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**DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AS THE KEY FACTOR OF SUCCESS OF
FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES – CASE STUDY**

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It is a requirement of the ever-changing world that students of public and non-public schools are prepared for changes occurring in their environment, especially in terms of adults in needs of finding their place on the labour market once again. The paper presents suggestions in relation to diversity management at a further education collage in regard to students and teachers, based on the example of the school in Żywiec.

Keywords: *diversity management, human resources management, management in education, adult education, educational services.*

Introduction

The concept of the educational system in modern Poland is often misleading. Uniform educational standards established in all schools and the specific division into educational stages may create a false impression of limiting creativity and innovativeness in regard to both teachers and students. It could be said that such schools have no room for diversity. The opponents of this view may consider it a misrepresentation of the actual state of affairs. Systematization of education is needed, as it provides all students with equal opportunities and possibilities of gaining knowledge, while teachers working at the same educational stages are given similar duties (Pilich, 2015). Therefore, it may be assumed that legislation grants equal opportunities to schools, teachers and students. It should be considered whether,

in a way, the concept of equal opportunities in terms of access to education, which in practical terms translates into gaining knowledge and new qualifications, means meeting the basic objective of diversity management. However, in order to understand this process, we should analyze the term diversity and diversity management. Over the last twenty years, a dynamic growth in popularity of diversity could be observed, both among academics in the fields of social and economic sciences and humanities, as well as among high-level national and EU officials. Diversity can be understood as a collection of noticeable and invisible features which diversify the society and which make each human being unique (Loden, 1996). We may also refer to a simpler definition of diversity as a collection of people's distinguishing features (Walczak, 2011).

Upon analysing those two definitions and literature on the subject, it may be concluded that the differentiating features include: character, willpower, determination, education, manners, mindset, etc. Whereas the visual factors include: race, gender, hair colour, height, age, and sometimes even past conditions or injuries. By combining both groups of differentiating features it is clear that all people seem to be the same, but they are in fact different. There are multiple concepts which deal with the complexity of the issue of diversity in regard to human resources. However, the one motioned above may be the most appropriate in the scope of this subject. Therefore, we should pay particular attention to the essence of diversity management, which was defined by Wziątek-Staśko as the manner of shaping awareness and mutual respect of sociodemographic differences within the society, which may translate into tangible benefits in certain cases (Wziątek-Staśko, 2012).

1. Characteristics of diversity at a further education college for adults

Similarly to people, schools vary among each other. Some differences are visually apparent: the number of students, size of the building, accomplishments achieved, type of the educational system; whereas the invisible elements include: the potential of the students, creativity and the experience of teachers. It is therefore clear in both examples referred to above that the human being plays the key role. Nevertheless, the material presented focuses on diversity and methods of its management in schools which provide tuition to adults wishing to obtain professional qualifications. The establishment of further education colleges in Poland is governed by the act on the educational system (1991). Colleges, similarly to universities, are not restricted by the law in terms of the upper age threshold of their students. Similarly to higher education studies, in order to be admitted, the student

must have completed secondary education. However, unlike higher education studies, the secondary school-leaving examination certificate (Polish Maturity Certificate) is not required. The main objective for the establishment of further education colleges in Poland, similarly to the Czech Republic (Pochankova, 2012), is to provide secondary school graduates who do not intend to continue their education at the university level with opportunities to obtain professional qualifications in their chosen occupation in which the school is authorised to provide training and tuition. College education provides an opportunity for raising professional qualifications of persons who are forced to gain new professional qualifications and whose living conditions do not enable them to enrol at undergraduate or postgraduate university courses. All Polish schools which provide postsecondary training, whether public or not, receive grants from the aid fund upon fulfilment of all legal requirements, awarded by the competent local government body in accordance with the act on the educational system (1991) and the act on public finances (2009). However, in practical terms, many colleges, especially non-public ones which provide extramural education, collect additional fees from course participants. The decision to collect fees lies directly in the hands of the authority running the institution and requires conclusion of a civil-law agreement on provision of educational services. An element of diversity management tactics used by colleges which provide tuition in specific professional fields is to employ teachers who practice the given profession themselves and at the same time hold higher education degrees. The combination of theorist and practitioner teachers, often without teaching background, enables students to become familiar with the latest trends in the specific field in terms of technological developments, legislation and

the market situation in regard to the profession they are training in. This practice is commonly used at higher education institutions and in former vocational schools. It is not an innovative method, but certainly it enables students to acquire knowledge necessary to be better prepared for their future work compared to systems based purely on solving tests. Thanks to the above, further education college graduates become more attractive candidates on the labour market and are able to achieve satisfactory employment faster.

2. Diversity management in regard to collaboration of teachers and students

The primary person responsible for diversity management at any school is the Principal. Their task is to create model diversity policies for the entire institution and to coordinate further changes. In modern schools, the aim of the Principal is no longer to supervise but to guide (Knap-Stefaniuk, Sapiński, 2015). Enforcing personal views without external consultation and excessive control over their practical implementation may have reverse effects. It should be mentioned that the introduction of a higher number of students in various courses run by the school has improved the admission rate.

Students can provide advice on such matters as:

- introducing new areas of study/courses,
- creating an advertising strategy which promotes the school at specific times,
- selecting school partners in regard to practical training,
- operation of the supervisory board which assesses the teachers' work in a given semester and academic year,
- organisation of academic projects and events held at the school and externally,
- organisation of the academic year and course schedules.

Thanks to the variety of opinions in regard to the examples described above, the School

Principal, while taking into account the views of the students in the process of school management, is able to eliminate threats relating to, for instance:

- frequent modifications of the schedule, which are a waste of their time,
- selection of inappropriate companies to provide internships for students,
- unfavourable selection of advertising channels which will not be successful, which results in financial losses incurred by the school,
- employment of teachers who, despite their qualifications, do not fulfil their tasks in an appropriate manner,
- unfair treatment of students nominated for various awards which are not always related to their academic accomplishments,
- shortcomings resulting from a generic approach in regard to new market trends.

In order to better explain the issue, surveys have been conducted at Mother Teresa of Calcutta Further Education College in Żywiec with 200 participants. The study group comprised of 140 women aged between 19 and 65, and 60 men aged between 21 and 65. 190 respondents were holders of secondary education degrees with school-leaving certificates (*matura*), while the remaining 10 were holders of higher education postgraduate degrees, including one person who had completed a former 5-year engineering course. The basic task of the survey was to provide a personal definition of diversity. Many answers referred to respecting the rights of women and homosexuals. According to one curious answer, it was "a requirement imposed on Poland by the European Union". Based on the above, we can see that adults are often prone to media manipulation due to the lacks of knowledge in terms of the subject. 14 papers submitted lacked an answer to this question. The second question asked how should school promote diversity? Around 75% of answers featured references to

diversification of teaching methods, various additional classes, foreign teachers, conferences and trips not always related to the curriculum. This is a satisfactory answer, especially in the context of the implementation of educational programmes which go beyond the basic mandatory curriculum. By analysing the answers to the first two questions it may be assumed that thanks to the additional activities offered by the college in the form of academic conferences on national and international level held in collaboration with partner universities in Poland and abroad, the students of the college in question have begun to consider the issues related to diversity, such as meeting people who represent other nationalities and cultures, as a natural occurrence, i.e. a non-distinguishing feature. Therefore, it may be concluded that the basic differentiating factors such as age, gender, race, skin colour and ethnicity no longer pose a challenge, and thanks to efficient diversity management, students know how to make use of such opportunities

- by holding joint videoconferences on specific subjects with their peers from Ukraine, Slovakia, India,

- by organizing special days to promote other countries and their cultures in order to make the local community aware of the benefits of healthy co-operation,

- by using certain organizational and innovative solutions, within the environment of the college referred to, which they have learnt about during student exchange programmes.

While noticing the abovementioned resourcefulness of students who make efficient use of broadly defined diversity with

positive effects on both sides, we should consider the question which illustrates the attitude of the survey participants towards issues related to broadly defined diversity that they would consider difficult to introduce in the school environment. They include, for instance, matters which promote the diversity of sexual behaviours, which, in the case referred to herein, offend the students' feelings and religious values promoted by the college through its work, as well as the matter of introducing students with certain shortfalls to the professional training environment, as it may cause gross discomfort for such students in their future work. In regard to the abovementioned matters, it should be stated that the school is friendly and treats all people referred to in both examples above with respect, as diversity also entails an exchange of views which may not always be approved by us personally. Due to the extensive nature of the research material and the subject matter itself, the paper does not cover all related issues.

Conclusion

Diversity management in school is linked to resourcefulness of its students, the Principal and the teaching staff, who, as intermediaries, must collaborate with both sides. The School Principal, as the leader, needs to effectively guide the facility towards more favourable conditions for the development of students and teachers, and thus the entire school as an institution, which often happens at the expense of guidelines which may bring about temporary benefits (Ackoff, 1993). Therefore, the success of efficient diversity management at school lies in good exemplary conduct and awareness of the correct conduct.

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