CURRICULUM INCLUSIVENESS CHALLENGE: RESPONDING TO MULTICULTURALISM AMONG WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT (WED) GRADUATE STUDENTS – A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The U.S. society is generally promoted as a "melting pot" of peoples and cultures. But to what extent is such multiculturalism reflected in its curriculum content for a graduate workforce education and development (WED) program at a Mid-Western university? This descriptive study used a mixed methods design to examine graduate students' perceptions of curriculum inclusiveness for the WED program's course content. Study findings revealed that U.S. minority and international student groups (*Mdn = 4.0*) found that WED content was quite often aligned to the interests of the dominant group (U.S. Caucasians), while the dominant group found this phenomenon occurred sometimes (Mdn = 3.0). Responding to multiculturalism among WED graduate students appeared to present a challenge for a Midwestern university, and by extension, subjected students to much cultural and intellectual bondage. Students' suggestions for improving multiculturalism responsiveness included diversifying/internationalizing WED curriculum content, which is in keeping with multicultural education.

Key Words: Multiculturalism, Curriculum Inclusiveness, Multicultural Education, and Cultural Bondage

Introduction

The customary metaphor of a *melting pot* to describe the U.S. society is interpreted to mean the assimilation of its people from many different lands into one U.S. culture. Recent research reveals an ongoing shift from assimilation to multiculturalism now symbolized as a mosaic or salad bowl containing "…, mixtures of various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics… not being blended together in one "pot"…" (Millet 2009). In the previous "melting pot" metaphor, U.S. tertiary institutions employed multicultural education (ME) to prepare the culturally diverse student population for assimilation into U.S. culture. However, in exploring how ME evolved over four decades, prolific *diversity* author, Gay (2004) observed that the multicultural curriculum is given greater breadth and depth. Curriculum content moved beyond the race specific issue of African Americans to include other minority groups such as Mexicans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians. According to Gay (2004) a future challenge of ME is 'to keep pace with the changing demographic demands of the society and schools it was created to represent and serve' (215). This challenge is addressed in the current study as it asks the question: To what extent is the curriculum content inclusive of the multiculturalism represented in the U.S. society and its students in a graduate workforce education and development (WED) program?

Workforce Education and Development

Workforce education and development (WED) is a U.S. term for a field that has its foundation in vocational education (VE). One of the earliest forms of VE in the U.S. brought by British colonists in the 17th Century was the custom of apprenticeship. Employing a strictly work-based curriculum, apprentices were allowed to learn a trade under the supervision of a master craftsman in exchange for work. Enhancements became necessary to the VE curriculum to include theory and labs along with manual work to meet the labor market needs of the industrialized society of the 1800s (Barlow 1967, Wonacott 2003, Gordon 2003). The passing of the landmark Smith Hughes Act of 1917 in the U.S. prompted the isolation of VE from the academic curriculum, defining it as the "preparation for occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree" (Gordon 2003:15). By 1998, the flagship organization – American Vocational Association (AVA) found in a survey that the term "vocational" was perceived by its members as negative, outdated, and non-academic. Consequently, AVA was changed to ACTE – Association of Career and Technical Education (Gordon 2003).

Subsequent Career and Technical Education (CTE) legislation increasingly required the integration of CTE with academic curricula in developing a highly skilled U.S. workforce for competing in today's global market (U.S. Department of Education 2006). Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) in the U.S. was among the firsts to change the name of its Vocational Educational Studies department to Workforce Education and Development (WED) in the 1990s (Waugh and Ruppel 2004) to reflect the ongoing focus on workforce development echoed in the new legislation and the move away from the "vocational" stigma. SIUC's WED department's mission includes to 'help create a world-class professional and technical workforce based on values and respect for occupational competence, the dignity of work, equal education opportunity, and life-long learning (SIUC 2008). Graduates of the WED program hold such positions as training specialists, human resource and development or workforce development specialists. Preparation for a world-class workforce requires awareness of diverse cultures and perspectives which the current study explores in the WED graduate curriculum.

Growing Student Diversity

Expectations for growing student diversity on U.S. campuses show an increase by 19 percent or to 16 million students by 2015 with the following ethnic breakdown: Hispanics will increase from 10% to 15% and African Americans from 12.8% to 13.2%. But Caucasians will decline from 71% to 63% (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2000). International students enrolling in U.S. universities and colleges have increased by 32% over the past decade. An increase of 5% to 723, 277 international students is reported for the academic year 2010/2011 with China being the leading sending country. The other countries following after China include India, South Korea, Canada, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Venezuela (Open Doors 2011).

At the time of conducting this research at an accredited U.S. Midwestern university, diversity was a core value in achieving its educational mission, which included hosting campus-wide diversity seminars and workshops to enhance faculty cultural competence (Trevino 2007). Known for enrolling the largest number of African American students among the "big five" Illinois national universities (U.S. News and World Report 2007b), the University also has a

large student international student population representing over 100 countries. A breakdown of the University's race/ethnic student enrollment for 2007-2008 was as follows: White (Caucasian) – 14, 559 (69.3%); Black (African American) – 3,132 (14.9%); Hispanic – 653 (3.1%); Asian – 432 (2%); and other (includes international students) – 2,227 (10.6%) (SIUC 2007).

Of greater importance to this study is student ethnicity for the WED master's and doctoral programs (2007-2008) at a U.S. Midwestern univeristy. A breakdown of the ethnic diversity of its WED master's program was as follows: Black (African American) – 55 (25%); White (Caucasian) – 126 (58%); Hispanic – 8 (3%); Asian – 3 (1%); Foreign – 11 (5%); Unknown – 11 (5%) with a total of 214 students. A similar breakdown for WED doctoral students was as follows: Black – 3 (5%); Whites – 41(75%); Foreign – 8 (14%); Unknown – 2 (3%) giving a total of 54 students (SIUC 2007). Ironically, the campus wide Instructor-Course-Evaluation (ICE) did not capture data by student ethnicity, so with such wide disparities in student race/ethnicity numbers, using evaluation data for course improvements could result in the following: the aggregate majority responses (obviously from Caucasians), by default, would be used to effect program changes in favor of the majority group, undermining diversity as core value in accommodating for multiculturalism among the campus student population. Thus, this study specifically examined student perceptions by student groups (majority, minority, and international) of the inclusiveness of curriculum content in responding to their diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural diversity includes differences in race/ethnicity, language, values, customs, attitudes, geographic location, and religious persuasion (Sahin 2003). By extension, multiculturalism in this study's educational context refers to students' diverse cultural backgrounds.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Theoretical frameworks used in analyzing issues concerning educational inequity for culturally and internationally diverse students include ethnocentrism, melting pot theory, critical race theory, critical education theory, and multicultural education. Walker-Tileston (2004) explained that e*thnocentrism* 'is the belief that one's own ethnicity is superior to others' (70). Such a belief is one of the biggest barriers to culturally responsive teaching, especially for minority students like African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians (Gay 2000). The dominance of U.S. centric and Euro-American curricula in U.S. schools and colleges promote a knowledge hierarchy reflective of the ethnocentrism or superiority of western Caucasian culture to that of culturally and internationally diverse students (Mehra and Bishop 2007, Yoso 2002). Guiffrida (2005) found empirical evidence to affirm that 'faculty have also been perceived by students of color as culturally insensitive when they fail to acknowledge or incorporate culturally diverse perspectives into their curricula' (18). In the application of theory to practice, ethnocentrism is not conducive to accommodating responsive curricula for culturally and internationally diverse students.

In contrast to ethnocentrism, the melting-pot theory is based on the assumption that American immigrants from diverse cultures should assimilate and blend into the dominant Western European culture (Walker-Tileston 2004). Yet, in practice, the melting pot theory stifles the

cultural identity of minority students (e.g., African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, Middle Easterners, and Africans). Instead, minority students within the United States should maintain their different cultural identities which help to transform the U.S. into a truly multicultural mosaic or landscape (Millet 2009). Such a mosaic adds cultural currency to U.S. campuses and redounds in benefits for both students and faculty. For instance, a diversified curriculum can help to bridge misunderstandings of students' diverse cultural backgrounds between the dominant majority group and minority student groups (Diamond 1998). In particular, learning transfer would be enhanced from exposure to Non-U.S. settings in curriculum materials for international students. Both near learning transfer (U.S. classroom testing) and far learning transfer (Shrunk 2004) of newly acquired skills and knowledge to their home country work settings would be enhanced. Faculty can develop cultural competence in accommodating for the multiculturalism represented in a diverse student body. Both students and faculty can develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills in having to consider a non-U.S. perspective in their teaching and learning (Smith and Schonfeld 2000). The latter prepares them for the cultural diversity in the 21st Century global workforce.

Critical education theory (CET), critical race theory (CRT), and multicultural education (ME) have also dominated research discourses in unmasking the role of racism and culture bias in U.S. education. Critical education theorists help to unveil the hidden curriculum with its unintended outcomes resulting in, among other things, acceptable mediocrity for minorities (McLaren 2003). Also very critical to their work is unmasking "how descriptions, discussions, and representations in textbooks, curriculum materials, course content, and social relations embodied in classroom practices benefit dominant groups and exclude subordinate ones" (McLaren 2003, 212). The relegating of ethnic minorities to lower-level occupational skills (e.g., hair-dressing and cosmetology) in early U.S. vocational education (late 1800s) is likened to CET (Gordon 2003). With an emphasis on the racial discrimination, CRT unmasks the existence of racism in education and provides strategies for eliminating it in all its forms from the curriculum Yoso 2000).

Notions of CRT include whiteness as a standard of normalcy which only helps to further stereotype minority students in predominantly white schools (DeCuir and Dixson 2004). Bartlett and Brayboy (2006) used CRT to unmask the experiences of specific racial groups. For example, TribalCrit examines educational issues 'resulting not only from the contemporary, liminal positioning of American Indians but also from hundreds of years of abusive relationships between mainstream educational institutions and American Indian communities' (367). As ME was previously discussed in the opening paragraphs, only a look at its role in teacher education is done here. ME attempts to address such inequities in U.S. higher education through teacher education with a current focus on instructor quality. For example, improvements in ME show an emphasis on inclusion of evidence of plans for inclusion of multicultural education in curricula and hands-on practice in culturally diverse classrooms for teacher education (Ladson-Billings 1999). In mirroring this standard, Diamond (1998) in assessing curricula asks the following questions: '…, Whose voices are you listening to? What authorities? Are they only white? Are they only male and European? Or are they multicultural and diverse?' (209 – 210). Inclusive answers to these questions can redound to several benefits for both teachers and students to

include cultural sensitivity and critical thinking (Smith and Schonfeld 2000). Keeping a research pulse on multiculturalism responsiveness of graduate curriculum content so as to avoid the pitfalls of cultural insensitivity and ethnocentrism are implicit in the current study by asking similar questions.

Curriculum Inclusiveness

In keeping with the study context, curriculum inclusiveness is a concerted effort to eliminate cultural bias in higher education curriculum (Diamond 1998). Historically, efforts to achieve curriculum inclusiveness have shown some progress. For instance, a shocking discovery by one history professor at a renowned U.S. University that students believed Africans made no contributions to civilization led to an approval of a campus-wide diversity initiative (Diamond 1998). University administrators, in mandating the approval, required that diversity be made a major curriculum goal in its higher education thrust and that all faculties must present multicultural perspectives in all courses (e.g., literature, art, nursing, business, and economics). Diversity issues included gender, age, social class, race, ethnicity, and disability in the curriculum to help bridge gaps in understanding between students (both young and mature) and faculty of diverse backgrounds. This all inclusive approach had a positive impact on curriculum transformation, and by extension, students' readiness for working in today's diverse workplace (Diamond 1998). Similar success stories are well documented in the New Jersey Project of the 1980s that created an all-inclusive college curriculum for the growing diversity in the student population (Friedman, Kolmar, Flint, and Rothenberg 1996).

Attention to culture bias in curriculum materials was highlighted in a study focused on Preparing Future Faculty (PPF) conducted by Prutt-Logan and Gaff (1999). The PFF program engaged more mature graduate students with higher education career pursuits in preparatory activities for their future various roles such as researcher, teacher, and academic professional. One PFF doctoral student commented on the benefit of the PFF experience and acknowledged "how valuable it was for her to have had the opportunity to examine curricula, syllabi, and text materials with her teaching mentor and revise these materials to eliminate biases" (Pruitt-Logan & Gaff, Fall, 1999:2). Evidently, finding content material that give diverse perspectives aligned to students' diverse cultural background is not difficult but rather takes a more concerted effort to achieve. Similarly, Rehm (2008) study findings of practicing CTE teachers in diverse classrooms of more than 25 different cultures included the following: among the most useful teaching strategies in diverse classrooms were to include content examples representative of diverse student cultures and assign small group tasks to build a sense of community in allowing students from different backgrounds to work together.

Nevertheless, an understanding of curriculum content misrepresenting or avoiding the perspectives of minority groups is important for reversing such trends (Gay 2000, Capella-Santana 2003), especially among the younger students. In an empirical study involving black students' experiences in the Toronto school system, Gumbs-Fleming (2001) reported that 'they [black students] prefer to see characters that are heroes and victors instead of the usual image of Blacks as slaves, servants and "'bad people"' (10). On the other hand, a historical review (early

17th to 20th Centuries) of British colonial school curricula and its effects on the learning experiences of students in West Africa revealed that African learners were not "learning or acquiring skills of immediate relevance to the community, and curricula were aligned with the interests of missionaries and British colonial government as in all colonies in Africa, North and South America, Asia, or the Caribbean" (Ofori-Attah 2006 412). Failing to critically evaluate curricula materials in preparation for culturally diverse classrooms negatively impact students' interest and motivation to learn especially when they are portrayed as negative or inferior characters or presented with irrelevant perspectives in curriculum content. Recent inroads in multicultural education as pointed out in the introduction help to address these issues of inequity in curriculum content, but continuing research such as this study would reveal to what extent such equity exists for culturally diverse students.

A key barrier to curriculum inclusiveness is the issue of US-centric learning material. Results from Mehra and Bishop's (2007) case study of international doctoral students (usually more mature than undergraduate students) in a library and information science (LIS) program revealed their invisibility in curriculum content, despite the fact that most international students pay almost three times the tuition cost of a U.S. student (SIUC 2009). Significant findings from this qualitative study included that LIS international students (10) found the U.S. literature was too "US-centric", ignoring international perspectives that were readily available; and that the nature of LIS called for more collaboration with international counterparts in learning global perspectives, which did not form an integral part of their learning experiences. The latter gives relevance to the current study that examines the curriculum content responsiveness for accommodating graduate students' diverse cultural or multicultural backgrounds in a WED program. Like many authors on the topic of curriculum inclusiveness, Mestenhauser and Ellingboe (1998) recommend infusing the U.S. higher education curriculum as needed with relevant scholarly study material from other minority cultures and international countries, ensuring that international authors are used as far as possible instead of U.S. authors writing about international topics. To this end, the researchers noted the remarks on one U.S. professor: "I became aware of a wide variety of quality global education materials being produced in Great Britain to which I had absolutely no access in the United States due to copyright conventions or lack of an American partner publishing house" (Mestenhauser and Ellingboe 1998:108). However, the rapid pace of globalization fuelled by the Internet makes it's a lot easier to access relevant international materials such as journal articles and books for accommodating international perspectives in curriculum content.

The researcher's experience as an international student pursuing a doctoral degree in Workforce Education and Development (WED) at a Mid-Western University resonates with much of the research discourse in this study's literature review. Moreover, questions on the responsiveness of the higher education curriculum content to multiculturalism among students were quite relevant to a Mid-Western University "diversity" thrust. Finding answers to such questions would help to identify any multicultural gaps in WED curriculum content and suggest improvements for closing these gaps. To this end, the purpose of this study was to examine graduate students' perceptions of the inclusiveness of curriculum content for a WED program in responding to multiculturalism among students at a Mid-Western university.

Method

This descriptive study employed a mixed methods design to examine and interpret students' perceptions on WED curriculum content inclusiveness. The mixed methods design consisted of a combination of the following: the Follow-Up Explanations model that only allows for quantitative data collection in phase one (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007) and the Within-Stage Mixed Method Model design that allow both the collection of closed and open-ended responses simultaniously on the same survey. As such, a combination of these two mixed methods models facilitated concurrent collection of quantitative (closed-ended survey questions) and qualitative (open-ended survey questions) data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). The Follow-up Explanations model was continued in phase two in collecting additional qualitative data in focus groups for explaining the survey quantitative results. The pluralistic appraoch of using not one but a combination of two mixed methods model is supported by the overarching pragmatic paradigm used here mixed methods research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). Relevant peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, scholarly books, professional websites, and Ebsco Host Research online databases were searched using such descriptors like *multiculturalism, curriculum inclusiveness, multicultural education, critical race theory, critical education theory, and cultural bondage*.

Study Population

Study population comprised all WED graduate students (master's and doctoral) with at least one year of continuous enrollment in the WED program, allowing for adequate exposure to the WED curriculum content for answering survey items. A total of 162 students met these criteria for participating in the study according to information requested and supplied by the University's WED department and Student Information System (SIS). No sampling was done but instead a census of the study population to afford the best opportunity to capture the few under-represented culturally diverse groups (e.g., internationals and Hispanic students) in the WED program. Six deductions from this list of 162 students accounted for one exemption (the researcher) and five students used in initially pilot testing the study instrument, bringing the final total of the study population to 157. The ethnic/racial breakdown of the 157 students comprising the study population was as follows: 30 African Americans (19.1%); 11 international students (7%) who represent Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean; 3 unknowns (1.9%), 5 Hispanics (3.18%), 1 Asian American (.64%); and 107 Caucasians (68%).

Instrumentation

Participants were given a self-reported WED Curriculum Responsiveness survey developed from reviewing studies in the literature that measured related constructs such as learning styles, internationalization, and cultural responsiveness. However, no one instrument from these studies measured the exact constructs of interests in the study. As a result, a new self-reported survey was developed from scratch, comprising three separate curriculum responsiveness scales, one of

which was curriculum inclusiveness. Three subject-matter experts (African American, Asian, and Hispanic) reviewed the draft survey for content validity and revisions were made accordingly. In addition, two survey pilot tests were conducted. Firstly, one pilot test was done with a volunteer group outside the study population comprising eight culturally and internationally diverse graduate students who fell just short of being one year in the WED program. Slight inconsistencies in the returning student responses led to a revision in the wording for some survey items. A second pilot test of the revised survey was conducted with the five students extracted from the study population initially and responses were much more consistent when compared to the first pilot test. Taking time to conduct these pilot tests of the study survey, as recommended by Best and Khan (2003), helped to increase its overall reliability.

The Midwestern University's Human Subjects Committee gave approval and permission for accessing student e-mails from the university's student information system. The fillable PDF survey consisting of 26 items included demographic information on ethnic/national origin, gender, graduate status (master's or doctoral), and three separate curriculum responsiveness scales, one of which was curriculum inclusiveness. Participants were required to rank WED curriculum inclusiveness items on a 5-point verbal frequency scale with 1 being 'don't know' and 5 being 'nearly always' on the following aspects:

- Ethnic groups are equitably represented as far as possible in WED content

- Scholarly works of people of color are included

- Perspectives of minority groups are fairly represented

- WED content is diversified, as needed, to facilitate learning transfer to Non-U.S settings

- WED content is aligned to the interests of the dominant majority group (U.S. Caucasians)

Three open ended questions on suggestions for improvements included improving cultural diversity in WED curriculum content were also included at the end of the survey. The Cronbach's alpha for the survey's three curriculum responsiveness scales one of which was Curriculum Inclusiveness resulted in a high internal consistency rating of .850.

The first official administration of the survey sent via e-mail contained a cover letter notifying participants of voluntary participation and assuring confidentiality in data collection. A low response rate on the e-mail survey prompted its conversion to a paper survey for hand distribution in WED courses once students agreed and instructors permitted it. Of the total 157 students surveyed, one student (Hispanic) opted to withdraw, one e-mail was undeliverable, and one e-mail survey was returned blank. The overall response rate was 44% (69 out of 154), which is above the 35% acceptance response rate for survey research (Best and Khan 2003). In controlling for non-response error, a comparison was done on geographic/ethnic origin demographics for respondents and non-respondents.

In keeping with the mixed methods Follow-Up Explanations model, participants from the survey pool were asked to volunteer for follow-up focus groups to collect qualitative data for further explaining survey results (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). A total of 13 participants volunteered representing diverse ethnic backgrounds to include African American, Asian, African, and Caucasian. A minimum for four persons is required for conducting a focus group (Stokes 2003); hence, the composition of the three groups consisted of four, four, and five participants. The researcher moderated the focus groups, having a solid WED background. Consent forms were disseminated for participants' signatures and included a focus group consent statement, purpose of the focus group, assurance of confidentiality/anonymity, and other instructions. The researcher followed an interview protocol using five trigger questions that were previously pilot tested and emerged from the survey findings that needed further explanation. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. Recorded field notes from three observers and verbatim transcription of the video-taped focus groups (each placed in separate folders) reflected pseudo names (e.g., Speaker 1) for participants to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. These procedures meet ethical guidelines required for conducting focus groups (Lindlof and Taylor 2002).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were mainly used to analyze the survey quantitative data for frequency distributions and measures of central tendencies for student demographics and graduate students' perceptions of WED curriculum content inclusiveness. Measures of variability were not done as follow-up focus groups were conducted to further explain emerging differences and similarities in the survey data. No parametric tests were used as the study survey consisted of a census of all study population and not a sample of it, resulting in the study data not being normally distributed (Best and Khan 2003). In this instance, the median was used as it is not affected by extreme values and recommended as the better average to use for the study's ordinal data (Alreck and Settle 1995). Content analysis was used to analyse the open-ended survey responses on suggestions for improvements and the focus group data. Open coding was used initially in reading and underlining chunks of text that show coherent meaning relevant to the open-ended questions. An example of an underlined chunk was the following: include more class discussion. Simultaneously, in vivo codes grounded in "what was said" in the underlined text were affixed to arrive at emerging patterns, themes, and/or categories in the data. In order to ensure that in vivo codes were mutually exclusive, a constant comparison to previous ones was done to avoid overlapping.

The final emerging patterns and themes by respondents' ethnicities from these qualitative data were observed and a quantified summary of trends was done by the researcher. Member-checking of focus group summaries and survey open-ended responses with participants did not reflect any disparities, thus helping to verify the accuracy of these findings and improving the validity and reliability of the study results. Like other cross-cultural studies using the Follow-Up Explanations Model, "the present study led to a multi-method approach to allow triangulation of the methods and cross-validation of the data" (Aldridge et al 1999:220). Cross-checking and further explaining the quantitative survey data with qualitative data (triangulation) help to

increase the reliability and validity of the survey findings as confirmed by Best and Khan (2003).

Results

Demographics

The census survey of the 157 participants resulted in one request for withdrawal bringing the final total population to 156 of which one survey was returned blank. A total of 69 students completed the survey comprising 39 (56%) females and 30 (44%) males with a graduate status showing 41 (59%) master's and 28 (41%) doctoral students. All respondents had one or more years of continuous enrollment at the Midwestern University's WED program. A further breakdown of 69 respondents by student groups showed the following: 11 (100%) or all international students; 41 (38%) U.S. majority group (mainly Caucasians); and 17 (44%) from the U.S. minority student group. The international students' geographic origins were as follows: Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The U.S. minority student population group comprised 15 (50%) African Americans, one (100%) Asian American, and one "Other" or Unknown (33%). Available data on survey non-respondents show 66 (62%) from the majority group (mainly Caucasians) and 19 (56%) from the minority group (mainly African Americans). A comparison of student demographic ethnic/geographic origin for respondents was done to control non-response bias. No international non-respondents occurred and no substantial differences appeared among U.S. majority and minority respondents and non-respondents for ethnic/geographic origin, thus controlling for non-response error among these student groups.

Research Question and Survey

Table 1: Graduate Students' Frequency Ratings on WED Curriculum Inclusiveness (N=69)

Frequency of Responses

WED Curriculum Aspects	Group	*N*	*Mdn*	NA	QO	ST	AN	DK
Ethnic groups are equitably represented as far as possible in WED content.	MAJ	41	4.0	6	18	10	4	3
	MIN	17	4.0	3	8	4	1	1
	INT	11	3.0	1	3	3	3	1
Scholarly works of people of color are included.	MAJ	41	3.0	8	12	9	0	12
	MIN	17	3.0	2	2	8	3	2
	INT	11	3.0	0	3	4	3	1
Perspectives of minority groups are fairly represented.	MAJ	41	4.0	10	15	9	3	4
	MIN	17	3.0	1	4	9	3	0

		N	Mdn	NA	QO	ST	AN	DK
	INT	11	3.0	0	3	7	1	0
WED content is diversified, as needed, to facilitate learning transfer to Non-U.S. settings.	MAJ	41	3.0	4	11	9	5	12
	MIN	17	4.0	3	9	4	0	1
	INT	11	3.0	0	4	5	2	0
WED content is aligned to the interests of the dominant majority group.	MAJ	41	3.0	5	8	8	10	10
	MIN	17	4.0	4	8	2	1	2
	INT	11	4.0	3	6	1	0	1

Note. MAJ = U.S. Majority, MIN = U.S. Minority, INT = International; NA = Nearly Always, QO = Quite Often, ST = Sometimes, AN = Almost Never, DK = Don't Know

The primary research study question was as follows: To what extent is the WED curriculum content inclusive of the multiculturalism represented in U.S. society and students in a graduate workforce education and development (WED) program? Multiculturalism is likened to students' diverse cultures backgrounds that should be accommodated by inclusive curriculum content. Students' culturally and internationally diverse backgrounds appeared, as a whole, to have influenced their responses. The median value in Table 1 includes all the *don't know* responses which mostly came from the majority group. As a whole, U.S. majority students found the aspect of perspectives of minority groups being fairly represented to occur quite often (*Mdn* = 4) in WED content, whereas U.S. minority and international students found this to occur sometimes (*Mdn* = 3) as shown in Table 1. The latter indicate that sometimes perspectives of minority groups are not fairly represented in WED content.

Again, international and minority student groups reflected similar perceptions on the level of frequency with which WED content was diversified, as needed, to facilitate learning transfer to Non-U.S. settings as depicted in Table 1. However, U.S. majority students found this to occur sometimes (*Mdn* = 3.0) with the highest number of students (12) responding *don't know*, while U.S. minority students felt this happened quite often. In contrast, U.S. minority and international student groups found the inclusiveness aspect of WED content being aligned to the interests of the dominant majority group happened quite often (Mdn = 4.0), while U.S. majority students found this to occur sometimes (*Mdn* = 3.0) with the largest number of majority students (10) indicating they did not know. The divergence in students' perspectives for this inclusiveness aspect suggests that a gap exists for the equitable representation of interests of the U.S. minority and international students but not for the U.S. majority student group. Notably, none of the student groups found any aspect of curriculum inclusiveness occurred nearly always ("5" ranking) in WED content as shown in Table 1. All three student groups found that scholarly

works of people of color were included in WED curriculum content sometimes, but the largest number of majority students (12) did not know if this was so.

Content analysis of students' open-ended responses to the survey question on how WED curriculum content could be improved to reflect the cultural diversity of the population in the U.S. included one common theme. All three student groups felt that WED curriculum content should be diversified to become inclusive of the ethnic groups represented in the U.S. society and student population. Students suggested three main ways in which curriculum diversification can be achieved: (1) include more inclusive/diverse content (23 students responding); (2) include more cultural diversity courses (7 students responding); and (3) include more HRD courses (3 students responding). Sample responses shared much similarity across student groups, often described as 'more diverse content.'

One U.S. majority student asked and answered the question in caps to make a point: '… WHAT IS THE WHITE TO NON-WHITE RATIO FOR PROFESSORS? NO ASIANS, NO HISPANICS… AND MOSTLY OLD (60+). CURRICULUM IS DIRECTLY INFLUENCED BY THE INSTRUCTOR. DIVERSE FACULTY = DIVERSE CURRICULUM.' One U.S. minority student highlighted the need for more diversity courses in stating, '… to me Caucasians [*sic*] instructors only deal with safe topics and don't open up to discuss content that's prevalent to minority students.' An international student felt that "…the contributions of local Black, Asian, and Hispanic scholars among others should be given proper recognition.' Yet, another international student felt that inclusion of HRD courses could be achieved if 'they [administrators]… introduce cultural related topics specifically in the HR courses.' These sample responses echo the overall perceptions expressed by the students responding to the question on improving cultural diversity in WED curriculum content in the study survey. Evidently, the main improvement suggested that WED curriculum content should be diversified supports the quantitative survey finding that WED content was mostly aligned to the interest of the majority group (U.S. Caucasians).

Follow-Up Focus Group

In keeping with the mixed methods Follow-up Explanations model used in the research design for this study, several distinguishing and non-distinguishing survey results were identified for follow-up in focus groups to gain a deeper insight into these results. In addition, the focus group data also helped to cross-check the suggestions for improvements for bias as these were included on the same survey and not as a separate semi-structured one. A total of 13 participants volunteered representing multicultural backgrounds to include African American, Asian, African, and Caucasian. The composition of the three groups consisted of four, four, and five participants that included at least one international student, one minority student, and one majority student in each of the three groups. Students' specific ethnic/geographic origin is not mentioned to protect their identities given the sensitive nature of the research topic. The researcher moderated the focus groups, having a solid WED background.

WED content was found to be aligned to the interests of the dominant majority group quite often (*Mdn* = 4.0), according to the U.S. minority and international student groups' survey results. Several comments on the open-ended survey responses suggested that diversifying the faculty would improve curriculum inclusiveness. These results indicated that students perceived diverse faculty as being more readily able to improve curriculum inclusiveness than U.S. majority faculty. Lack of inclusiveness in curriculum content affects culturally and internationally diverse students' motivation to learn as revealed in the literature (Asher 2007, Gay 2004, Mehra and Bishop 2007). Further insight into students' learning experiences in this context can help to better understand their need for more diverse faculty and curriculum.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, students were not asked outright why they wanted more diverse faculty in initiating focus group discussions, but rather in a more general way were asked: *Judging from your exposure to the WED curriculum, how would you characterize or describe WED curriculum inclusiveness?* Curriculum inclusiveness means a concerted effort to eliminate cultural bias in higher education curriculum. Other questions emerging from the flow of focus group discussion included the following: *If there's much not diversity, what is there [in the curriculum content]? Does the culture bias affect your ability to master the content?* In responding to the latter question, an international student indicated that the culture bias affected her motivation to contribute to the in-class discussion as she felt that the majority of Caucasians students may not have been interested in listening but nevertheless, she shared her views to get rid of some baggage. Overall, participants' suggestions for improvements in the focus group discussions parallel those found in the survey results. The focus group suggestions for improvements helped to cross-check the open-ended responses for same on the survey results in verifying that no apparent biases existed between the two, increasing the reliability and validity for the results on suggestions for WED curricular improvements.

In most instances, students included the solution for increasing international perspectives in their focus group contributions on curriculum inclusiveness. This sample response from a U.S. majority student echoed a common view on diversifying curriculum content to improve its inclusiveness as highlighted in the survey findings:

> I don't see a lot of reflection [on international perspectives] …. Since this is a global economy, I think we would benefit … [in having] guest speakers or things like that in the curriculum that came [*sic*] and taught us about different styles of workforce education and development in different countries, different cultures.

In shifting the discussion toward the instructor, an international student felt that '… the ethnicity of the instructor is important because … [the instructor] can share his or her own experience and even give us a little insight about what's going on for this group of people …' One U.S. majority student's contribution help to possibly explain the high number of *don't know* responses among majority student group in sharing a similar unawareness among majority faculty:

> I'm just theorizing here, it may be that the instructor is not capable of incorporating multiple cultures because they've [*sic*] never been exposed to it; they don't know what questions to ask; … if you're relying on the instructor to deliver that kind of

> content; develop that kind of curriculum. I just don't see that as [sic], as going to happen (shaking head in agreement).

This sample response from a U.S. minority student reflected the view of a few other students: 'There's not much diversity in course content, except for the diversity class, …. The theorists are … Caucasian. I don't remember any other ethnic theories in any other classes; outside the diversity class (nodding to emphasize the point).' Students' verbal reports in calling for more diverse faculty to create diverse curriculum appear to rest with majority faculty passivity and perceived lack of international and cultural exposures. The latter help to explain why students perceived U.S. majority faculty as not being equipped to make curriculum diversification possible.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to examine graduate students' perceptions of the inclusiveness of curriculum content for a WED program in responding to multiculturalism among students at a Mid-Western university. The key overarching question asked was as follows: To what extent is the curriculum content inclusive of the multiculturalism (diverse cultural backgrounds) represented in U.S. society and students in a graduate workforce education and development (WED) program? Empirical evidence from study findings at this snapshot in time suggest that WED curriculum inclusiveness is inadequate in reflecting the multiculturalism or cultural plurality in U.S. society and graduate students in a Mid-Western State University's WED program. Survey results (see Table 1) show that unlike the U.S. majority group, U.S. minority and international students found WED curriculum content to be aligned to the interests of the dominant majority group quite often (*Mdn* = 4.0). In addition, international students found international authors and global views from developing countries are almost never (*Mdn* = 2) used in WED content. Of importance to the overall results is the high number of *don't know* responses in the majority group as compared to the small numbers among the minority and international student groups as shown in Table 1. This finding suggests that the majority student group is not engaged in the issue of inclusiveness in curriculum content despite efforts to embrace "diversity" as a core value at their university.

Further, survey open-ended responses on improvement suggestions support the quantitative results in students' clarion call for curriculum diversification to include international and minority perspectives in WED curriculum content. These findings suggest that students experience considerable intellectual and cultural bondage in their graduate studies that do not adequately prepare them for the rapidly growing global marketplace. The latter detracts from the Midwestern University's diversity initiative (Trevino 2007) and its WED department's mission of producing world-class graduates (SIUC 2008). In addition, focus group results help to explain students' call for more diversified faculty and curriculum content. The latter is in keeping with the dominant mixed methods Follow-Up Explanation model and pragmatic paradigm used in this research study. The level of continuity across students' focus group comments in using words/phrases like 'not much', 'more', 'we', and 'us' help to paint a collective picture of the multicultural deficits, and by extension, lack of inclusiveness in WED curriculum content. These

deficits articulated in the focus group discussions included limited international and minority perspectives in WED content, majority faculty lack of international and cultural exposures for teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds, and lack of diverse faculty.

The survey and focus group results have several implications for multicultural responsiveness in WED curriculum content for its culturally diverse graduate students and university "diversity" initiative. Notably, students' almost unanimous suggestion to diversify and internationalize WED curriculum content resonates with findings in the literature on creating more inclusive curriculum in higher education (Diamond 1998, Friedman et al 1996, Mestenhauser and Ellingboe 1998). The implication here would be a reduction in ethnocentric view and the intellectual bondage students' experience with the existing curriculum at the time of this study, and strongly validates the theoretical underpinnings for critical education theory, critical race theory, and multicultural education in the literature (Ladson-Billings 1999, DeCuir and Dixon 2004, McLaren 2003, Walker-Tileston 2004). Moreover, minority students' interests and motivation to learn would be enhanced with more inclusive curriculum content, increasing their potential to successfully achieve their educational goals (Gay 2000). A bigger implication for lack of international perspectives in WED content for international students is the risk of limited far learning transfer (Schunk 2004) to their home settings as indicated in the literature. If left unnoticed, this lack of global knowledge in the WED curriculum may deter future international enrollment, which would result in a substantial decline in tuition revenue for this Midwestern State University. International students pay more than twice the tuition cost of a U.S. student for seated classes (SIUC 2009).

Hiring more diverse faculty as a common suggestion by students for improving curriculum inclusiveness has proven to be effective in the literature (Ladson-Billings 1999). Still, special attention to preparing existing majority faculty to teach culturally diverse students is needed as this appeared to be a major concern from focus group comments. These findings are all in keeping with the shift in the multicultural education literature from curriculum content to instructor quality (Gay 2004). An alternative to hiring diverse faculty as reported in the literature would be to make diversity a major curriculum goal campus-wide, requiring faculty to present multicultural perspectives in all courses (Diamond, 1998). This alternative has potential for implementation as the Midwestern University already has a commitment to diversity as a core value in its mission and vision (Trevino 2007). Such an initiative would have a very positive impact on increasing the multicultural responsiveness of the WED curriculum and result in potential benefits such as developing cultural competence, high levels of creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving skills for both teachers and learners (Smith and Schonfeld 2000). The latter would require ongoing evaluation to measure the impact of diversity initiative which should definitely include a revision of the Mid-Western University's campus wide instructor-course evaluation forms to include students' ethnic diversity and instructor cultural competence.

Limitations evident in this study include using a self-reported WED Curriculum Responsiveness Survey, which is prone to personal bias. Findings are restricted to mostly the Caucasians, African Americans, and international students who participated in the study and cannot be generalized (no random sampling done) to other populations, but workforce educators in similar settings can

relate to the results accordingly. Nevertheless, study findings do add to the multiculturalism debate in supporting more inclusiveness for workforce education curriculum content. For future research, this study should be replicated to include a larger dataset and other regions in the U.S. to address the limitations identified.

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