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Adult Education Amidst Dual Pandemics: Community College Survival

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Traditionally, community colleges were designed to offer a variety of adult education programs to meet the needs of its myriad student body members (Miller et al., 2016). Cyril Houle (1972, as cited in Brockett & Donaghy, 2005) defined adult education as

> the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, groups, or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. (p. 32)

Its foci have included educating recent high school graduates, providing high school equivalency training for returning adult learners, as well as certificate and vocational training programs. Over the past 15 to 20 years, the reputation of community colleges has vastly improved because the caliber of instructors has improved. Many schools now require their professors to have advanced degrees in their chosen fields (Education Corner, 2020).

Based upon this definition, scholarship about adult educators would not only include instructors of adult learners but the learners themselves who engage in self-directed and motivated learning. Who, then, can be identified as an adult educator? For the purposes of this writing, because most adult educators work in a separate division or department, adult educators will be limited to instructors of adult learners at community colleges.

Below, we examine how these field experts, adult educators at an urban community college, cope with and persist in the face of dual pandemics: COVID-19 and systemic racism. We delve into the imminent requirements they faced turning in-person instruction to distance learning platforms at a

moment's notice, how they dealt with claims of racial disparity in doing so, and how the resurgence of racial unrest across the country challenged not only their own values and beliefs but how these events impacted their ability to teach and interact with their diverse students. We also examine their ability to maintain their own wellbeing amidst these major atrocities and provide recommendations intended to help educators (and institutions) simultaneously maintain their mental, physical, and emotional health and continue to educate adult learners in ways that dismantle the inequities borne of systemic racism.

ADULT EDUCATION PRE-PANDEMIC

Education and learning are fluid activities that occur in various modalities: we learn through our senses both consciously and unconsciously. Advances in technology afford the opportunity to 'research' information from anywhere, at any time. Classroom learning is but one facet of education. Adult learners, some of whom may have been out of the classroom for many years, have additional worries including, lack of confidence about returning to new and different classrooms, use of new and often unfamiliar technology, and adding another area of focus into their busy lives that needs to be managed. Yet, these sources of worry are the very things that can provide positive benefits. Meeting new people, discussing new topics, and hearing different perspectives, learning new skills - especially technological, and honing time management and discipline skills, all contribute to higher levels of confidence, increased mental stimulation, and ultimately, better health outcomes (Ashford University, 2017).

Often, adult learners are seeking new or increased skills, or are looking to increase their income potential; health and well-being are not conscious intentions. What adult learners are seeking is the very aim of education: economic mobility and social adherence, meaning, use of skills and training for societal innovation and advancement (Field, n.d.). The National Coalition for Literacy ([NCL], 2021) indicates that adult learners make up the population of the working poor and job seekers comprising 64% of adults in the workforce with little to no academic skills. Additionally, youth between the ages of 16-24 represent approximately 5.5 million who are either not enrolled in school or unemployed help to make up the population of adult learners when choosing to return to school (NCL, 2021). Community colleges are often the institutions of choice for adult learners because of their vast offerings of degree-seeking, certificate, and continuing education courses and programs. Many adult learners are employed and/or take care of families and the flexible schedules of community colleges allow them to continue to take care of their responsibilities while furthering their education (Pew Research Center, 2016).

More often than not, the composition of educational classrooms, especially for adult learners, is made up of individuals who identify as People of Color (POC), and who are at the lower levels of socioeconomic status (Pew Research Center, 2016). In 2019, the Association of Community Colleges reported that Black and LatinX students represented the largest proportion of community college enrollment in 2017 (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2019). African Americans and LatinX individuals are less likely than their White counterparts to pursue lifelong learning because when faced with maintaining a family and/or economic challenges, most choose work over school. When they do, however, choose educational attainment, they are more

likely to look to community colleges and postsecondary adult education (Gandara, 2017; Idoko, 2018; NCL, 2021). In the community college setting, adult educators have the responsibility of instilling in these non-traditional learners a sense of self-efficacy and self-advocacy so that they may achieve the goals and objectives they come to school seeking. One challenge faced by both educators and learners is how to forward this process when individuals vary across demographic identities, specifically race.

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Community colleges are uniquely situated, in that their doors are generally open to all, and in addition to offering a broad swath of educational programming, they can tailor their offerings to meet the needs of the adult learners in their community (Tull, 2015). Given this, adult learning populations in community colleges represent a diversity of age, gender, ability, race, and ethnicity (Tull, 2015). This level of diversity presents community colleges with a challenge, as well as an opportunity to promote and cultivate a climate not only of diversity but also of equity and inclusion.

Diversity Advocacy

Corinne Community College (3C: pseudonym to maintain confidentiality) is part of a large, urban university system in the northeast region of the US. The institution is comprised of diverse students, faculty, and staff, and yet, has historically been troubled by complaints of bias, discrimination, and microaggression, corroborated by research data about the campus climate and individual experiences (Bing et al., 2020). Questionable decisions about leadership choices, committee membership, and even promotions among faculty and staff have been viewed as continued practice of systemic racism. Heretofore, calls for change have gone largely unheeded. Of late, however, some college administrators have begun to ask for collaborative efforts to be undertaken with leaders among the faculty and staff to help mitigate the thinly-veiled pain and hostility harbored by staff and faculty of color, many of whom have been on the receiving end of racism, discrimination, and bias at the institution.

Some of the school's top leaders are looking for ways to connect with the various groups and voices around campus to promote equity and inclusion. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, the leadership has met with key campus constituents to ascertain the bias and discrimination experienced by marginalized and underrepresented groups; programming has been sanctioned to promote the institution's goal of equity and inclusivity; and strategies and action plans that the college will undertake are being implemented with the intention of righting historical wrongs.

This initiative of diversity advocacy has been the first step in an intentional design to bring together varied voices to address the historic inequities experienced at 3C and is necessary if the institution is to be successful in its efforts to maintain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. According to Bing et al. (2020), "diversity is not just about the numbers; inclusion is not just being around different people; rather, the intentional integration of variegated thoughts, histories, and traditions that provide nuance to educational environments is paramount" (p. 99).

ADULT EDUCATION MID- (DUAL) PANDEMICS

Over the past several years, challenges, such as declining college enrollment, economic downfalls, and budget cuts threatened the vitality of community colleges. However, the outbreak of a global health pandemic was not something that could have been anticipated, nor could anyone have predicted the catastrophic impact it would have, specifically on educational systems. As a result of the coronavirus - COVID-19 - adult educators found themselves in a whirlwind of transformation and transition that has forever changed the face of education provision.

Pandemic: COVID-19

In January 2020, America, along with many other countries around the world, began hearing reports of an outbreak of a coronavirus that had begun in December 2019, in Wuhan, China (Dong & Bouey, 2020; Yao et al., 2020). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and departments of health all across the nation, predictions about the rapid spread of this highly infectious and dangerous virus that contributed to the interruption of travel, work, school, and business, abounded (CDC, n.d.). In an effort to minimize the spread of the deadly disease, colleges and universities assessed international travel and study abroad programs, calling home faculty and students, and travel to and from countries designated by the CDC as contagion hotspots were prohibited; measures were instituted to test and quarantine students and faculty returning from affected areas (CDC, 2020).

Nationwide, as the spread of the virus threatened the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff, higher education grinded to a halt. With federally mandated mass closures of colleges and universities, adult educators were faced with making a rapid transition to remote, online, and distance education with little to no preparation time. Adult educators' proclivity for traditional face to face learning was fractured by the sudden onset of a new environment: remote learning (Lomicka, 2020). Shifting to online platforms at the start of the academic semester for 3C faculty was challenging. Synchronous and asynchronous methods of teaching and learning, for students and faculty, created a sense of vulnerability that still lingers today.

In March of 2020, postsecondary institutions were faced with the sudden challenge of suspending all in-person activities, including live, classroom instruction, and closing their doors to students, fully converting to remote, online distance learning. At this time, Corinne Community College, along with most other colleges and universities across the country, implemented an exhaustive transition to distance learning. For 3C faculty and staff, updates were provided with public health information on the threat and spread of the novel coronavirus within the college community. While no reported cases were presented, information was disseminated to 3C faculty outlining the capacity and infrastructure being implemented to provide online education and support to students during the imminent university-wide closure. An immediate university-wide recess was implemented for faculty to assess didactical practices designed for the remainder of the academic school year.

The transition for adult educators at 3C would require an expeditious conversion to synchronous learning. Traditional methods of pedagogy were replaced with the fragmented architecture of online learning. Faculty and staff were faced with the struggle of navigating remote learning with little to no training or support. Access to technology, environments conducive to online learning, and the lack of supportive services made this transition difficult for underrepresented and disadvantaged students from a myriad of diverse backgrounds, facing drastic inequities in economic wealth and access that highlighted the devastating effects of the dual pandemics that have plagued the nation in recent months.

During this time of transition preparation, 3C faculty and staff collectively responded to the ultimate call to action by supporting and accommodating students in areas of mental health and well-being, enrollment, advisement, and deadline extensions for exams, assignments, and internships. Alterations in traditional pedagogical practices resulted in faculty and students being forced to acclimate to new technological platforms, such as Blackboard/Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, to name a few.

Counseling and mental health support services were made available to students experiencing difficulty coping with the stress and anxiety of the virus. Initially, faculty and staff were allowed to work remotely from home based on documented recommendation from a health care provider but antithetical to the support provided to students was the consideration of the psychosocial and socio-emotional needs of faculty and staff who had to consider their own health and safety, and that of their families.

Not only has the impact of COVID-19 highlighted disparities in health, access to healthcare, education, and race, it has also highlighted a system of injustice that impacts underrepresented groups of minoritized individuals, particularly adult students, and educators (Pew Research Center, 2017). Adult education will forever be marred by the devastating effects of the pandemic in ways that have revealed inequities in health, access to healthcare, technology, and education as adult learners contended and managed with forced social isolation, mental health issues, an abysmal economic future (within a fractured financial market), and calls for social justice in the wake of national unrest (Verma et al., 2020). While community colleges play a vital and prominent role within local communities by providing post-secondary education to adult learners, the prominence of racism was magnified in academia as both adult learners and educators managed and adapted to the life-threatening challenges imposed by the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism.

Pandemic: Systemic Racism

In the middle of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has once again exposed the blatant health inequities, discrimination, and racist practices experienced by poor, low-income communities of color, the killing of George Floyd highlighted the long-term effects of systemic racism and its devastating impact on the lives of minoritized individuals; the pandemic of racism. The lived experiences of Black people have been marred by systemic racism since the first enslaved Africans were brought upon what would become American shores. Their existence has been constructed by legislation that made them property of White slave owners, criminalized their access to learning,

employment, and their lack thereof, and refused them rights afforded to White citizens, including the basic necessities of life (Tate, 1997).

Systemic racism has been a pandemic long before it was labeled as such in the spring of 2020. The world, and America specifically, was reeling from the insidious nature of the COVID-19 coronavirus which was quickly deemed a pandemic because of its global destruction of life. Not until, example upon example of the lives of Black Americans - many of whom were innocent and/or unarmed - being taken at the hands of White individuals, some who were sworn to protect and serve, did the nation begin to take notice. Not until daily protests across American cities became relentless and global citizens marched, kneeled, or raised fists in solidarity, did the clarion call sound that this too was a pandemic, marked by the surreptitious nature of the callous disregard for, and destruction of life; Black lives specifically.

Black Lives Matter

"Black Lives Matter" is not only a chant heard around the world, or just the focal point of murals on streets and walls, but it is a movement highlighting that the lives of Black people in America (and by extension across the world) are not expendable (BLM, n.d.). Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a collective activist movement that was founded in 2013 by three Black women -Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi - in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-year old Trayvon Martin (BLM, n.d.).The use of Black Lives Matter has been widely used in reference to the activist movement, a slogan and/or hashtag, and the recent protests across the world as a result of racial injustices. In a 2017 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 55% of Americans say they either strongly support or somewhat support the Black Lives Matter movement, with 34% opposing the movement. While Black Lives Matter is a social justice movement with a mission to dismantle White supremacy, structural racialization, and to mobilize Black and minoritized communities to fight against injustices, it is but one cog in the wheel of social equity.

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At the crossroad of addressing the evident global health and racial pandemics is the manner in which educators deal with structural racialization. Powell (2013) denoted structural racialization as a process that examines the uneven distribution of opportunities accentuated by the "fluid and dynamic nature of race" (p. 1). The BLM Movement is crucial to "imagining and creating a world free of anti-Blackness, where every Black person has the social, economic, and political power to thrive" (BLM, n.d.). Adult educators, regardless of their opposition to or support of the Movement, would do well to incorporate its tenets into their pedagogy and curricula, to promote equity and inclusivity among their students; teaching them a 'new normal".

The Wellbeing of Adult Educators

Further investigation into the impact of COVID-19 revealed that faculty are experiencing increased professional isolation; a sense of isolation that is potentially stifling the connectedness

and social interaction between students and faculty, while adjusting to, and dealing with, the psychosocial and socio-emotional toll of the pandemic (Lomicka, 2020; Knight, 2020). Knight (2020) suggests "the onset of the COVID -19 pandemic adds a new layer of complexity to professional isolation" (p. 299). As adult educators struggle to find balance in their personal and professional lives, working remotely has added another layer of exposure to the realities of physical and social distancing. The convergence of personal and professional responsibilities, compounded with rapid increases in COVID-19 related deaths, and the possibility of having to adjust to new technology, has the potential to stifle a faculty member's ability to fully engage in the college community's opportunities for professional development and camaraderie (Knight, 2020).

During this unprecedented time of health risk and civil unrest, faculty members had to manage the many moving pieces of their lives while trying to fully comprehend the magnitude of what was happening in the world, and within the communities in which they serve. Over the past several months, many of them experienced difficulty in juggling homeschooling of young and teenage students, care of and for senior and/or susceptible family members, virtual meetings, navigating student concerns about graduating or finishing the semester, coping with personal loss(es), and grappling to understand the intersectionality of racism and discrimination, all while focusing on staying healthy, mentally and physically.

While mental health has been a top priority for many college and university administrators, COVID has exacerbated its proliferation, producing higher incidences of stress and anxiety among students, staff, and faculty members (Active Minds, 2020; Lederman; 2020). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused attention has been centered on the impact of mental health in the higher educational setting. A recent study conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* (Lederman, 2020), found that in March 2020, 92% of college and university presidents reported being very/somewhat concerned about the mental health of students; 88% reported being very/somewhat concerned about the mental health of employees (Lederman, 2020). At Corinne Community College, the impact of the COVID health crisis created an environment for adult educators contextualized in the burgeoning chasm of mental health and education delivery, while simultaneously necessitating the creation and implementation of varied provision of mental health services to address the needs of its educators.

Concurrently, the continued increase of 3C's cross-campus communications regarding the racial climate, both within its hallowed halls, as well as on the world stage, and the conversations within and among individual campus affinity groups, revealed the depth and breadth of the weight it bears upon, not only POCs, but upon both non-POC and international faculty as well. Those who stand in solidarity with faculty of color are too struggling with the senseless killing of Black Americans, understanding the institutional and systemic inequities and disparities in all facets of life experienced by POCs, and figuring out if, how, and, what to do about it. Among 3C's faculty, mental stress is evident in conversations that flow about excess responsibilities - both personal and work-related, feelings of exhaustion, and the need to 'check out'.

Additional, yet different services, are also needed to address the compounded layers of anxiety, fear, isolation, noise, and trauma bred by the daily local, national, and global protests against racial injustice. Adult educators, learning to unpack their own issues around race must also create

educational environments that support and promote equity, justice, and inclusivity with and for students who have different levels of understanding and experience surrounding these issues. Any one of these concepts alone is complicated and complex, comprehensive, and demanding; added together, they create a recipe for mental and physical exhaustion.

The conflagration of these issues begs the question: how can adult educators effectively provide educational services to their students when their mental health is weighted down under the consequences of these dual pandemics?

ADULT EDUCATION POST-PANDEMIC

The daily operations and functions of colleges and universities will forever be changed due to COVID-19. Navigating in this era of 'new normal' is pushing adult educators to begin thinking of ways to reshape their pedagogy and to integrate factors of health and racial disparities in the classroom, both remotely and beyond. The future costs incurred by higher education institutions across the nation will require not only examining fiscal budgets, and the recruitment and retention of adult educators and students, especially those of color, but also the cost-benefit analysis of centering social equity and social justice.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Adult Education

The impact of COVID-19 on higher education clearly demonstrated the disparities in access to resources necessary to advance education in distance learning platforms. Low-income and immigrant students, like those who attend Corinne Community College, were challenged to maintain their educational pursuits when required to transition to online learning, not only for themselves, but perhaps for children now at home as well. The loss of educational environments, the demands of shared home space and time, and the forced learning and utilization of new and different virtual platforms were daunting for adult learners and educators alike.

Further, cuts in governmental funding and institutional budgetary constraints leading to instructor layoffs, and decreased tuition payments due to declining enrollment trends, stifle the academic success and support of impact of systemic racism on the American educational system has been evidenced through the lenses of such groundbreaking minoritized students. Yet, it is imperative for adult educators to refine and strengthen their pedagogical strategies, to adopt new instructional designs, and to develop new facilitation and communication skills that enhance the learning environment, thereby ensuring access and equity for adult learners. Technology is now a solid fixture in the provision of educational services; the stigma of online learning must be reshaped and re-labeled.

The litigation as school desegregation to affirmative action policies. The current acknowledgement of the continued inequities caused by this treacherous phenomenon has paved the way for reform at all levels in American education; particularly in adult education.

The Impact of Systemic Racism (Black Lives Matter) on Adult Education

The impact of systemic racism on the American educational system has been evidenced through the lenses of such groundbreaking litigation as school desegregation to affirmative action policies. The current acknowledgement of the continued inequities caused by this treacherous phenomenon has paved the way for reform at all levels in American education; particularly in adult education. Colleges and universities are now actively and intentionally creating courses, programs, and certification that address social equity and social justice issues. There are myriad virtual town hall meetings, webinars, and training about the many facets of re-imagining what is taught about racism, anti-Blackness, and bias, how it is taught, and who teaches it.

This pandemic is forcing adult educators to confront their own values, beliefs, biases, and for those to whom it applies, sense of entitlement and privilege, and to figure out how to unlearn generations of false understanding. Then, begin to learn and teach anew ways to value all people, and to ensure that their classrooms (whether remote or in-person) are environments where all voices are heard.

How These Pandemics are Shaping the Future of Adult Education

The impact of COVID-19 on institutions of higher education will be many and varied, including, but not limited to those related to economics, pedagogy, technology, health, and race.

The economic impact of COVID-19 on colleges and universities has and will result in massive cuts to part-time and adjunct teaching faculty members, student support services and programs, in addition to other non-essential operations. Comprehensive reductions in expenditures could potentially have a devastating impact on student enrollment, delivery of classroom instruction, and future financial sustainability (Lederman, 2020). The rippling effects of this economic trajectory could potentially mean the loss of faculty (primarily of color), and/or increased teaching loads for those remaining, crowded classrooms or virtual platforms, which add to the responsibilities of already overburdened instructors, thereby once again, negatively impacting their mental and physical health. Time away from the educational environment needed by these faculty members to address their mental and physical needs will create a cyclical trend impacting the already declining economics of, and educational provision at, institutions of higher education.

Another major factor affecting college and university funding is the decision to hold in-person classes vs remote learning. Students, or more so their parents, may be unwilling to pay for an altered college and campus experience. Declines in campus enrollment will subsequently impact already dwindling tuition. This, too, is a cyclical problem because colleges and universities need the funding to invest in online and remote platforms to continue student engagement and to ensure student success (Lederman, 2020). In-person instruction vs distance learning is highly dependent upon the ability to maintain social distancing mandates and to continually clean and disinfect all used spaces, which, too, requires fiscal consideration.

Concomitantly, the convergence of these dual pandemics has given rise to renewed calls for funding at colleges and universities to address diversity, equity, and inclusion. School leadership, administration, and faculty are being held accountable for their failure to adequately address these issues previously and are being called upon to immediately develop and implement new social equity strategies. Demands are made known that faculty, staff, and student recruitment and

retention efforts must be transparent, equitable, and inclusive, and that institutional pedagogy needs to include not only the voices of various scholars, but instruction must also demonstrate how each topic area impacts or is impacted by social equity and social justice (Democracy and Social Justice, 2020).

It is evident that for adult education, the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of systemic racism have created questions that were not previously thought about, or at least, not to the extent that they now require: How can educational provision be accommodated that ensures the health and safety of faculty, staff, and students? Is online/distance learning an effective and sufficient educational provision medium? How can institutions maintain economic solvency via hybrid or online instruction? Can institutions center mental health and social equity, and how will it be funded? Will institutions need to continually upgrade and/or change technology platforms to meet educational demands? Answers to these questions must be considered critically and in the context of the systems that impact them and are impacted by them. Adult learners, educators, and higher education institutions are faced with several challenges that reflect the forever-changed environment of adult education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities presented adult educators with little to no options on how to facilitate the immediate overhaul of in-person educational instruction to a completely online environment. Creating a digital community of adult learners requires skill, time, and effort, which was not a consideration given the dire circumstances. During the transition to online, remote, and distance learning, adult educators had to manage multiple priorities, including personal and family obligations and professional responsibilities. With very little time for higher education administrations to assess student access to digital tools and resources, faculty were expected to assist in the process of ensuring flexibility in instructional design, assessment, and student engagement. Across the country, faculty diligently worked to create environments of success and engagement, using digital resources, tools, and guides to encourage and support students (Lomicka, 2020).

Having to shoulder the burden of continued educational instruction amid sickness and death, experiencing social distancing and isolation, and witnessing social and racial unrest created challenging, and sometimes unhealthy, environments for adult educators. How could they effectively teach and mentor their students while dealing with their own overwhelming stresses?

In an attempt to address this question, we offer several recommendations for consideration by adult educators and institutions of higher education as a guide to help adult educators manage in the midst of dual pandemics.

Fully Incorporate Adult Educators/Education in Mainstream Academe

Adult learners bring value to higher education, whether in credit-bearing or continuing education divisions (Mackinnon & Floyd, 2011). As self-motivated and self-directed learners, they are educators as well, and particularly in the midst of dual pandemics are among the most vulnerable

in higher education. The impacts and demands of the dual pandemics necessitate the (re)defining of adult educator/education and adoption into mainstream academe, lending credence to the profession while simultaneously utilizing a wider lens with which to view higher education, and providing a broader support collective.

Professional Development Policies & Practices

The move to online learning and teaching evidenced the lack of technological training and experience of many faculty members who were required to provide an almost seamless transition in educational provision. Ongoing professional development would equip adult educators with the skills and expertise needed in the changing face of education (Baker, 2020).

Online Faculty Community

A dedicated platform specifically for faculty to share and exchange resources, pedagogy, and curricula, and as a medium to give and receive support, where issues and concerns can be voiced without fear of reprisal. Baker (2020) notes that such communities, "should be a safe environment where people can express concerns, frustrations and trepidation without the need to engage in impression management" (p. 1).

Mental Health Initiatives

In optimal times, colleges and universities have inadequate resources to address the mental health needs of its staff and faculty. Given the morbid nature of COVID-19 and the detriment it has left in its wake, and the continued trauma of systemic racism, institutions need to invest more funding into helping adult educators mitigate the nefarious and potentially long-lasting effects of the dual pandemics on their psychological well-being.

Difficult Dialogue & Action

Higher education institutions need to create spaces for cross-campus dialogue about social equity and social justice issues that lead to meaningful action, establishing and maintaining equitable and inclusive learning environments. For effective diversity, equity, and inclusion work to occur, open and honest discussions need to take place for adult educators to confront their personal biases, and to learn about and value the experiences of others (Bing et al., 2020)

Laughter

The compounded impact of the dual pandemics has created a diseased sore on the psychosocial well-being of adult educators, that if allowed to fester, will forever alter their psyches. One simple way to ward off this contagion is the gift of laughter. Mounting data is proving the positive short- and long-term effects of laughter (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Among many effects, laughter may relieve and activate stress responses, soothe tension, improve one's mood, and relieve pain. One of the other positive benefits of laughter is that it can be shared with anyone, at any time. Adult educators would do well to engage in laughter, even if only for a few moments, alone or among friends, family, or colleagues to maintain positive mental health.

CONCLUSION

If hindsight is 20/20, then this is the time that America must look back upon its infamous history and begin to see and accept the error of its ways, and to make real and lasting change. The COVID pandemic will not continue in perpetuity, as evidenced by the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. Systemic racism, however, which was woven onto the fabric of this nation, needs to be intentionally eradicated. The nexus of these dual pandemics necessitates systemic and systematic change in all areas of life: nutrition and healthcare, education, business, politics, and the policies that govern them all.

If hindsight is 20/20, then this is the time that America must look back upon its infamous history and begin to see and accept the error of its ways, and to make real and lasting change.

Adult educators are, now more than ever, responsible for developing the understanding, thoughts, and habits of students, and must consciously examine their own beliefs and values as they shape the vision of global individuals who will run the world. The vision must be clear and must be predicated upon the belief that all lives have value, regardless of skin color or national origin. Social equity and social justice have to become the bedrock of education, for it is here that great minds and thinkers are nurtured, and the foundations of society are established and implemented. Adult educators must tout the vision from every classroom, virtual platform, hamlet, and mountaintop because a people without a vision - left in the throes of a racial pandemic - will surely die.

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