Diversity and Conflict: What is the Conversation?

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Abstract

Increasing diversity in the profession has been an important focus of recruitment and retention initiatives for quite some time. However, despite these initiatives and programs, diversity in LIS has not changed significantly. Given this lack of change, it might be a good idea to consider some of the potential institutional barriers to diversity. Among these is the role of conflict in diversity, both as a concept and in regards to initiatives and programs. Diversity is generally represented as a positive and enriching process, which while true, also only represents one aspect of diversity initiatives. One important aspect of diversity is that it is the identification of difference. This difference generally necessitates some sort of change from the status quo, which creates feelings of uneasiness, insecurity, and discomfort. Change is a process that in order to be successful requires questioning of assumptions, acceptance of temporary instability, and increased tensions, all of which generally result in conflict. While conflict is discussed in the LIS literature, the role of conflict in diversity is not an issue that is often addressed in LIS literature as conflict is not often perceived as part of diversity programs or initiatives.

There are many probable reasons for the minimal discussion of conflict in relation to diversity initiatives. Conflict on its own is not a popular topic because conflict is uncomfortable, scary, and often seen as a part of failure. In comparison, diversity initiatives are presented as positive actions and investments in the future. Hence, connecting conflict with diversity initiatives may seem like setting up for failure rather than planning for success. It may also seem as if the organization is creating excuses for failure and perpetuating or supporting the status quo by planning for conflict within the diversity initiative. Diversity is presented as good and planning for problems may seem counter effective.

In order to try to address these issues, the research will focus on the presentation of these concepts – diversity, change and conflict – within the LIS literature. The results will be analyzed in order to address questions such as: How are the concepts defined? How is the process of introducing diversity initiatives represented? How are successful programs described? What role, if any, does conflict play in the process? How well are the diversity, change and conflict connected within the LIS literature? Additionally, the research will also include excerpts from interviews with ethnic minority students in LIS discussing their views of diversity and what they view as challenges to introducing and promoting diversity within LIS.