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Young Adult, Adult Learner and Faculty Perceptions on the Integration of Diversity and Social Justice Education in the Classroom

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Abstract: As diversity within the classroom soars, evaluating the curriculum and assessing perceptions about the integration of diversity and social justice education is integral.

Keywords: Diversity, Social Justice, College Classroom

Introduction

With the increase of social tensions, students and faculty are unsure of how to interact and address the issues before them. Higher education institutions attempt to achieve diversity by admitting students from diverse backgrounds resulting in numerical diversity. However, in the eyes of students, it does little to create a diverse climate on campus. Although care is taken to include the recruitment and participation of all, institutions must also include this thought within the curriculum (Byrd, 2015).

Brookfield (2013) noted that "diversity is a major buzzword in American higher education" (p. 97). When homing in on curricula and pedagogy, one needs to consider if and how faculty are integrating diversity and social justice education into the classroom. This is not limited to the class's general makeup or topical characteristics such as learning style and student preference. According to Stevens (2019, personal communication), an extension of this includes what materials are included and excluded; whose voices are heard/validated and whose are silenced/marginalized; what content is included and what is not; and what conversations are allowed/facilitated in comparison to which are avoided/ignored. Brookfield (2013) also notes that "contemporary teachers now work in truly multicultural classrooms in which multiple intelligences (Armstrong, 2009) and culturally grounded ways of knowing (Merriam, 2007) coexist" (p.97). Furthermore, Manglitz, Guy, and Merriweather (2014) assert that

> creating conditions under which meaningful discussion can occur requires examining how racism operates at an individual, institutional, and societal or structural level. This requires deep understanding of barriers to creating those conditions. Many barriers relate to individuals' discomfort with talking about race and their own racialized identity. While all participants in cross-racial dialogues may find it difficult to engage in meaningful exchange, this is an especially salient point for individuals within the dominant White culture, due to the power disparity in which cross-racial relationships are embedded. (pp. 111-112)

While race is not the primary issue, when it comes to the integration of diversity and social justice education in the classroom, it often is a taboo subject that faculty sidestep because they do not feel that this is their expertise. This is a disadvantage to the student experience and their ability to engage around this topic.

> The mission of Texas State University states that
> Texas State University is a doctoral-granting, student-centered institution dedicated to excellence, innovation in teaching, research, including creative expression, and service. The university strives to create new knowledge, to embrace diversity of people and ideas, to foster cultural and economic development, and to prepare its graduates to participate

fully and freely as citizens of Texas, the nation, and the world. (Texas State University, 2017)

To fulfill this mission, one must begin to understand the perceptions of faculty and students regarding the integration of diversity and social justice in the classroom. With this understanding, faculty, students, and the university will be able to better understand where they are in relation to fulfillment of the mission and brainstorm means by which to better develop global citizens.

Research Methods

A survey consisting of demographic information and a 15 question Likert-style questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the integration of diversity and social justice education into the classroom and the university was distributed to 10% of the student population and all faculty members per Institutional Review Board standards. Each question had a possibility of five answers ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." These were coded from 1 – 5. We ran an exploratory factor analysis on these items and ended up assigning the items to two individual factors. Three of the items were not used because of semantic issues within the questions.

Two-hundred faculty members responded to the survey and their responses resulted in a two-factor solution: Factor 1- Faculty Self-Perceptions of Practice and Factor 2- Faculty Perceptions of University Policy. The extraction method used was principle component analysis. The rotation method employed was Varimax with Kaiser normalization and the rotation converged in three iterations. The scores were calculated by adding the individual answers to the first eleven (11) items or Factor I and the last three answers for Factor II.

Ninety-one students completed a similar survey. We repeated the factor analysis for the student perceptions, assigned the same factors, and scored the students the in the same way. This produced two factors, Student Perceptions of Faculty Practice and Student Perceptions of University Policy.

Findings

The coefficient alpha of each scale demarcates instrument reliability: faculty self-perception of practice (FFI) $\alpha = .90$; faculty perceptions of university policy (FFII) $\alpha = .78$; student perceptions of faculty practice (SFI) $\alpha = .92$; student perceptions of university policy (SFII) $\alpha = .78$. The perceptions of faculty practice varied significantly between the faculty and the students ($t = 2.39$, $p = .017$, $df = 289$). Faculty had a more positive perception of their practice than the students. There was no significant difference in the perceptions of university policy between students and faculty ($t = 1.19$, $p = .24$, $df = 289$).

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