

## **A Look at Illiteracy and Diversity**

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Webster's Dictionary defines diversity as "the condition of having or being composed of differing elements: the inclusion of different types of people..." Each of us has had diverse life experiences that have shaped our thoughts, actions, and biases. Do we hold ourselves accountable for developing curricula to represent our commitment to literacy diversity in education?



What does illiteracy look like in programs? Have you ever experienced low survey returns or non-responsive participants? I cannot say for sure, but from my experiences as a high school teacher and literacy tutor, there are similarities between these behaviors and poor literacy skills. Sometimes our printed materials do not match the reading levels of our clients. Illiteracy reports from 2016 show 36 million adults in the United States cannot read, write, or perform basic math beyond a third-grade level. These low literacy levels are also linked to high health care costs and contribute to low literacy levels of children which may lead to higher dropout rates. Aren't these the issues that we address?

As Extension professionals, it is our duty to address issues, find solutions, and respond. We all have the ability to change our point of view and look at the needs of people we serve. Collaborate with health professionals and community groups to discuss social and cultural differences, low literacy, and poverty to create an awareness of how these factors affect how people learn. Review the literature and share these adaptive teaching methods and technology with your partners. When we program, we impact the quality of life for individuals, families and communities.