessment of when this activity might be most powerful.

Deliver Phase

The Deliver phase is often a favorite of participants, and for good reason! It is here where participants can shine and show off their good work. In the Deliver phase participants present their results and begin to execute the plans they developed in the Design phase. By giving participants the freedom to select how they want to help make the plan a reality will encourage group members to reach these goals. As an invested partner in their dream, facilitators can continuously give feedback to participants in a meaningful manner so as to encourage their success.

Deliver phase in action. During this phase participants should have identified other resources and people to serve as mavens for their project. A maven is a knowledgeable individual who has a personal investment in the success of a project. Mavens help ensure that a project will be successful. It might help in this phase to brainstorm about what a good maven might look like for this project and to begin identifying possible mavens. Students can create a web of expectations and needs for the project in order to help identify who might be an appropriate maven. Table 1 includes some examples for clarification and for identifying the project needs and the mavens that might be available to help overcome challenges that the project will likely face.

Table 1. Project Delivery Example

Project	Project Need	Skills Needed	Maven
Attend the Social Justice Training Institute to further your growth	Raising \$1,000 for the SJTI	Fundraising; knowledge of other supportive potential donors	Jalavender: a local non-profit development professional
Benefit Dinner for Local NPO Volunteers	Event "night of" details	How to create and manage a successful one-time event	Ebonique: a student in your class who has aspirations of an event planner
A rally to support equality in education	Spreading the word about the rally	Networks; a passion for the topic; ability to spread the word	Chase: he has knowledge on how to network and get support from the student body

One tool that the authors have often used to great success is something called an "interpretive dance." This is meant to get the participants thinking about eclectic ways to present their project, including skits and short theatrical based pieces. The facilitators should give participants a set amount of time to create their presentation and then perform it for the rest of the group. Facilitators may want to film these presentations and upload them to share with participants later.

A third training option designed to emphasize the importance of carrying out the project together is to do a Yurt Circle. This can be achieved in one of two ways. The easiest way is to take a circle of sturdy rope, one that will support a great deal of pressure (we recommend retired climbing rope, or tubular webbing which can be bought relatively cheap at any outdoor store) and tie the two ends together with a water knot. A really great animated tutorial of this knot can be found at: <http://bit.ly/LvWRxt>. Have all the participants grab the rope with both hands and pull and walk back until all the slack is out of the rope. Then, the facilitator begins to walk in to the middle, encouraging participants to do the same. This will allow for, if it works, all the students to lean back and trust in the group and the rope. This shows a collective unity amongst the group. For more advanced groups, the facilitator can slowly let go of the rope. This will cause weight to become unbalanced and the group will have to adapt and adjust. This provides great fodder for a follow-up processing conversation about partnerships in dreams and holding one another accountable.

Don't Settle Phase

The Don't Settle phase builds on the positive energy produced from successful initiatives from earlier phases in order to tackle other topics and challenges within the organization. The Don't Settle phase is typically carried out during a follow-up group meeting after the original diversity training workshop. Facilitators should remain cognizant that social justice and inclusion work is a full-time position that will never end. Participants should be encouraged to think, "Good enough is neither good nor enough. What more can we do? How can we get more people involved?" It is o.k. to celebrate the group's victories, but the celebration should be one of new beginnings and not of the end.

Don't settle phase in action. In this phase facilitators should encourage critical reflection through questions that get participants to think about their own growth and development. For example, some good questions to ask participants might be: "How has this experience changed you?" or "What surprised you the most about yourself during this experience or activity?" With these questions or ones like it, facilitators will encourage participants to discover their hidden potential and ability to accomplish even greater feats.

It is important in this phase to reinforce the idea of "positive restlessness" which Kuh et al. (2005) describes never settling for "good enough." Facilitators should resist the temptation to emphasize what was not accomplished, but rather focus on what can be accomplished next. A visual demonstration for this phase could be used to inspire or motivate the group. For example, the facilitators can ask participants to "raise your hands as high as you can" and tell them to look around at the other participants so they can see each other reaching for the sky. Finally, tell them to raise their hands a little higher by saying "Now raise them a little higher." Often times this visual demonstration will get participants to raise their hands higher the second time which one could use to characterize the hidden potential within all of us.

Another effective Don't Settle activity is the Synergy Ball. The synergy ball is a tool that can be found at many science supply stores. It is essentially a Ping-Pong ball halved and put back together with electric connections. The facilitator should instruct participants to hold hands in a circle and have each person (being careful not to touch one another) touch one of the metal connections. It is important that this is skin to skin contact, but the ball will glow and make a noise. This is a great opportunity to talk about the energy and support that is flowing between us

all. Have someone across the circle drop their hands, and the ball will stop glowing, as the electric circuit is severed. This is a great way to talk about mutual support for one's goals and how we can help hold one another to a higher standard.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted how the six phases of Appreciative Education can be utilized to facilitate diversity training sessions that focus on building on the best of participants. This non-threatening approach to diversity allows the diversity training facilitators to establish a safe environment for participants (Disarm) and gives participants the opportunity to learn more about themselves and each other (Discover). This solid foundation is the basis for participants to begin dreaming about how their organization can become even more inclusive (Dream). Once that dream has been established, participants then have the opportunity to co-create a plan for implementing the dream (Design). Participants will then carry out the plan with the help of project mavens (Deliver) and afterwards participants will be encouraged to continue to raise their expectations of what the group can accomplish together (Don't Settle). We posit that an appreciative approach to diversity will combat diversity fatigue and create a more open and inclusive environment for all people.

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