

Workforce Education and Development (WED): Graduate Students' Perceptions of Cultural Insensitivity in Classroom Teaching – A Mixed Methods Study

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Growing ethnic student diversity (to include Caribbean students) on U.S. campuses requires exercising cultural sensitivity in classroom teaching, in accommodating for the culturally/internationally diverse students in U.S. classrooms. A Midwestern university embarked on a diversity thrust that included workshops for boosting faculty cultural competence in facilitating culturally/internationally diverse learners. This descriptive study examined the extent to which cultural insensitivity existed in WED teaching delivery. A Within Stage Mixed Model research design and a pragmatic paradigm were employed to guide the study's design and data collection/analysis of its census survey data consisting of quantitative and qualitative data from three student groups: Minority, Majority, and International. Findings included the following: International students felt that cultural insensitivity occurred in verbal and non-verbal communication with students in WED teaching delivery very often; U.S. majority and minority students felt it almost never or sometimes occurred respectively. Suggestions from WED graduate students for addressing this cultural deficit mainly include faculty diversity training and diversification of teaching styles, in keeping with multicultural education, ethnocentrism and critical race theory.

Keywords: *Workforce Education and Development (WED); Perceptions; Cultural Insensitivity; Classroom; Teaching*

Introduction

Having studied as a Caribbean student from my Associate's to Doctoral degrees in three different U.S. institutions in three different states, I became aware of that very delicate intersection between cultural insensitivity and classroom teaching as an international student. In exploring how policy is practiced relating to teaching culturally and internationally diverse graduate students, my intention in this article is to elicit their perceptions on whether cultural insensitivity exists in classroom teaching and to focus more on their suggestions for any improvements in teaching delivery for them. The latter warrants attention as the U.S. aggressively markets its higher education institutions abroad and its population becomes more diverse (Millet, 2009; Institute of International Education, 2012). Student diversity projections on U.S. campuses reveal a noted increase of 19 percent or 16 million students by 2015 with the following ethnic breakdown: An increase from 10% to 15% for Hispanics and from 12.8% to 13.2% for African

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Americans. A decrease from 71% to 63% is expected for Caucasians (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% over the previous year to a total of 723,277 international students was reported for the academic year 2010/2011 with China being the leading sending country. The other countries following after China included India, South Korea, Canada, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Venezuela (Institute of International Education, 2012). Caribbean students accounted for 11,644 of the total 727,277 studying at U.S. tertiary institutions with the top three sending islands being Jamaica (3,172), Trinidad and Tobago (1,882), and Bahamas (1,720) for the academic year 2010/2011 (Institute of International Education, 2012).

While service sectors like retailing and banking are quick in responding to changing customer demographics and growing preferences for customization and innovation (Gordon, 2003; Werner, Dellaert, Manfred, Kumar, & Varadarajan, 2011), higher education has been catching up. An accredited Midwestern University (MU) embarked on a policy initiative-“Southern @ 150”- that recognized diversity as a core value in achieving its educational remit, which included hosting campus-wide cultural competency workshops for faculty. Cultural competence in this diversity thrust refers to accommodating for students’ cultural differences to include language, race, ethnicity, geographic location, values, customs, and religion) in teaching and learning (Buila, 2009; Sahin, 2003; SIUC, 2009a). One cultural competency that is critical to creating an inclusive classroom climate is cultural sensitivity referred to as respecting learners’ diverse cultural differences in classroom delivery (Buila, 2009; Sahin, 2003). Ranked among the top and largest in the U.S., MU’s workforce education and development (WED) graduate program specifically prepares teachers/trainers for delivering occupational subject content to diverse learners (SIUC, 2008; Sum, McCaskey & Kyeyune, 2010). The current study, a first attempt at any type of assessment of the MU’s diversity efforts, explores answers to the question: To what extent do WED graduate students’ of diverse cultural and international backgrounds experience cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching?

Diversity Policy Initiatives

Accommodating for student diversity in policy initiatives by U.S. administrators has been challenging but attainable. In a noted case study at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, the faculty won approval for a campus-wide initiative on diversity after a disturbing discovery by one history professor, who found that her students were of the belief that Africans had not made any contributions to civilization (Diamond, 1998). In giving the approval for the diversity initiative, the University of Massachusetts’ administrators mandated that diversity to be a major curriculum goal in its higher education. All faculties were required to 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 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, & Rothenberg, 1996).

Growing student ethnic diversity undoubtedly would also influence diversity policy initiatives. The MU is on record for holding a number one ranking for African American students

on two counts: (1) enrolling the largest number of African American students (17% of its total student population) among the “big five” Illinois national universities (Illinois State; Illinois-Urbana-Champaign; Illinois-Chicago; Northern Illinois; and Southern Illinois University Carbondale) (US News and World Report, 2007); and (2) attracting the largest number of undergraduate African American males among majority institutions as well as their successful completion of undergraduate degrees (SIUC 2003). Its breakdown for student ethnicity at the beginning of this study 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 from over 100 countries) – 2,227 (10.6%) (SIUC, 2007a; SIUC, 2003). A similar breakdown for its WED graduate program was as follows: Master’s: 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. For its PhD program: Black – 3 (5%); Whites – 41(75%); Foreign – 8 (14%); Unknown – 2 (3%) giving a total of 54 students (SIUC, 2007b).

In responding to its growing student ethnicity, the MU fully embarked on a key strategic policy imperative in 2003 -“Southern @ 150: Building Excellence Through Commitment”- to position the University among the top 75 public research universities in the U.S. by 2019, its 150th anniversary. To this end, the University placed “diversity” as a core value in achieving its educational mission that included being known “for a faculty and a student body that reflects the human and ethnic diversity and intellectual pluralism of the world” (SIUC 2005, p. 6). In addition, its Affirmative Action policy (visible on campus bulletin boards) includes maintaining cultural and educational diversity in university curricula (SIUC, 2006), a laudable intent given its cultural milieu. A Black Resource Center was also established at the MU to provide academic and support services for its growing minority student population in keeping with its Southern @ 150 initiative. Campus-wide diversity seminars aimed at honing the cultural competence of faculty that provided them with teaching strategies or techniques and methods used in teaching delivery that promote learning in all students by accommodating their variant learning styles and cultural differences (SIUC, 2009b). Given its commitment to diversity, the current study would help to elicit from students any possible gaps in cultural sensitivity for accommodating ethnic diversity among students in WED classroom teaching delivery.

But, “diversity” policy initiatives appear to be ahead of practice for the MU at the time of conducting this study. Ironically, its campus wide Instructor-Course-Evaluation (ICE) was not modified, even four years after launching its new diversity initiative, to capture data by student ethnicity. Likewise, evaluation practices for its WED program overlooked student ethnicity/national origin or intellectual pluralism in measuring program effectiveness (SIUC, 2006; SIUC, 2007a). Consequently, with wide disparities in its student race/ethnicity numbers, using evaluation data for course improvements could result in the following for the MU: 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. A subsequent survey of the University’s international students, to include Caribbean students, revealed that they were mainly dissatisfied with the quality of service and education afforded to them (International Student and Scholars Office, 2006). Such dissatisfaction may also be driven by the fact that they pay almost two and half times that of U.S. students in tuition fees (SIUC, 2009c). Thus, international students are seen as a significant source of revenue and cultural currency for U.S. tertiary institutions (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Institute of International Education, 2012).

Feedback from its campus-wide diversity workshops/symposia to increase faculty cultural competence and overall campus diversity responsiveness show a need for more inclusive curriculum and diverse faculty to adequately accommodate the University's growing student diversity (The SIUC Office of the Associate Chancellor (Diversity), 2006; SIUC 2009b). Similarly, Buila (2009) at the MU observed that there was usually a notable absence of Caucasian educators at workshops on cultural competence. Further elaboration by Buila on the application of cultural competencies in the classroom revealed that "Colored" students (minority) question the legitimacy of Caucasian educators to address cultural diversity issues, while Caucasian students (majority) suspect "Colored" educators of having personal agendas in teaching about white supremacy and oppression. This apparent trust issue in faculty-student classroom interaction gives relevance to the current study that examined student perceptions by student groups (majority, minority, and international) on cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching.

Theoretical Rationale

Theories concerned with cultural diversity and used to analyze educational issues for culturally and internationally diverse students such as cultural sensitivity include *ethnocentrism*, *critical education theory*, *melting pot theory*, *multicultural education* and *critical race theory*. Walker-Tileston (2004) referred to *ethnocentrism* as '... the belief that one's own ethnicity is superior to others' (p. 70). This 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). Mehra and Bishop (2007) and Yoso (2002) found ethnocentric evidence indicating dominant U.S. centric and Euro-American curricula in U.S. schools and colleges. The latter promoted a hierarchy of knowledge that placed western Caucasian culture as superior to that of culturally and internationally diverse students. Similar findings by Guiffreda (2005) revealed that 'faculty have [sic] also been perceived by students of color as culturally insensitive when they fail to acknowledge or incorporate culturally diverse perspectives into their curricula' (p. 18). Such dominance is likened to hegemony, which McLaren (2003) in critical education theory described as when "the dominant culture tries to "fix" the meaning of signs, symbols, and representations to provide a "common" worldview, disguising relations of power and privilege through the organs of mass media and state apparatus such as schools, government institutions, ..." (p. 203). Dominant "white" representation can lead to the kinds of liminal positioning of Blacks pointed out by Crichlow (2005) in his research on race, identity, and representation in education. He asserted that diversity issues should not only focus on race and class but on any single term of identification, i.e. subject positioning. But given the sensitive nature of this study, diversity would be confined to three broad categories of students: majority (Caucasians), minority (Non-White), and international (Non-U.S.). Thus, the current study moves beyond race and class and addresses cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching towards three student groups.

Evidently, the melting-pot theory of the 1960s, based on the assumption that culturally diverse immigrants to the U.S. should assimilate into its dominant Western European culture (Walker-Tileston, 2004), is somewhat limited in addressing diversity in the 21st Century. Millet (2009) pointed out a growing shift from assimilation to multiculturalism in which the metaphor changes from "melting pot" to "salad bowl". In effect, minority students (e.g., African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, Middle Easterners, and Africans) maintain their cultural identity in transforming the U.S. into a truly multicultural mosaic and not blending into one melting pot. The latter adds cultural "currency" to U.S. campuses and requires U.S.

instructors to exercise cultural sensitivity in classroom practice. Still, a policy decision by the MU administrators to a mandatory change from the social security number (SSN) as the student identification (ID) number to a system generated DAWG Tag number (SIUC, 2009b) can be considered culturally appropriate or alarming depending on whether a melting pot or multicultural lens is used. But, a dog or any other animal, however used figuratively as a sporting mascot at the MU, is not held in such high esteem in other cultures (Kim, 1999); so it can be culturally insensitive to expect all students with intellect, mind, and soul to readily attach themselves to a Dawg Tag number (level of a dog). The administrator's decision to prescribe a common identity that does not equitably represent its ethnically diverse student body is yet another example of the power of dominance as previously described by McLaren (2003).

At the heart of addressing cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching is the preparation of teachers. Multicultural education (ME) aimed to equip teachers with skills/strategies for assisting diverse groups to assimilate into multicultural classrooms, especially in the 1960s after the racial desegregation of U.S. public schools. Teachers were expected to avoid such pitfalls as cultural insensitivity and cultural bias in curriculum content. Such bias can take the form of white-dominated course content, where the power of privilege and dominance make such representations almost seem normal or natural for whites (Caucasians) and abnormal for non-whites (i.e., all other races) (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; Johnson, 2001). Yet, an evolution of ME from 1960 has seen a shift from an emphasis on multicultural curriculum content to instructor quality (Gay, 2004). In preparing future faculty candidates for diverse classrooms, Lane, Hertog, and Waldhart (2003) found that a graduate seminar on developing student teachers' cultural sensitivity skills made them better quality teachers for culturally diverse students. Ladson-Billings and Gillborn (2004) and McKeachie and Svincki (2006) also shared a similar view, emphasising that trainee teachers must be able to use and communicate culturally relevant content material to promote culturally diverse students' in class participation. Such inroads into ME would make the campus climate more conducive to diversity. Minority students, to include "internationals" like this study's author from the Caribbean, would be more motivated to learn given equitable representation in curriculum content coupled with culturally sensitive instructors. International students will be better able to achieve far learning transfer of the skills and knowledge learnt in near learning transfer (Schunk, 2004) in the U.S. classroom setting given a diversified curriculum. Faculty and students would develop cross-cultural competencies and critical thinking skills in having to work with others outside of their dominant culture (Green, 2002; Nyquist 2002; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). An examination of instructor cultural sensitivity in the current study would help to keep a pulse on instructor quality and whether students continue to enjoy the benefits of a multicultural classroom.

In contrast to the above theories, critical race theory (CRT) has been used to unmask and confront racism in its varied forms in the school curriculum. DeCuir and Dixon (2004) used CRT to unmask the pervasiveness of "Whiteness" as a standard of normalcy. Bartlett and Brayboy (2006) unveiled the increasing use of CRT in a socio-cultural context for analyzing the experiences of specific racial/ethnic groups in U.S. schooling. For example, Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) highlights the Latina/o and Chicana/o issues affecting this ethnic group such as immigration, language, and identity; Asian critical race theory (AsianCrit) emphasizes such issues as stereotyping and language affecting Asians; and TribalCrit focuses on 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" (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005, p. 367). Liminal positioning has

wider implications for eroding the national identity of the Native American to one of anti-intellectual, not giving him/her the same esteem as “Whites” or dominant majority group. In a similar view, Crichlow (2005) lamented the failure of multiculturalism in the U.S. in not recognising the authentic cultural identities of its diverse population. This misrepresentation Crichlow contested can be disempowering for some ethnic groups in education, defeating the purpose of it

Methodology

This descriptive study employed a mixed methods design to examine and interpret WED graduate students’ perceptions of cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching. All graduate students with at least one year of continuous enrollment comprised the study participants, allowing for adequate exposure to the WED program’s curriculum content for answering survey items. A census survey was conducted (no sampling), affording the best opportunity to capture the under-represented culturally diverse groups (e.g., international students) in the WED program. The Within-Stage Mixed Method Model design facilitated concurrent collection of quantitative (closed-ended survey questions) and qualitative (open-ended survey questions) data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism as the overarching paradigm (Creswell, 2007), focusing on what works in reality, was used to guide the study’s design, collection and analysis of its census data. A total of 162 students met the criteria for participating in the study from which six students were deducted: one exemption (the researcher) and five students used in pilot testing and refining the study instrument that included one of the two Caribbean students in the WED program. The final total of the study population was 157 graduate students. A breakdown of the study population’s ethnic/racial diversity was as follows: 30 African Americans (19.1%), 11 international students (7%), 3 unknowns (1.9%), 5 Hispanics (3.18%), 1 Asian American (.64%), and 107 Caucasians (68%).

A self-reported WED Curriculum Responsiveness survey was developed from reviewing studies in the literature that measured constructs of interests such as curriculum inclusiveness and internationalization on a 5-point Likert scale; 5 being nearly always and 1 don’t know. An expert panel comprising one African American, Asian, and Hispanic faculty reviewed the draft survey for content validity. In addition, two pilot tests were conducted with representative groups to increase instrument validity and revisions were done in keeping with faculty reviews and pilot testing before administering the final survey as recommended by Best and Khan (2006). The MU’s Human Subjects Committee gave approval for conducting the study and permission for accessing student e-mails from the university’s student information system. The first administration of the e-mail survey contained a cover letter notifying participants of voluntary participation and assuring confidentiality in data collection. However, a very low response to the e-mail survey prompted its conversion to a paper survey by printing out the attachment sent with the e-mail survey. Permission from WED instructors was sought before distributing and collecting the paper surveys in classes. 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 & Khan, 2006). In controlling for non-response error, a comparison was done on geographic/ethnic origin demographics for respondents and non-respondents and no substantial differences were found.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey quantitative data for frequency distributions and measures of central tendencies for student demographics and graduate students’

perceptions of cultural insensitivity in WED teaching delivery. Non-parametric tests were used for the study's census data as required when no sampling of the study population is done (Best & Khan, 2006). 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 & Settle, 1995). Content analysis was used to analyse the open-ended survey responses on suggestions for improvements for the following question: *How can WED teaching strategies be improved to facilitate culturally and internationally diverse students?* Using the latter question as the object of the content analysis, emerging patterns and themes by student groups from these qualitative data were observed and a quantified summary of trends done (Berge, 2001; Stokes, 2003). Member-checking of the survey open-ended responses was done, which verified the accuracy of summary tables on these responses, thereby improving the validity and reliability of the study results. Cross-checking and explaining the quantitative survey data with this qualitative data (triangulation) help to increase the reliability and validity of the survey findings as confirmed by Best and Khan (2006) and Creswell (2007).

Research Population

Survey respondents totalled 69 participants (44% response rate) in all 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 in the MU's WED graduate program. A further breakdown of 69 respondents by student groups showed the following: 11 (16%) international, 41 (59%) U.S. majority (mainly Caucasians), and 17 (25%) U.S. minority students responded to the survey from their population groups. 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 African Americans, one Asian American, and one "Other" or Unknown.

Research Question and Survey

The primary research study question was as follows: *To what extent do WED graduate students' of diverse cultural and international backgrounds experience cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching?* Cultural insensitivity is taken to mean not showing respect for students' cultural differences that included language, race, ethnicity, geographic location, values, customs, and religion. In answering the primary research question, students had to rank WED teaching delivery on a 5-point Likert scale; 5 being nearly always and 1 don't know on six dimensions: equitable treatment, second language accommodation, ethnic stereotyping, cultural insensitivity, learning transfer, and cultural differences. Also, they were asked to respond to the survey open-ended question: *How can WED teaching strategies be improved to facilitate culturally and internationally diverse students?* The heightened awareness of the MU's diversity thrust at the time of the study made it common knowledge that efforts to improve facilitation of the MU's diverse student population was needed. Thus, the open-ended question was worded in keeping with the vibrant marketing of the MU's diversity policy initiatives at that time and asked students for suggestions on improvements regarding teaching strategies for culturally and internationally diverse students. Table 1 (overleaf) contains results for survey items relating to cultural sensitivity in teaching delivery in WED, using a five-point verbal frequency scale: 5 – Nearly Always; 4 – Quite Often; 3 – Sometimes; 2 – Almost Never; and 1 – Don't Know. The median (*Mdn*) was used as a single indicator to analyse student responses and reduce results bias as it is not affected by extreme values. Approximately 40 (97%) U.S. majority students responded to

cultural sensitivity items with one non-response. For the U.S. minority students, 17 (100%) responded to these items with no invalid responses. All 11 (100%) international students responded to these items.

As shown in Table 1, much divergence in responses appeared across students groups for the level of frequency with which *cultural insensitivity occurred in verbal and non-verbal communication with students*. Minority student groups found cultural insensitivity to occur sometimes ($Mdn = 3.0$), while U.S. majority students felt it almost never occurred ($Mdn = 2.0$), and international students found this to happen very often ($Mdn = 4.0$) in WED teaching delivery. Yet, international students latter response show some divergence to their “nearly always” (5) ranking on students being treated equitably regardless of ethnic/national/geographic origin as illustrated in Table 1 overleaf. Nevertheless, the results do suggest that cultural insensitive invariably occurs especially for international students, who pay almost three times the cost of American students in tuition fees as pointed out before. Similarly, all three groups differed in their views on allowances made for students who speak English as a second language during teaching: Majority-quite often ($Mdn = 4.0$); Minority-sometimes ($Mdn = 3.0$); and International-almost never ($Mdn = 2.0$). Overall, students’ were treated equitably regardless of ethnic/geographic origin, and ethnic stereotyping was avoided as shown in Table 1, which again showed much divergence with the international students “nearly always” ranking of students equitable treatment in WED teaching delivery. Some majority and minority students felt that potential for learning transfer to Non-U.S. settings and opportunities to share cultural differences almost never occurred ($Mdn = 2.0$) during teaching delivery.” However, international students found these to occur sometimes ($Mdn = 3.0$). Noticeably, a significant number of majority students checked “don’t know” for the survey item regarding “learning transfer. The latter result suggests that learning transfer to non-U.S. settings for this group was not an issue as they could not recognise whether or not a gap existed for such learning transfer. The variation in students’ perceptions across the three student groups suggest that deficits exist to varying degrees for cultural sensitivity in WED teaching delivery. Of the three student groups, the international students appear to have perceived a higher degree of deficit especially for cultural insensitivity occurring and accommodating for language differences which they ranked as “quite often” and “almost never” respectively.

Table 1

Graduate Students' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching Delivery in WED (N = 69)

Teaching Delivery Relating to Cultural Sensitivity	Group	Frequency of Responses						
		<i>n</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	NA	QO	ST	AN	DK
Students are treated equitably regardless of ethnic/national/geographic origin	MAJ	41	5.0	28	8	2	1	2
	MIN	17	4.0	5	10	1	0	1
	INT	11	5.0	6	4	1	0	0
Allowances are made, as needed, for students who speak English as a second language	MAJ	41	4.0	10	12	9	2	8
	MIN	17	3.0	4	3	3	2	5
	INT	11	2.0	1	0	1	4	5
Ethnic stereotyping of students is avoided	MAJ	40	5.0	23	9	3	2	3
	MIN	17	4.0	4	5	5	1	2
	INT	11	4.0	4	4	2	0	1
Cultural insensitivity occurs in verbal and non-verbal communication with students	MAJ	41	2.0	3	3	10	18	7
	MIN	17	3.0	0	3	8	3	3
	INT	11	4.0	2	4	2	1	2
Potential for WED learning transfer to Non-U.S. settings is limited	MAJ	41	2.0	1	5	11	4	20
	MIN	17	2.0	1	3	3	4	6
	INT	11	3.0	1	3	3	1	3
Opportunities for students to share cultural differences are limited.	MAJ	41	2.0	2	3	13	19	4
	MIN	17	2.0	1	3	1	11	1
	INT	11	3.0	1	1	4	4	1

Note. MAJ = U.S. Majority, MIN = U.S. Minority, INT = International; NA = Nearly Always (5), QO = Quite Often (4), ST = Sometimes (3), AN = Almost Never (2), DK = Don't Know (1)

The object of the content analysis for the student open-ended responses was the question: *How can WED teaching strategies be improved to facilitate culturally and internationally diverse students?* This broad question is asked against the background of a heightened awareness of MU's diversity policy initiative for developing its faculty's cultural competences in classroom practice of which cultural sensitivity is one. Responses to this question reflected four main themes as shown in Table 2: *diversify teaching styles, curriculum inclusiveness, diversify faculty, and faculty diversity training*. Overall, more responses came from the U.S. majority (21) than international students (15), and U.S. minority students (13) as shown in Table 2. A few majority and minority students felt no improvements were needed to WED teaching delivery for culturally and internationally diverse students. To this end, a majority student commented: *"WED does a good job of this already. I don't see any need for improvement, but that comes from "my" perspective which may be jaded/biased."* A minority student responding put it this way: *"No changes needed. What WED has so far is working."* All international students found changes were needed. For the three students groups (majority, minority, and international), the first major improvement for diversifying teaching styles is in researching and planning for teaching

international students and inviting international guest speakers; more so among the U.S. majority and international students than the U.S. minority group. Of note, the international students' suggestion to revisit class participation in addressing diverse learning styles appeared to have serious consequences on learning performance as evident in a student's sample quote: *"I think the idea of participation points should be revisited. It doesn't work for all culture [sic] especially those from Africa and Asia."* This view was echoed somewhat by another U.S. majority student: *"... The only problem I have noticed for them [i.e., international students,] is this is Workforce Ed and some have never worked hear [sic] so they are lost when talking about or [sic] ways."*

As shown in Table 2 overleaf, specific to the U.S. minority group in improving teaching strategies was the need to include more class discussion evident by this sample student response: *"Engage student in more discussion in the class... by discussing relevant things in the world that could pertain to things in class."* This sentiment also resonated with the international students' need for revisiting their participation in class sessions. One international student commented that *"because there're not so many international students staying in WED, they're sometimes overlooked ..."* The majority students specifically recognized, in this quote reflecting their overall view, that WED instructors need to *"study class population backgrounds before starting a course."* A minority student identified with the challenge of changing teaching strategies in stating, *"... Most have taught for years, are sit [sic] in their ways, and there is no incentive to try new of different strategies."* All three student groups further suggested that offering teaching externships (outside U.S.) would be another way of helping faculty to teach culturally – and internationally – diverse students as evident by this definitive statement from a majority student: *"Have WED faculty teach in those countries during the summer."* These verbal responses to some extent show a need for much overall consideration for accommodating the cultural and international diversity of the students in WED teaching delivery.

Table 2

Student Perceptions on Improving Teaching Strategies in a WED Program

Category and Theme	# in Group Responding N = 46		
	MAJ (n= 20)	MIN (n = 17)	INT (n = 9)
Diversify Teaching Styles			
Research/plan teaching for international students	4	1	2
Invite more diverse/international guest speakers	2	1	2
Study students' backgrounds	4	0	0
Include more class discussion	0	2	0
Revisit international student participation	0	0	2
Provide faculty teaching externships	2	0	0
Curriculum Inclusiveness			
Offer International Focus in Courses	2	0	2
More Culturally Diverse Course Topics	2	1	2
Encourage International Research	1	2	1
Faculty Diversity Training			
Prof. X (pseudo name) needs sensitivity training	2	0	0
Provide more diversity training for faculty	0	4	1
Diversify Faculty			
Diversify Staff	2	1	0
Hire More International Staff	0	0	2
More Culturally Aware Faculty	0	1	1

Note. MAJ = U.S. Majority; MIN = U.S. Minority; and INT = International

Students gave multiple suggestions or not at all, so the number responding is less than 46 or more per student group.

The second major improvement for making WED teaching delivery more culturally responsive was – *curriculum inclusiveness* as shown in Table 2. Offering a more diversified curriculum was identified as a major need across all three groups (international, majority, and minority). An international student summed up the issue this way: “... *the curriculum should be made more diverse ... world is becoming more globalized, it would not be a good idea in my opinion, to remain centered on nation/state level issues.*” Both majority and international students found offering courses with an international focus was needed for making WED curriculum more inclusive; this sample quote from an international student reflected their collected view: “... *teaching strategies can be improved by focusing on the international aspect of education...*” Encouraging international research was also another improvement across the three student groups as echoed in this majority student’s view: “*Assignments can be made instructing students to research work from international sources and share findings in class.*”

The third major improvement: *faculty diversity training and diversify faculty* – echoed across all three groups. Two U.S. majority group lamented that one WED instructor’s need for sensitivity training, who despite students’ race, gender or nationality used slangs to identify with them and was abrasive to them. Students’ overall comments on faculty diversity training reflected the view that (a) “... The faculty must become more diverse with teaching styles and diversity inclusiveness”; and (b) one other quote which suggested that faculty should be trained in knowing how to “*turn empathy into knowledge and understanding.*” An international student

felt that: “... *providing more diversity training to faculty ... will help them to know how to deal with a diverse student population.*” One majority student’s insider view, in which MU is substituted for the actual name of the University, helps to shed more light on this issue: “... *[MU] has a bad habit of keeping in-house grads to teach here after graduation. Unfortunately, as you know this can keep perspectives limited. While researching a division ... here ... a few years ago, I noticed that [there] were 27/31 teachers that were all graduates of [MU]...!*” Unsurprisingly, all three student groups (majority, minority, and international) sounded a clarion call for diversifying faculty in the WED program. Their views all reflected that “employing international faculty” and “more diverse faculty” who are “at least more aware of cultural differences” would improve classroom practice in facilitating culturally and internationally diverse students.

Discussion

The key overarching research question asked was as follows: *To what extent do WED graduate students’ of diverse cultural and international backgrounds experience cultural insensitivity in classroom teaching?* Empirical evidence from study findings at that snapshot (2008-2009) in time suggested a reasonable cultural sensitivity gap existed in WED teaching delivery as cultural insensitivity occurred sometimes ($Mdn = 3$) and quite often ($Mdn = 4.0$) for U.S. minority and international students, respectively. Such cultural deficits in teaching impact negatively on students’ participation and performance in class activities as confirmed in the literature (Gay, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005). Students’ open-ended responses on improvements to WED teaching strategies in facilitating culturally and internationally graduate students reflected an overall shared position that diversification was needed in faculty, curriculum, teaching styles, and faculty preparation to include exposure to diversity training and external internships outside the U.S. Further, the continuous thread of “more” in their personal narratives (e.g., more classroom discussion, international staff, and diverse course topics) indicate an overall inadequacy in being culturally and internationally responsive to their learning needs.

While majority group respondents felt cultural insensitivity almost never occurred in WED teaching delivery ($Mdn = 2$), their suggestions for improvements resonated with the minority and international student groups who felt this occurred sometimes to very often respectively. The latter finding suggests that the majority group does not experience cultural insensitivity directly or may be bias in responding as indicated by one majority’s student’s comment: “WED does a good job of this already. I don’t see any need for improvement, but that comes from “my” perspective which may be jaded/biased.” Yet, students’ clarion call across the three groups (majority, minority, and international) for diversifying teaching styles brings balance and objectivity to the study results. The call for more faculty diversity training is consistent with the literature on preparing future faculty (Lane, Hertog, & Waldhart, 2003) and multicultural education in the shift from curricular content to instructor quality (Gay, 2004). The under representation of White faculty at the MU’s diversity workshops (Buila, 2009) validates the students’ collective position on wanting more faculty diversity training and possibly explains why “White” majority faculty are perceived as not being pedagogically equipped to facilitate students’ diverse cultural and international backgrounds. An example of this cultural competence deficit is represented in one international student’s comment: “I think the idea of participation points should be revisited. It doesn’t work for all culture [*sic*] especially those from Africa and Asia.” Making accommodation for the latter is addressed in multicultural education in preparing teachers for diverse classrooms (Gay, 2004).

Study findings regarding limited learning transfer to Non-U.S. settings suggest that MU's diversity workshops/seminars (SIUC, 2009b) are not "hitting ground" in practice. Even four years after embarking on its diversity policy initiative in 2003, some majority and most international students (*Mdn* = 2) felt that learning transfer to Non-U.S. setting almost never occurred in WED teaching delivery, and happened sometimes (*Mdn* = 3) for minorities. The convergence in students' common position that more inclusive curriculum content is needed for improving WED teaching delivery help to confirm the latter survey finding. Moreover, the literature supports the students' view as Guffrida (2005) found evidence to suggest that minority students perceive White faculty 'as culturally insensitive when they fail to acknowledge or incorporate culturally diverse perspectives into their curricula' (18). The under representation of the minority and international student groups in WED curricular materials makes them almost invisible and can lead to taking a compromising position that "because there're not so many international students staying in WED, they're sometimes overlooked ...", as one international student pointed out. Crichlow (2005) helped in understanding the latter position by pointing that power is partly fuelled by dominance in numbers, so that the dominant majority faculty has the power to cater mostly to the majority students. But, promoting a Western European hierarchy of knowledge is detrimental to achieving MU's educational remit that includes being known "for a faculty and a student body that reflects the human and ethnic diversity and intellectual pluralism of the world" (SIUC 2005, p. 6). Evidence of such detrimental consequences is found in this majority student's position on the issue: "... The only problem I have noticed for them [i.e., international students,] is this is Workforce Ed and some have never worked hear [*sic*] so they are lost when talking about or [*sic*] ways." The latter is also likened to hegemony as highlighted by McLaren (2003) in critical education theory. Such inequity can help to possibly explain international students' dissatisfaction with the MU educational services noted in a previous survey (International Student and Scholars Office, 2006) to include Caribbean students.

Similarly, the call by the three student groups to diversify faculty for improving WED teaching delivery and, by extension, address the cultural insensitivity mostly international students experience is in keeping with the pragmatic lens used in this study. An insider view from a majority student describes the reality of the problem that warrants attention if the MU is to achieve its educational remit (MU is substituted for the actual name of the University): "... [MU] has a bad habit of keeping in-house grads to teach here after graduation. Unfortunately, as you know this can keep perspectives limited. While researching a division ... here ... a few years ago, I noticed that [there] were 27/31 teachers that were all graduates of [MU]...! The over representation of White faculty in WED is likened to "Whiteness" being used as a standard of normalcy as described by DeCuir and Dixon (2004) in critical rave theory. Still, if White faculty is copious, reluctant and not mandated to attend diversity workshops for acquiring the cultural competencies (Buila, 2009), then one workable solution would be hire diverse faculty who could relate to particularly international students' cultural backgrounds. The students' shared position is that "employing international faculty" and "more diverse faculty" who are "at least more aware of cultural differences" would improve The continued under representation of diverse faculty in the WED program can lead to a future reduction of international students and a significant source of revenue (Institute of International Education, 2012) for the MU. Conversely, more internationally-diverse faculty could make teaching delivery more responsive in addressing the "invisibility" issues resulting from a U.S.-centric curriculum and its intellectual bondage. Students from developing countries like those in the Caribbean region, where U.S.

exchange rates vary, resulting in exorbitant international tuition costs, can get value for money in venturing into a U.S. higher education experience.

The study findings provide valuable insights for improving MU's diversity policy initiatives in light of growing ethnic diversity on U.S. campus populations and the aggressive marketing by U.S. universities toward international students. Other institutional diversity policy decision makers can learn from the MU's experience and the institutional politics therein. The MU should have targeted both faculty and students (majority, minority, and international) so that a mutual understanding of expectations for building more inclusive class and campus climates could be established. Waning attendance by White faculty at these diversity workshops suggest that incentives such as summer teaching externships in foreign countries could have been offered to encourage faculty to participate. Making faculty attendance mandatory was another option in order to reduce the risk of cultural insensitivities like predominantly host country curriculum that limit learning transfer and foster intellectual bondage for students from developing countries like the Caribbean. Pragmatically, the MU could have emphasized the importance of mastering such cultural competencies as cultural sensitivity to the retention of international students and by extension their lucrative tuition revenues. In addition, cultural competencies should have been evaluated on the instructor-course evaluation forms distributed to students at the end of the semester (SIUC, 2007a) to identify where improvements are needed.

This study's findings were constrained by a few limitations that included the use of a self-reported WED Curriculum Responsiveness Survey prone to personal bias. Findings were restricted to mostly the Caucasians, African Americans, and international students in WED seated classes who participated in the study and cannot be generalized (no random sampling done) to other populations or programmes. However, workforce educators/policy makers in similar settings can relate to the results accordingly. Nevertheless, study findings do add to the scholarly literature on cultural sensitivity as a cultural competence for teachers of culturally and internationally diverse graduate students. For future research, this study should be replicated to include a larger dataset (online and seated classes) and other regions in the U.S. to address the limitations identified.

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