3-2021

Implementing Culturally Diverse Strategies in Higher Education Classrooms

Christina M. Corona

cmc16d@acu.edu

This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of
the College of Graduate and
Professional Studies

Date: February 16, 2021

Dissertation Committee:

Brian Cole

Dr. Brian Cole, Chair

Colleen P Ramos, PhD.

Dr. Colleen Ramos

Jenifer Williams

Dr. Jenifer Williams

Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

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by

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March 2021

Dedication

I began this journey in August of 2016 not knowing how many sacrifices my family would have to make, especially my husband, Joe. Since I started college some time ago, Joe has been my biggest supporter. This dissertation is dedicated to him, as he has provided unwavering support, love, and guidance, which helped me achieve my goals. I appreciate Joe keeping me focused, as I sometimes would find it difficult to work because of my career as a fifth-grade teacher or my new role as a mom. Throughout the years, Joe has never doubted I would fulfill this dream, and for that I am happy to share this accomplishment with him.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Camille Marie. I cannot wait to share the stories and pictures of how I held you in my lap while typing up the last chapter of this dissertation. The memories I share of this will hopefully be a powerful example to you of determination and how you were included in all my plans as encouragement. Camille, you have made me stronger, better, and more fulfilled than I could have ever imagined. I love you and Daddy to the moon and back.

Acknowledgments

To start with, I must express my appreciation to God for allowing me the strength to complete my dissertation. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Abilene Christian University Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership faculty. You are all a wonderful, inspiring group of educational leaders, and you have provided me with constant encouragement and guidance. I would also like to take this time and thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Brian Cole, for his sincere, invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. I will be forever grateful and indebted to you. Additionally, to my committee members, Dr. Colleen Ramos and Dr. Jenifer Williams, I appreciate your willingness to serve on my committee and for guiding me through this process. To the many other family members, friends, and colleagues, thank you for the mental, emotional, and moral support throughout this endeavor. I am so blessed to have you all in my life, and I am grateful for your continued support.

Abstract

In this qualitative case study, the researcher determined how student cultural differences influenced Western Coastal University (WCU, pseudonym) faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, the researcher clarified how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation also uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom and what differences they discovered in their teaching and student learning as a result. The researcher used in-depth interviews, artifact documents such as the WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement and Strategic Plan, and course survey data. Three overarching themes emerged from the data collection, revealing a lack of a unified vision and approach to diversity education within their department at WCU, the challenges the faculty experienced such as the implementation of culturally diverse strategies, and the faculty's recognition of the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies. Exploring the data in a real-life environment while identifying complexities of real-life situations has the potential to help WCU and the wider community of interest by bridging the cultural gap between faculty and students, resulting in an enhanced organizational culture that will better serve the increasingly diverse student body.

Keywords: culture, diversity, pedagogy, awareness, differences, strategies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I distinctly remember my first semester in the early childhood development program at Western Coastal University (WCU), a small private Christian university in 2010 (pseudonym for this study). Initially, we students met with advisors as they welcomed us and explained the expectations and goals of the program. During that meeting, the advisors reviewed course schedules but then told us that the human diversity course might be replaced and that our advisor would keep us updated. One student asked if the course would be replaced with another diversity course, and the advisors said it would be replaced with a course that met the needs of the students and the communities we would be working in. In the end, this response led me to wonder if I would graduate from WCU knowing the importance of implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom and the skills to do so.

Today, I have had several chances to reconnect with WCU, specifically at WCU's regional site in western California, where there is a predominately Hispanic community. After some time spent with WCU faculty and students, I became very comfortable with the community but was saddened to overhear students during our community dinner share they were dissatisfied with some of the professors' delivery of content and explanation of assignments. Some students had mentioned a lack of connection and feelings of being left out of activities, clubs, and groups that were being held on campus. A small group of students had shared they felt like their traditions, beliefs, and values were respected but not acknowledged or understood within the program. Overhearing the students discuss their concerns brought back memories of the way I felt as a student at WCU and made me realize that WCU is still experiencing similar challenges when it comes to what knowledge professors need in order to successfully integrate and promote strategies to meet the needs of students in a culturally diverse classroom.

With many demographic changes and an increase in diverse student enrollment at the higher education level, it is critical for higher education leaders to be knowledgeable of challenges that relate to diversity. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported that on many American campuses, there had been a significant increase in number of students who come from diverse backgrounds enrolled in colleges and universities. Huanshu (2017) suggested because of the rise in diversity in students, leaders need to be prepared and display culturally responsive leadership behaviors as a tool for addressing issues that may arise from leading a culturally diverse institution.

Background

Leadership and diversity are invariably related as educational institutions shift from a homogeneous culture to an environment containing a multiethnic, multicultural, and economically diverse student body (A. Chen, 2017; D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). To lead institutions effectively and successfully, it is helpful for leaders to recognize cultural differences and disparities in communication styles, beliefs, shared values, and sociocultural heritage among their diverse student populations (Ingram, 2015; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). An increasing body of research describes the importance of culturally responsive practices in addressing the needs of culturally diverse students at the primary school level (Brown, 2007); however, more research is needed on how faculty leaders in higher education integrate and promote culturally responsive strategies to better facilitate effective teaching and learning for culturally diverse college students, such as the students who attend WCU (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The ever-changing demographic, social, cultural, and economic trends call for essential changes and implications of culturally responsive teaching strategies in higher education (Gay, 2015). To respond more effectively to the growing demographic shift in the student population, professors should seek out strategies to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure they receive a high-quality education (MacDonald, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010). When professors do not find ways to recognize students' cultures, the students may become less engaged, therefore impacting their learning. Additionally, if students do not learn the traditional way, they will participate less and only receive information. The specific problem that prompts this research is that many professors do not have the necessary knowledge to integrate and promote strategies to meet the needs of students in a culturally diverse classroom (Gay, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2018; Scandura & Mouriño, 2017), including, seemingly, those at WCU. Therefore, definitions that provide clarity, as well as models and strategies that provide steps for higher education leaders to explore, are needed to elucidate how leaders in higher education should respond to the current demographic changes that characterize today's educational organizations and college students (Gay, 2015; Ingram, 2015; Lucey & White, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how student cultural differences influence WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I sought to understand how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result.

The intended goal of this research was to be helpful to my organization, WCU, and help the wider community of interest by bridging the cultural gap between faculty and students, resulting in an enhanced organizational culture that would better serve the increasingly diverse student body. Furthermore, through this study, I offer practical recommendations such as modifications in teaching materials and classroom teaching strategies.

Research Questions

To understand the implementation of culturally diverse strategies of professors in an undergraduate early childhood development program at WCU, a private Christian university, I examined in this qualitative case study the following research questions:

RQ1: How do WCU faculty perceive student cultural differences influencing their instructional pedagogies within their courses?

RQ2: How do WCU faculty describe their understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies, particularly within the context of a Christian university?

RQ3: What culturally diverse strategies are WCU faculty implementing, and what differences have they seen in their teaching and student learning as a result?

RQ4: What factors help facilitate or create barriers to WCU faculty implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies in their courses?

Definition of Key Terms

Culturally responsive leadership. Culturally responsive leadership involves using strategies that make learning relevant, effective, and relatable to culturally diverse students (Gay, 2010).

Culturally responsive leadership behaviors. Culturally responsive leadership behaviors include practices, actions, mannerisms, policies, and procedures that impact the climate and

structure of the classroom. These behaviors may also impact teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culture. Culture includes traits or behaviors that are shared or learned by a group of people or by each generation (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Diversity. Diversity includes the similarities and differences among the human race. Diversity can range from race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation to ability, religion, or economic status (A. Chen, 2017).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how student cultural differences influenced WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I sought to understand how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result. Chapter 1 continues with sections on the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, and a definition of key terms.

Chapter 2 features a review of the literature made up of two major areas: culturally responsive leadership in higher education and diverse groups in higher education. The conceptual framework for this study is based on work by Gay (2010) around her work on culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Gay's (2010) work defined culturally responsive teaching as "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory" (p. 36). Lastly, the review of literature includes information about Christian

higher education institutions and their continued challenges with increasing diversity on their

campuses (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how student cultural differences influenced WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I sought to understand how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result.

According to Karkouti (2016), diversity is a powerful agent of social change sometimes not fully embraced by higher education institutions. The university is viewed by many as an organization in society that must embrace diversity, not standardization. This demands the organization, its students, and leaders make a commitment to cultural diversity and promote the supposition that diversity is anticipated at the individual and subgroup levels (Parker & Pascarella, 2013). Subsequently, the inclusion of culture as a factor in investigating the implementation of culturally responsive strategies in higher education classrooms is regarded as imperative for the future development in educational leadership as an area of research and implementation (Considine et al., 2014). Consequently, research regarding higher education, culture, diversity, and the challenges that accompany cultural responsiveness in higher education settings was reviewed.

To understand the topic of culturally responsive leadership, the literature review strategy was to locate and analyze literature on culturally responsive leadership, as well as culture, globalization, cultural relevance, and higher education, using the research database EBSCOhost. The aim was to explore how educators understand the concept of culturally diverse teaching strategies and how students' cultural differences influence their instruction. Additionally, the

goal was to explore what successes and challenges educators faced when implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies. A wealth of scholarly articles about cultural responsiveness was reviewed to learn how it impacts students in feeling valued and respected, ultimately increasing learning.

Conceptual Framework: Culturally Responsive Leadership

The culturally responsive leadership framework is based on the work by Gay (2010) around culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Gay's (2010) work defined culturally responsive teaching as "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory" (p. 36). Gay (2010) explained that there are five important foundational strategies of cultural responsiveness: knowledge about cultural diversity, how to implement culturally relevant curriculum, creating diverse classroom climates, effective cross-cultural communication, and delivery of instruction. Several researchers have described culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics of their students as ways to deliver instruction more effectively (D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Gay 2010; Genao, 2016; Maingi, 2017). Genao (2016) asserted that when specific strategies are utilized to deliver content in a way that students can relate to, the interest of the student is heightened, and the academic content becomes more meaningful and more easily retained.

Knowledge About Cultural Diversity

Having knowledge about cultural diversity and the students being taught is vital when delivering content in any type of educational setting (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Case, 2013; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). Howard (2016) explained that educators are unable to deliver and support students in retaining content when they have no knowledge of who their students are outside of the educational setting in which they teach.

Although higher education campuses are continuing to become more diverse (Aponte-Soto et al., 2014; D. Chen & Yang, 2017), some higher education programs are still vague about how they implement multicultural education as well as culturally responsive strategies. Gay (2010) explained there are several leaders of professional programs who are still trying to find a way to present and embrace the implementation of a multicultural education, even though some other programs have implemented it successfully without any challenges. Additionally, Gay (2010) explained that when higher education programs are vague in how they serve the educational needs of their ethnically diverse student population, it is not consistent with preparing and supporting educators to implement culturally responsive teaching or strategies. This challenge supports the argument that "explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2010, p. 107).

Gay (2010) found that having knowledge about cultural diversity includes "understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups" (p. 108). Even though some educators may find this overwhelming, many researchers support the idea that culture is very complex and educators need only be knowledgeable in the areas that have to do with teaching and learning (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Case, 2013; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016). For example, among different ethnic groups in a higher education setting, an educator should be aware of cultural values, traditions, communication style, learning style, as well as contributions to the community. Being knowledgeable in these areas supports the first tenet of Gay's (2010) framework and further confirms that to support an ethnically diverse student population and increase academic achievement, knowledge about cultural diversity is needed.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Aside from knowing cultural diversity, educators also need to know how to design and teach culturally relevant curriculum. Additionally, educators need to be aware of different strategies for the delivery of content. Gay (2002) explained that there are normally three different types of curriculum that are present in the classroom that offer opportunities to teach cultural diversity. The first type is formal curriculum, which Gay (2002) explained as curriculum that normally consists of the textbooks and specific curriculum standards that have already been predetermined.

The second type is what Gay (2002) considered to be symbolic curriculum, which consists of symbols and images used to reward or acknowledge students. Gay (2002) stated that "culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power of the symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity" (p. 108). An example of symbolic curriculum would be a community leader's bulletin, which would be a way to display leaders within the community who are of different gender, race, social class, and ability, resulting in students feeling more comfortable and welcomed in the environment.

The third type of curriculum is what Cortés (1979) referred to as societal curriculum. Cortés (1979) defined societal curriculum as "a massive, ongoing, informal curriculum made up of family, peer groups, neighborhoods, mass media, and other socializing forces that educate us throughout our lives" (p. 476). Gay (2002) explained that both groups, minority and majority, can be negatively impacted by these forces, which is why educators need to become more confident in a culturally relevant curriculum. Educators who become more confident can utilize

the tools they have, including the formal curriculum to meet the needs of the diverse classroom environment (Gay, 2002).

Cultural Classroom Climates

Gay (2002) discussed the third critical component to the culturally responsive leadership framework, which is creating classroom climates that promote learning for the ethnically diverse student population. Researchers have found that the learning environment is known to impact student engagement and ultimately performance (Garibay, 2015). Regardless of if the students are in class, the cafeteria, the computer lab, or the library, an environment where all students feel safe, valued, and respected is needed for students to experience success. Researchers have found that a negative environment can pose a challenge for learning, which is why it is vital to create and sustain a culturally diverse classroom climate (D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Garibay, 2015).

Creating a classroom climate that is safe and values diversity must begin before class starts for the students (Garibay, 2015; Gay, 2002). Garibay (2015) supported Gay's (2002) assertion that several areas need to be addressed to create an environment that allows students to feel like they are a valuable part of the class. It is suggested that educators know about their students in terms of diversity. Self-identification allows educators to think about their own identity and how they might teach and respond to students. Gay (2002) suggested that self-identification could provide a glimpse of teacher effectiveness in terms of diversity.

Additionally, how educators learn about other groups requires some examination (Garibay, 2015). As educators, it is our responsibility to increase our learning about "student needs and problematic assumptions about particular groups" (Garibay, 2015, p. 5). Garibay (2015) stated, "learning about others may also help instructors draw on examples from various cultural reference points so that diverse students feel included and valued" (p. 6).

Cross-Cultural Communications

Cross-cultural communication is also a vital component to Gay's (2002) culturally responsive framework. Gay (2002) stated that "this is a pivotal element in preparing for culturally responsive teaching. Teacher preparation programs that teach how to prepare a culturally responsive classroom teach educators how to communicate with different ethnic groups" (p. 24). However, making sure that the communication style reflects the cultural values of the student and shapes learning behaviors is vital to successful cross-cultural communication (Gay, 2002).

As higher education institutions' demographics shift from a homogenous culture to a more diverse culture, educators are finding issues meeting the needs of students. These issues include effective communication with students, which is causing some students to feel unheard, undervalued, and in some cases ostracized (D. Chen & Yang, 2017).

Delivery of Instruction

The aim of the culturally responsive framework is the improvement of ethnically diverse student academic achievement (Gay, 2002). D. Chen and Yang (2017) examined the "effectiveness of implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies in an adult ESL classroom" (p. 79). D. Chen and Yang (2017) found when culturally responsive teaching strategies are utilized, student participation increased. Also, it was found that when the instruction employed different types of delivery, there was an increase in students' involvement, communication, and communication skills (D. Chen & Yang, 2017).

Education scholars have come to a consensus that in order to be an effective educator, one must have a great wealth of content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Case, 2013; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

According to Howard (2016), "Teachers can't teach what they do not know" (p. 6). Howard's (2016) statement refers to knowing students as well as knowing the content that teachers are required to teach. Howard (2016) further explained it is still common that many higher education professionals are unprepared to teach ethnically diverse students. Han et al. (2014) stated, "With a growing number of students in schools coming from diverse backgrounds, there is little debate about the need to prepare educators who are responsive to diverse student populations" (p. 290). However, they found that leaders within their study were not prepared to support new teachers in utilizing culturally responsive strategies on higher education campuses.

The aim of implementing culturally responsive strategies with the culturally responsive framework is the improvement of ethnically diverse student academic achievements (Gay, 2010). As a result of the implementation, the academic achievement of the diverse student population within the higher education campus will improve when the content is delivered through the lens of the student's culture and life experiences (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Case, 2013; Gay, 2010; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

Pedagogy in Higher Education

Pedagogy is defined as the "method and practice of teaching" (Wells & Edwards, 2013, p. 86). Teaching is one of a university's top priorities, but some researchers claim that it is not carried out as effectively as it should be. Wells and Edwards (2013) also claimed that there is a major concern regarding the dominance of whole-class lectures and reports that instructors are not teaching the way their students learn. Pedagogy and assessment are vital aspects of classroom teaching at all grade levels, especially higher education (Filene, 2005). Oftentimes, K–12 teachers are heavily trained in pedagogy; universities, however, do focus on pedagogy but most of the time with preservice teachers, not with their faculty (Wells & Edwards, 2013).

Within the higher education campus, new faculty or instructors are hired with very little formal knowledge about pedagogy (Wells & Edwards, 2013). Additionally, it is rare that faculty are provided with any instruction or professional growth opportunities to develop knowledge in the pedagogy of teaching. Harris and Cullen (2008) stated, "One attempt to revitalize undergraduate education is by shifting pedagogy to a learner-centered focus and supporting an emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning" (p. 58). According to many researchers, the best college teachers know how to engage students because their knowledge is expandable (Filene, 2005; Harris & Cullen, 2008; Wells & Edwards, 2013). These teachers also know their students, create environments that are welcoming yet challenging, and have a healthy relationship with students that is built on trust and genuine interest. Harris and Cullen (2008) explained professors who can do these things are more likely to branch out and find alternative ways to teach the way their students learn.

Filene (2005) stated, "Our college students deserve more than talking heads. The students deserve to be taught in ways that actively engage them in the learning process, are student-centered, and evaluate their learning using a variety of measures" (p. 56). Unfortunately, researchers found that sometimes even though some professors are well versed in their field, they are not aware of effective instructional or assessment techniques or are not always using them in the higher education classroom.

Andragogy

"Andragogy" is a term that is commonly connected to the education of adults. According to Knowles (1980), andragogy is the "art and science of adult learning" (p. 47). Because education reform has encouraged more support of adult learners, adult students should be encouraged to develop knowledge through "an active construction process based on their prior

experience and personal interpretation of the world" (Sharifi et al., 2017, p. 1442). The concept of andragogy differs from pedagogy because within andragogy the learning is viewed as an active process that adds to the knowledge that a student may already have. Additionally, if well-designed activities are in place, not only will students add to their existing knowledge but they will also improve their understanding of the topic (Sharifi et al., 2017).

To the contrary, pedagogy works under the assumption that "learners are passive recipients of transferred information" (Harris & Cullen, 2018, p. 59). Harris and Cullen (2018) explained that because the teacher is the administrator of all information, students often become dependent on the teacher for information and knowledge. Sharifi et al. (2017) claimed that in this type of environment self-assessment is rarely encouraged and the feedback students receive does not promote student success.

Knowles (1980) stated the "purpose of adult education should be self-actualization" (p. 51). Knowles (1980) also explained that although learning is important in adult education, teachers should also pay attention to students' "social, emotional, psychological, and intellectual development" (p. 55). As a result of Knowles's (1980) research, andragogy is recognized as different from pedagogy. This difference in recognition is different partly because of the adult learner's ability and need to be in charge of their own learning. Knowles (1980) stated,

> As individuals mature, their self-concept moves from dependency to independency; they accumulate a reservoir of life experiences; their readiness to learn becomes closely related to the developmental tasks of social roles; and their time and curricular perspectives are modified to accommodate the immediate application of knowledge or performance-centeredness. (p. 44)

These assumptions are synonymous with autonomy, which allows students to create their own path for learning and work in a way that best fits them.

Student Development Theories

Student development theories are helpful when implementing culturally responsive strategies in diverse higher education classrooms. However, an underlying assumption is that in student development, the growth of a student is one part instead of a collection of parts (Gerda, 2006). This idea has evolved quite a bit from the student affairs paradigm, where the goal is to deliver content and hope that the student learns it (Schuh et al., 2017). Student affairs did play a major role in external demands such as acceptance rates, class ranks, retention rates, and graduation rates but needed a paradigm shift that helped craft a learning environment that was aligned with the institution's academic mission and recognized the unique contributions that faculty and students can add to student learning (Gerda, 2006). As student affairs became more challenged to be seen as a partnership with faculty to increase the overall success of the institution and the students, student development theory was able to provide the shift needed so that there could be a focus on the affective areas of the student while the faculty focuses on the cognitive areas (Schuh et al., 2017).

Student development theories provide a guide for student affairs professionals to develop programs, provide services, set goals, and interact with students (Gerda, 2006). Understanding these theories provides higher education institutions with clarity regarding this complementary work and how it impacts classroom teaching (Gerda, 2006). Student development theories also support faculty in identifying and understanding student behavior, which in turn allows faculty to utilize what they know about their students to create unique and meaningful experiences in the classroom. As Gollnick and Chinn (2017) stated, "Understanding the diverse groups on campus

will make the implementation of classroom and teaching strategies in the higher education classroom more effective," which will positively impact student learning (p. 12).

Tinto (1993) developed a theory of student retention that stated that students leave college without a degree because of the lack of connection and interactions with their institution. Tinto (1993) asserted that students enter college with a diverse set of challenges and beliefs about the education system. Three areas of student retention are identified in Tinto's (1993) theory. Tinto (1993) stated, "Academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the university, or a low level of commitment to the university" (p. 98) will result in students departing college or dropping out.

Tinto (1993) explained that over time, most groups and organizations, such as higher education institutions, develop cultures. Braxton (2000) defined culture in higher education as "the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions, on and off campus" (p. 198). Braxton (2000) suggested using a cultural perspective to take a closer look at student departure. One advantage of using a cultural perspective is that it provides accountability for student behavior that may result from students' interactions, such as the effort students put forth, level of involvement, and student belonging (Braxton, 2000). Additionally, Braxton (2000) explained that using a cultural perspective defines the issue of student departure primarily as "a sociocultural phenomenon, rather than an individual, psychological experience" (p. 205). Braxton (2000) claimed that although the decision to depart from college is made independently and individually, the decision is also influenced by cultural forces.

Additionally, part of the diverse groups that enter higher education campuses can be characterized by their socioeconomic background, knowledge of college-level work, and their demographics (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discussed Pascarella's model for assessment of student development, which suggests student development and growth might be affected by five variables. Pascarella (2006) stated,

> Variables such as students' precollege traits, the college or university's structural or organizational characteristics, the campus culture or environment, socializing agents on the campus, and the quality of effort put forth by the students, can all directly or indirectly affect campus culture. (p. 509)

Like Tinto (1993), Pascarella (2006) stated that students who are less involved due to one or more of the five variables would not develop as well as they would if they had made connections on campus.

Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering describes how transitioning into a new role can be daunting. Schlossberg (1989) defined mattering as "our belief, right or wrong, that we matter to someone else" (p. 9). Mattering is "the alternative feeling to marginality" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 11). Mattering is the assurance a person needs when they ask reflective questions such as "Am I important?" or "Do I belong here?" Schlossberg (1989) wrote about students who felt lost between the transition of their old role and their new role. Schlossberg (1989) stated, "People in transition often feel marginal and that they do not matter. Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises" (p. 6). Schlossberg (1989) also explained that if there is a lack of routines in the new position, or if there are considerable differences between the old position and the new position, a person could feel more "marginal" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 6). Several feelings contribute to a person feeling

marginal, such as the feeling that you do not fit in, no one likes you or wants to be your friend, or the feeling that no one cares about you (Schlossberg, 1989). In any new role, a student can feel out of place, especially when making a transition from a familiar place such as home or high school. Park (1928) described the marginal person as

> one who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if permitted to do so, with past and traditions, and not quite accepted, because of prejudice, in the new society in which the individual seeks to find a place. (p. 892)

Although everyone feels out of place at one time or another, it does help students learn about themselves and how they react to transitions (Anderson et al., 2012). The feeling of mattering is important to everyone and provides students with the feeling that they are depended on, that what they do concerns someone, and that they have some type of influence over others. Schlossberg (1989) suggested that creating situations that bring marginal students together will impact student learning.

There are many examples of how feeling marginal affects students and impacts learning. Klineberg and Hull (1979) explained that feelings of being left out while enrolled in a university are experienced more by students who are international students than students who are originally from the United States. Becker (1971) found that international students who were enrolled in college in the United States changed how much they supported their country of origin to support the beliefs and values of the United States, but they were also found to have an aggressive attitude toward both countries. The marginality these students experienced was partly due to the many transitions they went through to get to their institution.

In the end, researchers agreed that students should maintain who they are in relation to their culture of origin as well as maintain their social contacts outside of the institution and experience learning that fits their needs (Braxton, 2000; Pascarella, 2006; Rendon et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). For example, the teaching methods of the institution should match the diverse group of students enrolled in the class. Rendon et al. (2000) suggested that these students would have to make significant changes to adapt to the institutional culture; however, this would help the students move between their "culture of origin" and their institutional "culture of immersion" (p. 150). The result of this institutional shift is increased student retention, persistence, and achievement.

Culturally Responsive Leadership in Higher Education

Culturally responsive leadership was defined by Gay (2010) as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective" (p. 46). Researchers found it was important that U.S. higher education institutions utilize culturally responsive practices to become more inclusive to promote environments that will effectively develop a growing population of ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students (Case, 2013). An emphasis on how educational leaders respond to culturally diverse students may help improve education at all levels (Lucey & White, 2017).

Researchers agree that organizational changes need to be made in all areas, including the culture of the organization (Nunan, 1999). Developing a culturally responsive curriculum is an approach that requires all leaders to actively involve themselves in the process of reflection and improvement (Considine et al., 2014). Embracing culture can serve as a way to improve the motivation of students because it is grounded in respect for differences in culture and creating a

safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment that can increase engagement and motivation for all learners. Teaching methods that cross disciplines and integrate culturally responsive practices into all subject areas leads to the promotion of justice and equity in society (Mette et al., 2016).

Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) explained that many university students feel a lack of connection with campus leadership, the content being taught, and the classroom pedagogical strategies being used. According to Gay (2010), students from culturally diverse backgrounds perform poorly academically and socially when compared to their White peers. In the current American higher education system, individuals who belong to underrepresented groups continue to perform poorly and feel isolated (Gay, 2015; Scandura & Mouriño, 2017). Reasons for this low performance can be traced to such variables as institutional culture, curriculum design, instructional practices, leadership practices, and educational policies (Gay, 2010, 2015; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

Heitner and Jennings (2016) questioned whether discrimination is still tucked into people's minds when working with diverse groups of students. Additionally, Heitner and Jennings (2016) suggested that this could be a message that is being sent to students through the lack of diverse faculty on many higher education campuses (Karkouti, 2016). Karkouti (2016) suggested before leaders can implement culturally responsive classroom and teaching strategies, leaders need to address issues on campus through education and by increasing the number of diverse faculty members. Consequently, addressing these challenges will lead to effectively reaching organizational goals of diversity, such as enhancing diversity-related educational opportunities and promoting and supporting activities that celebrate diversity and develop and awareness of inclusion (Mette et al., 2016).

Lastly, according to Baumgartner et al. (2015), some faculty may not be sure what culturally responsive strategies are and how to implement them. It is reported that educational leaders believe it is important but are unsure how to apply what they know and may be lacking a safe place to ask because they do not know who is responsible for ensuring implementation (Baumgartner et al., 2015).

Culture in Cultural Responsiveness

Culture is defined by Heitner and Jennings (2016) as traits or behaviors that are shared or learned by a group of people or by each generation. When culturally responsive leadership recognizes the value of including aspects of a student's culture in all areas of learning, students will become more engaged, and the learning that takes place will be more meaningful (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). The development of culture is directly related to leadership because leadership consists of beliefs and values that help a group to progress when dealing with a problem (Gordon & Ronder, 2016). Similar to assumptions within culture, when a leader's assumptions, values, and beliefs are endorsed and shared, they will be utilized as the group culture (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). Parker and Pascarella (2013) reported that those who hold positions in higher education should be held responsible for understanding the numerous cultural groups present because the student body relies on them for direction and encouragement, which in turn shapes their culture. This is how leaders in the higher education setting can have an impact on the diversity challenges on campus (Parker & Pascarella, 2013).

While awareness of culture in the field of higher education is important, Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) described the idea of cultural humility, which calls for the person with hierarchical power to openly acknowledge the limited understanding of the cultures of those they lead. Additionally, cultural humility allows the leader to empower others to express and teach from

their cultural perspectives, regardless of hierarchal status. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) stated, "Cultural humility is committing to an ongoing relationship with communities, and colleagues' that require humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique" (p. 118). Through reflection and asking meaningful questions, practitioners and higher education institutions are better encouraged to understand the student body on a deeper level, therefore impacting student learning.

Diverse Groups in Higher Education

As Gollnick and Chinn (2017) explained, higher education campuses in the United States are some of the most diverse campuses in the world. The diverse groups that can be found on a higher education campus differ from one campus to the next: "Students in the higher education classroom bring with them their unique ethnicities, races, socioeconomic statuses, religions, and native languages to the classrooms" (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017, p. 10). On higher education campuses, students vary in gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and mental abilities. Some students come from different parts of the world, and the foundation of their experiences comes from the environment in which they grew up. Many researchers are convinced that as we move further into this century, the educational population in higher education is going to become more diverse, and because of this, education needs to be in a continuous state of change (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017; Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Gollnick and Chinn (2017) asserted understanding the diverse groups on campus will make the implementation of classroom and teaching strategies in the higher education classroom more effective. A proper multicultural education that values diversity and implements it properly shows students that they are valued regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity,

native language, religion, socioeconomic status, or disability (Bennett, 2019). According to Gollnick and Chinn (2017),

> To deliver a multicultural education, we must develop instructional strategies that build on the culture of our students and their communities. The curriculum must be authentic and meaningful to students to engage them in learning. Making the curriculum multicultural help students and teachers think critically about institutional racism, classism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism. (p. 11)

According to Gay (2002), like elementary and middle school teachers, higher education faculty are faced with the task of preparing students with diverse backgrounds for real-life situations in a global workforce. Without the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies in the higher education classroom, some students may leave the institution unprepared for the workforce (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, the lack of relevant and culturally appropriate instructional materials may hinder students from obtaining new knowledge and hinder students from applying what they have learned to their community (Abadeer, 2009). Lastly, when faculty fail to incorporate elements of the student's culture in instruction, students do not feel a sense of belonging, may not take ownership of their learning, and will struggle at developing healthy teacher-student relationships (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017).

Diversity in Christian Higher Education

Diversity and cross-cultural engagements should be "among the top priorities and objectives in Christian higher education institutions" (Abadeer, 2009, p. 187). Abadeer (2009) explained the reason for making diversity and cross-cultural engagements a priority is due to "national and local globalization" (Abadeer, 2009, p. 189). Additionally, Abadeer (2009) discussed that Christian higher education institutions should celebrate diversity not because of

the fear of being politically incorrect but because of the "joy of celebrating God's creation of diversity" (Abadeer, 2009, p. 190). Unfortunately, Christian higher education institutions continue to face challenges with increasing diversity on their campuses (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). With the ever-changing multicultural society, it is vital yet challenging that higher education Christian institutions understand the impact diversity has on "institutional life" (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013, p. 7). Researchers have found that several Christian higher education institutions claim to be dedicated to increasing racial and ethnic diversity on their campuses but "continue to be less diverse than their secular counterparts" (Ash & Schreiner, 2016, p. 41). Ash and Schreiner (2016) suggested that this commitment is so the institutions represent diversity as "described in Christian scriptures" (p. 38). However, researchers explain that Christian higher education institutions struggle to understand the conditions that are needed to make diversity relevant in the higher education context (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Nussbaum & Chang, 2013).

Abadeer (2009) suggested that globalization is having such a large impact on society that it is becoming necessary that Christian institutions revisit their "heritage, mission statements, and perspectives on diversity in terms of their Christian identity and their interactions with the world that exists outside their physical, religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries" (p. 187). Recent literature points out that even though Christian higher education institutions claim to be inclusive, they are often monocultural in practice (Abadeer, 2009; Smith, 2014). Smith (2014) discussed the theme of unity and diversity in the Bible, as well as the awareness of cultural diversity. However, researchers agree that when examining the history of the Church, the idea of a dominant culture is visible (Abadeer, 2009; Smith, 2014). Smith (2014) noted when policies

and procedures are focused on diversity, it may seem that the institutions are attempting to be politically correct, which may seem "tokenistic" (p. 268).

Like any other policies that involve humans and human interactions, incorporating diversity comes with its own set of obstacles. Some institutions fear losing their own

> Christian identities through processes and trends of society trivializing religion and succumbing to secularism in academic life, marginalizing religious practices as extracurricular activities, and rejecting the Christian faith and religion in general as restrictive, dogmatic, exclusive, and divisive. (Abadeer, 2009, p. 192)

In the end, several researchers agree that Christian higher education institutions should embrace the start and execution of diversity and cross-cultural engagement because they enhance the institutions' Christian identity and foundation (Abadeer, 2009; Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Smith, 2014).

Race and Ethnicity

Nieto and Bode (2018) described race as "biological, referring to the physical characteristics of a person" and ethnicity as "a social science construct that describes a person's cultural identity" (p. 51). When comparing the major differences in graduation rates in students of color and students who are White, one would hope that race and ethnicity in higher education would be high on the education reform agenda (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). When considering the higher education context, Hawley and Nieto (2010) explained that race and ethnicity affect higher education teaching and learning in two ways: "They affect how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and they influence teachers' assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning" (p. 66). Being aware of how race and ethnicity

impact learning would allow educators to maximize the learning opportunities and outcomes for students who come from diverse backgrounds (Hawley & Nieto, 2010).

Several researchers suggested that the higher education population is going to continue to become more diverse, so creating a responsive campus culture is key (Bennett, 2019; A. Chen, 2017; D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Nunan, 1999). Hawley and Nieto (2010) stated, "Being more conscious of race and ethnicity is not discriminatory; it is realistic" (p. 66). Research regarding race and discrimination suggests that everyone, regardless of their race and ethnicity, is uncomfortable with people whose race and ethnicity are different from their own (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Additionally, people of different races and ethnicities also see equity and access to education differently (Bennett, 2019; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2018).

Many scholars also discussed the idea of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2014) stated, "Color blind racism is the belief that racism is no longer a problem and that we all have equal opportunities" (p. 41). French and Simmons (2015) explained that teachers and administrators are reluctant to talk about topics such as race and gender. Despite higher education campuses having a caring climate, a supportive and collaborative community, and meaningful instruction, they still face barriers to being more successful with students of color partly due to the lack of discussions around race and gender explicitly (French & Simmons, 2015). Additionally, it was discovered that the reason success was impacted was because faculty and staff members preferred to take "the colorblind approach to teaching" (French & Simmons, 2015, p. 11). Finally, if race and ethnicity play such a large role in access to higher education and its opportunities and achievements, it is vital that higher education leaders understand the importance of successfully addressing race and ethnicity in their classrooms (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Gender

According to researchers, the term "gender" is used to describe the social and cultural role of a person in society. The World Health Organization (2018) defined gender as "the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed." In agreement with the World Health Organization's definition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2018 Global Education Digest defined gender as "the complex interrelationship between one's body, identity, and social attitude" (p. 3).

Throughout the past 10 years, there has been a critical global change in higher education classrooms. Diprete and Buchmann (2013) explained, "Across socioeconomic classes, women are increasingly enrolling and completing postsecondary education, while, even as opportunities for people without a college education shrink, men's rates of graduation remain relatively stagnant" (p. 35). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), 73.5% of women who had graduated high school were enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college, compared to 66.8% of males. That is an increase from 1960 when 57% of college students were men and 43% were women (National Center for Education Statistics, 1960).

In recent years, how students acquire knowledge and what the student's role looks like in a classroom have been the topic of growing research. Specifically, on the topic of gender, Belenky et al. (1997) stated there are "five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority" (p. 29). The authors suggested that women's socialization begins in a stage of silence and that women are taught not to speak but to listen. Additionally, the authors reported women are taught to focus on the voices and needs of others, putting all of their own needs aside (Belenky et al., 1997). Throughout the literature,

women are expected to obtain knowledge from experts and to accept that knowledge without being critical of it. The authors claimed that if a woman evaluates received knowledge against her experience, she is likely to see her experience as incorrect (Belenky et al., 1997).

Hofer (2008) explained that the foundation of a person's beliefs plays a critical part in their intellectual development. Understanding how each gender learns best can assist the institution in structuring classrooms in a way to support all students. In agreement with Hofer (2008), Kline (2008) stated, "Much research continues to be done internationally on what 'knowing,' 'knowledge' and 'beliefs' mean, and how they may vary across cultures" (p. 105).

Although some gains have been made and efforts have increased, resulting in increased achievement, women still face many challenges "economically, politically, and globally" (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017, p. 56). Sleeter (2018) explained that in many areas of the workforce, women are still underrepresented. Therefore, women are still not as dominant in many areas, which causes researchers to describe culture related to gender as a major concern in the higher education setting (A. Chen, 2017; Gollnick & Chinn, 2017; Sleeter, 2018). Understanding the diverse groups of students on campus will increase the effectiveness of the faculty and impact learning (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). A proper multicultural education that values diversity and implements it properly shows students that they are valued regardless of their gender (Bennett, 2019).

International Students

In the 2017–2018 academic year, U.S. colleges and universities experienced a 1.5% increase from the previous year in the number of international students on their campus (Institute of International Education, 2018). According to the Institute of International Education (2018), the number of international students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States has

held a steadily increasing trend for over 3 years. In the 2015–2016 academic year, roughly 15%
of graduate students were international students, whereas about 4% of undergraduate students
were international students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The Institute of
International Education (2018) reported that over 84% of international students had declared a
major that allowed them to contribute to globalizing the workforce upon graduation.

Researchers found that "peers and faculty treat international students differently than
their American counterparts on the basis of English Language skills, accent, cultural differences,
and social identities, such as nationality, religion, and race" (George Mwangi et al., 2018, p. 1).
Pointedly, if international students are in a class providing support to their peers, they may be
ignored or not asked to elaborate on their thinking (George Mwangi et al., 2018). George
Mwangi et al. stated, "International graduate students have shown that if they do not believe their
English-speaking abilities are strong, then they are less likely to participate in class and interact
with their fellow peers" (p. 2). This can be detrimental to their education because U.S. classes
usually include some type of expectation for class participation and cooperative group activities
(Andrade et al., 2020). Bennett (2019) explained that the negative perceptions of international
students' intellectual and academic abilities negatively affect their sense of belonging and can
lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Disabilities

When examining the number of adults pursuing a higher education degree, researchers
discovered that the number of adults with disabilities enrolled in a university was higher than it
had been in the past 25 years (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). Although the rates have tripled, the
rate of this increase continues to be a lot lower than that of those who are pursing degrees
without a disability. Obtaining an education is vital for those with disabilities, as researchers

have found that adults with disabilities who do not pursue a college education are five times more likely to live at the poverty level than those without disabilities (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Squires et al., 2018). Additionally, it was found that in order for those with disabilities to gain financial freedom and independence like their peers, a postsecondary education is needed (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010).

Squires et al. (2018) confirmed that "federal legislation mandates that individuals with disabilities be provided with appropriate accommodations to be successful at public postsecondary institutions" (p. 141). Unlike in K–12 institutions, students with disabilities in higher education have to self-identify their disability and request accommodations. Lombardi and Murray (2010) explained that in college, students with disabilities are fully integrated into general education classes and are expected to advocate for themselves. Although students have the right to accommodations, "the instructional demands and learning expectations are not modified in postsecondary settings" (Lombardi & Murray, 2010, p. 44). Squires et al. (2018) explained that as a result, students with disabilities may experience difficulty in transitioning and adjusting to a higher education environment.

Researchers found that in postsecondary education, it is more common that faculty are familiar with content rather than with pedagogy (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Lombardi & Murray, 2010; Squires et al., 2018). Although there are some programs offered so that faculty can increase their knowledge of pedagogical methods, they are often not required or are very limited. As a result, some faculty members may not be aware of appropriate accommodations or instructional strategies that can support learning for all students, especially those with disabilities (Lombardi & Murray, 2010). Lombardi and Murray (2010) stated, "Students with disabilities report that negative faculty attitudes and perceptions toward disability, specifically in response to

accommodations requests, adversely affect their experience in postsecondary classrooms" (p. 44). Lastly, lacking knowledge of students who have disabilities limits the faculty's ability to design instruction and utilize teaching strategies that are responsive to the student's needs, which can negatively impact learning (Lombardi & Murray, 2010).

Summary

In summary, if meeting the specific needs of students is a goal in a higher education setting, then faculty should understand changes in populations and begin to practice skills that bring benefits to society. In this chapter, I explored how educators understood the concept of culturally diverse teaching strategies and how students' cultural differences influence their instruction. Additionally, this chapter explored what successes and challenges educators are facing when implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies. Fortunately, this chapter indicated that some groups of scholars and practitioners believe in the value of cultural responsiveness. More importantly, in this chapter I also discussed the beginning of conversations among agents of change within the diverse demographics of the communities they serve.

Chapter 3 features an overview of the research methodology for this qualitative case study regarding the understanding and value of culturally responsive strategies in higher education. Additionally, included in Chapter 3 is information about the population, the participants, and the number of interviewees. The criteria for selection are also explained as well as how the participants were invited to participate in the study. The methods for establishing trustworthiness and rigor are also clearly stated and supported by scholarly research. Lastly, materials, instruments used, data collection procedures, and analysis procedures are clearly explained.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the research methods that were utilized in the study. This chapter provides information about the participants, the criteria for being invited to the study, and the sampling strategy. Additionally, there is a description of the research design that was chosen for the study as well as an explanation as to why the qualitative case study design was appropriate. The instruments for the case study are also described, and the procedures that were followed to carry out the study are also included. I also describe the methods that were used to collect and analyze the data, as well as any ethical guidelines that were followed.

Research Questions

To understand the implementation of culturally diverse strategies of professors in an undergraduate early childhood development program at WCU, a private Christian university, in this qualitative case study I examined the following research questions:

RQ1: How do WCU faculty perceive student cultural differences influencing their instructional pedagogies within their courses?

RQ2: How do WCU faculty describe their understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies, particularly within the context of a Christian university?

RQ3: What culturally diverse strategies are WCU faculty implementing, and what differences have they seen in their teaching and student learning as a result?

RQ4: What factors help facilitate or create barriers to WCU faculty implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies in their courses?

Methodological Approach

I sought to understand how WCU faculty describe their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result. The decision to utilize qualitative methods should be driven by the purpose of the research and the research questions (Creswell, 2014). In this case study, the research questions influenced the use of qualitative research because it involves "emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). Qualitative research provides the flexibility needed when dealing with human interaction, such as in this research study examining what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result. Qualitative researchers also utilize an inductive strategy to build concepts, hypotheses, and theories rather than test theories that already exist (Saldaña, 2015). Creswell (2014) suggested qualitative research could also be employed if a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little prior research exists or the topic has hardly been addressed.

Case Study Methodology

A case study research design was used in this study, as this approach allows in-depth, multipart explorations of complex issues in their real-life setting (Stake, 1995). Yin (2017) explained that all case study research starts from the same idea, which is "the desire to derive an up close or in-depth understanding of a topic in a real-world context" (p. 2). A single-case study

approach can be considered a strong research method, especially when a full in-depth investigation is conducted (Stake, 1995). Leavy (2017) stated that case studies are often recognized as the most used method when researching topics such as education and sociology.

Additionally, utilizing the case study approach allowed me to identify multiple ways of interpreting the same experience and allowed each participant to formulate from their own reality and experiences (Yin, 2017). The focus was on the consciousness of participants' experience concerning how they implement culturally diverse strategies in the classroom and in their teaching. An additional goal of this qualitative case study was to explore the data in a real-life environment while identifying complexities of real-life situations.

Stake (1995) added that a case study may be simple or complex. Unlike Yin (2017), who suggested a very tight and organized structure, Stake (1995) focused more on a flexible case study design that allows researchers to make changes while amid research. Moreover, Creswell (2014) indicated that the case study method allows a researcher to thoroughly examine the data within a specific context by conducting in-depth research with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. My intentions for utilizing Yin's approach to the case study method were to understand the social and behavioral actions of the participants through a more in-depth and structured perspective (Yin, 2017).

Setting

Western Coastal University (WCU) is located in California and is an accredited Christian university. Currently, the university serves over 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students. In addition to its main campus, WCU has regional campuses as well as academic programs online. As a Christian university, WCU integrates faith and learning in all classrooms. WCU's mission describes its commitment to providing an educational environment that promotes Christianity, as

well as safety. At WCU, it is important that students have an opportunity to explore their faith and belief system through many different opportunities. One such opportunity is through weekly devotions. Additionally, to enrich the students' Christian lives, the university offers extracurricular activities such as a gathering time, where through various styles of worship, fine arts presentations, lectures, discussions, and debates, students explore how to integrate faith, life, and learning.

Within the university, the School of Education consists of six degree programs for aspiring educators to earn an undergraduate degree. The program specifically being studied was the early childhood development program, where the professors had some familiarity with culturally responsive leadership as well as culturally diverse teaching strategies. The mission of the early childhood development program was to provide the students with the education needed to work successfully in an early childhood education setting. Additionally, the early childhood development program was designed to help students better understand the growth and development of children from birth through age eight. According to WCU's website, courses within the program focus on "the total environment of the child by incorporating a strong foundation in theory and practice through a holistic, constructivist approach, which addresses the diversity and special needs of the young child and their families."

WCU also takes several steps to promote diversity on campus. The university offers several points of diversity and multiculturalism on campus as a display of the respect it has for the perspectives of people from all different backgrounds. Having an inclusive mission at WCU shows that they value diversity and provide opportunities for their students to express themselves however they are comfortable. WCU clubs and campus events are places where students can meet other students who have the same interests as them or are from the same background as

them, or learn from those who are from different backgrounds. It is vital that students, regardless

of what background they come from, have a safe place to express themselves when in college.

Students need campus not only to feel like home but also to be a place where they can celebrate

themselves, each other, and their differences.

Some of the clubs that WCU provides to promote diversity on campus are ones that

promote the unity of people in specific communities. For example, there is a club that supports

Chinese students who are studying outside of China. This club brings together Chinese students

to provide support to one another in their new environment. Additionally, there is a club that is

made up of Muslim students to bring awareness to their culture by hosting events for all students

on campus. On top of bringing awareness to specific nationalities on campus, there are also

groups that support and promote awareness of keeping students safe on campus. The goal is to

help homeless students get off and stay off of the streets and move into a safe environment.

WCU offers several clubs and events that can meet the needs of students regardless of their

ethnicity, ability, sexual identity, or religion.

Participant Sampling

The participants for this study were adjunct higher education faculty who teach at WCU

in the early childhood education program (see Table 1). Creswell (2014) explained that in case

study research, the researcher typically "selects a small geographical area or a very limited

number of individuals as the subjects of study" (p. 94). To select the participants, I employed

purposeful sampling. Creswell (2014) described purposeful sampling to be useful when the

researcher needs an information-rich case. This type of method involves what Creswell (2011)

described as "identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or

experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (p. 96). The goal was to purposefully choose

participants who are knowledgeable and have experience in the context being studied, as well as differences in terms of race/ethnicity, time of service at the institution, and in their areas of specialization (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Race/ethnicity	Time at WCU	Area of specialization
Patricia	Caucasian	8 years	Human Development
Cindy	Armenian	16 years	Cultural Influences in Early Childhood
Nessa	Caucasian	2 years	Early Language Development
Sabrina	Caucasian	1 year, 4 months	Social Emotional Guidance
Jackie	Caucasian	4 years	Curriculum and Teaching
Nicole	Caucasian	6 years	Foundations of Early Childhood
Katie	Hispanic	2 years	Family and Community Relationships
Martin	African American	1 year	Growth and Development
Debbie	Caucasian	13 years	Curriculum and Teaching / Curriculum Design
Lisa	Caucasian	9 years	Human Development/ Brain Development
Dani	Hispanic	1 year, 8 months	Effective Teaching Strategies
Justin	Caucasian	2 years	Human Diversity

The administrative staff at WCU played a vital role in helping me identify participants who qualified for the study. Additionally, I took an active approach and emailed the program director with, first, an explanation regarding my interest and goals of the study and then a request for support in contacting professors to ask if they were interested in participating in the study (see Appendix A). The goal of the initial contact was to identify a specific group of professors who met the criteria, which was teaching in the early childhood program at WCU and having taught the course on human diversity and the course on exceptionalities. Following the initial contact, the method known as purposeful sampling was employed through an email (see Appendix B). Creswell (2014) described purposeful sampling to be useful when participants are knowledgeable in a specific area. The rationale and the strength of purposeful sampling lay in the selection of participants who met the criteria and the gathering of useful information for the investigation.

Individual participants at the institution were higher education faculty who teach at WCU in the early childhood education program and have taught the course on human diversity and the course on exceptionalities. Gaining access to the research site and approval of the individual participants was arranged prior to collecting data through one or more gatekeepers at the institution (Stake, 1995). I explained the purpose and possible beneficiaries of the study, which alleviated any concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality during interview recording, scheduling of interviews, institutional documents needed, or other issues that might arise to the gatekeeper (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017).

The aim of sampling in qualitative research is to gather information that is useful for "understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to represent populations as in quantitative research" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 161). Several

researchers agree that saturation serves as a good benchmark for deciding when enough data have been gathered (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). My plan was to continue to recruit participants and collect data until thematic saturation was achieved in this case study. There were 12 participants in this qualitative study, as researchers have suggested that a number between 10 and 12 typically provides the researcher enough data to adequately answer the research questions (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). However, Charmaz (2014) also suggested it is nearly impossible for a researcher to know if they have reached saturation unless they are analyzing the data while collecting it. Charmaz (2014) explained that instead of deciding on a fixed number of participants, combing through data and analyzing them until nothing new are revealed is key. While selecting a specific number of participants is viewed as a quantitative characteristic that is not appropriate when employing the qualitative methodology, it is essential to collect enough data to achieve thematic saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). This method allowed for common themes to occur and for multiple perspectives to arise within the study.

Data Collection

In data collection, qualitative researchers approach and study people in their natural environments and value how the participants experience and understand their life and work (Saldaña, 2015). Additionally, the aim of qualitative data collection is to recognize the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives and not the researcher's (Saldaña, 2015).

Yin (2011) explained that case study research should always rely on multiple sources of evidence with data that come together in a triangulated fashion. Triangulation is the use of at

least three data sources and is used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in

their studies by analyzing the research question from multiple perspectives. In this study I used

in-depth interviews, which were recorded for in-depth analysis. Additionally, artifact documents,

such as the WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement and Strategic Plan, also served as sources of

data collected in this qualitative study. Lastly, a third stream of data included course survey data.

These survey data included course feedback that had been integrated into course design and

planning.

Creswell (2014) explained that interviews, documents, and survey data are critical pieces

of qualitative research that could provide critical information about a participant's point of view

or personal experience. Like Creswell (2014), Yin (2011) also suggested that researchers use

"evidentiary sources" such as documents, interviews, archival records, and survey data, as each

of those pieces will have unique strengths and weaknesses.

In-Depth Interviews

To address the research questions, in-depth interviewing served as the main approach to

data collection. Each interview began with a semistructured interview protocol of open-ended

questions (see Appendix C) that encouraged the participants to open up about their experience

with cultural responsiveness within their classrooms and its impact on their teaching. Saldaña

and Omasta (2018) described an interview to be the most commonly used method for qualitative

inquiry. This type of interviewing was used to gather information to understand the participant's

point of view or a situation that involves social and interpersonal interaction (Saldaña & Omasta,

2018). Utilizing interviews for this study allowed me to gather personal points of view from

participants and ask immediate follow-up questions that would deepen and add to the data.

Document Artifacts

Document artifacts, such as the WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement and Strategic Plan, were utilized to complement the in-depth interviews. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) described that documents are another major source of qualitative data and may include public records, personal publications, and other artifacts. Through the additional data collection strategy, it was my goal to provide increased understanding of leaders' perceptions and implementation of culturally responsive strategies in higher education. Specifically, through WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement, I learned the rationale for increasing diversity on the campus as well as how the rationale for diversity is related to the mission and values of WCU. The strategic plan helped me understand the purpose of the inclusion and diversity planning process at the institution and clarified the university's commitment to forming and strengthening environments that foster a culture of excellence through diverse people, ideas, and perspectives.

To collect the data, I explored the institution's website and examined documents like the mission and vision statements on diversity and cultural responsiveness. Through the combination of in-depth interviews and document research approaches, my expectation was to provide a better understanding of faculty leaders' perceptions and their organizational culture in implementing culturally responsive strategies.

Survey Data

In addition to in-depth interviews and document artifacts, I used course survey data. The survey data consisted of qualitative feedback from students about teaching and learning based on their direct course experience, providing faculty with relevant information. The survey data were part of the end-of-course evaluations that students complete. The survey is optional for students; however, it is highly encouraged so that the university and the instructors gain valuable insight

regarding their teaching and student learning. This survey is sent out at the end of each term to each enrolled student, which allowed me to analyze survey data that already existed.

Access to the surveys was gained through the Office of Institutional Development. At the end of each term, an email was sent out with a link to log in and review program performance. Additionally, the data were sorted by course so that professors of those courses could review student feedback. There was no identifying information associated with the survey data for either the student or the instructor.

The surveys were pulled from four different courses with an enrollment between 12 and 18 students each. The focus of each course was early childhood education, helping prepare students to work in early childhood education in a public or private school. The courses also prepared graduates to pursue credentials and certificates to become educators in elementary schools and special education programs or work as career counselors with child and family services. Each course had a different professor to ensure that a range of teaching approaches were examined. Surveys from the most recent semester were examined (Spring 2019) to ensure that it was the most accurate description of teaching approaches within the early childhood development program at that time.

The participants of the survey were students who had taken courses in the early childhood development program. The goal was to gain in-depth information about implementing culturally responsive strategies in higher education and whether it is seen as a challenge or a success from an individual student perspective. Additionally, the goal was to learn whether the student's perceptions, when it comes to challenges and successes in diverse teaching strategies, were aligned with those of the faculty.

To address the research questions, I analyzed the following three open-ended survey questions that were a part of WCU's course evaluation. These allowed students to provide their personalized answers instead of the predetermined general responses:

Q1: How has the instructor helped you develop knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives, global awareness, and other cultures?

Q2: How has the instructor helped you gain a broader understanding of cultural activity?

Q3: Explain how the instructor has used what they know about your background to facilitate learning in the course.

Analyzing the three questions from the surveys allowed me to understand more about how students feel about the teaching strategies the faculty implements in their courses. Additionally, the analysis of the survey questions provided me a better understanding about the students' learning based on direct course experience. Lastly, the survey data also provided me with data that revealed the success and challenges that professors faced when implementing culturally responsive strategies in the higher education classroom.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included exploring the data by transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews and reading and rereading interview transcripts. Additionally, document analysis was used with the WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement and Strategic Plan among other public documents. The third stream of data was survey data that contained open-ended questions, which were coded like the interviews.

I began the data analysis by transcribing the interviews from digital recordings. Once they were read several times, notes were made in the margins to track thoughts and questions. Snippets of information gathered from interviews and documents were combined and sorted into

larger categories as I moved from the particular to the general to establish a comprehensive set of themes (Saldaña, 2015). In this study, I utilized the themes, categories, and other concepts to organize the data into abstract units of information. The main goal of this type of data analysis was to combine categories to discover relationships or patterns that existed in the data. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) and Creswell (2014) suggested the following approaches when conducting a qualitative data analysis.

Reading and Rereading Transcripts and Interview Data

Saldaña (2015) explained that authentic understanding is created when readers can live their way into an experience that has been clearly described and conveyed. Exploring the data by reading and rereading helped gather an in-depth sense of the data and allowed for a meaningful reflection of its overall meaning. When the interviews were complete, I read the transcripts, listened to the recordings, and interpreted the data repeatedly and thoroughly as suggested by several researchers (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). During this time, any notes that were taken in the margins, such as thoughts, hunches, or speculations, were analyzed at this time (Creswell, 2014).

Coding Data

Coding is the "analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 66). During the coding process, I identified pieces of the transcripts, sorted them into categories, and labeled the categories with a term derived from the actual language of the participant. I then used different colors to categorize and label all the beginning data analysis by using line-by-line analysis, as suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018).

Combining Codes to Form Themes With Axial Coding

Saldaña (2015) explained that the goal of data analysis in axial coding is to discover the relationships and identify the patterns that exist in the data. The purpose of coding using axial data in the study was to identify major categories that represented the hypothesis and address the research questions about the relationship in the data (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). After establishing categories, I implemented the line-by-line analysis and then holistically analyzed to identify and create major themes.

Selective Coding

Lastly, my focus was to identify the core category and then relate the main part of the data to other categories (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). According to Creswell (2014), this was an effective way for me to present the identified relationship with other main categories. Therefore, all other data categories were organized to revolve around the core categories (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015).

Document Analysis

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is "a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around a topic" (p. 31). Document analysis included coding the documents into themes, much as the interview transcripts were analyzed but sometimes with a rubric (Bowen, 2009; O'Leary, 2014). In this case, the documents that were analyzed were public record, which served as ongoing official records that demonstrated the commitment to culture and inclusiveness. Including the document analysis was important to the study when providing evidence of credibility, and it reduced the impact of potential bias by analyzing information from different collection methods (Bowen, 2009).

Survey Data

Open-ended survey questions are often used in surveys to provide participants with the chance to express their opinion about the topics in question freely. These types of questions also provide a more in-depth response than closed-ended questions or multiple-choice questions can provide (Leeuw et al., 2008). Like the in-depth interviews, the survey data contained questions that were read, coded, and labeled so that themes could be identified.

Reading and Rereading Survey Data

A commonly used technique in analyzing data is rereading information during and after the gathering of the survey data. This prepares the researcher to interpret and produce an analysis. When rereading is conducted, a more realistic understanding will develop because readers are putting themselves in an experience that has been clearly described (Saldaña, 2015). In addition to experiencing what the participants have described, rereading the data also allowed the creation of a meaningful reflection of its overall theme. When the surveys were completed, I read the open-ended short-answer questions and interpreted the data repetitively (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Coding Data

According to Saldaña (2015), coding is the "process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (p. 67). During the coding of the surveys, I identified pieces of information, sorted them into categories, and labeled the categories with a term that came directly from the common themes according to the respondents' answers. I then used different colors to categorize and label all the beginning data analysis by using line-by-line analysis as suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018), similar to the in-depth interviews.

Selective Coding

Lastly, I identified the main category and then combined those data with the main part of the data and to other categories (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). Saldaña (2015) described the goal of data analysis as a way to identify relationships and reveal any patterns in the data. According to Creswell (2014), this is an effective way to present the identified relationship with other main groups. Therefore, all other data categories were organized to revolve around the core categories (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015).

Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2014), conducting an investigation in an ethical manner helps ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research. Additionally, the focus in qualitative research should be on the trustworthiness of the data that were collected and the ethical nature of the investigation (Creswell, 2014). To guarantee reliability in qualitative research, "the examination of trustworthiness is crucial" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). According to Golafshani (2003), "While establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability" (p. 601). Additionally, in order to ensure reliability and validity of the data, triangulation was a priority. Fusch et al. (2018) explained that this will occur when the data are

> accurate and truthful, when the inferences have a reasonable probability for actually occurring and can be tied back to the conceptual framework of the study, and by the ability of a study's conclusions to be transferred to other studies regardless of populations, settings, or times. (p. 23)

Moreover, triangulation served as the exploration of different perceptions of the same occurrence and ensured the reliability and validity of the results. To ensure that the data that were collected emitted reliability and validity, I relied on triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation of Data

Data were collected from three different sources: interviews, document artifacts, and WCU's Diversity Rationale Statement. According to Fusch et al. (2018), "One approach to promote social change, mitigate bias, and enhance reaching thematic saturation is through triangulation: multiple sources of data" (p. 19). When applying triangulation, the reliability of the results of the study is enhanced and can allow for the researcher to saturate the data (Fusch et al., 2018). Denzin (2012) also explained the idea of triangulation and how it "employs multiple external data collection methods regarding the same event" (p. 89). Denzin (2012) further asserted that being able to look at data from three different sources and consider a phenomenon in more than one way helps contribute to the reliability and validity of the results.

These data were used to determine how student cultural differences influence WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, the triangulation of the data supported my understanding of how WCU faculty applied culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result.

Member Checking

According to Carlson (2010), member checking is a step taken to check the credibility of results. Member checking is vital to researchers and participants to avoid miscommunication that can create problems and affect the trustworthiness of their research (Carlson, 2010). So that

miscommunication does not take place within this study, a follow-up email including the transcription of the interview was sent to the participants. This allowed the participants the opportunity to make corrections, check for accuracy, and add anything if needed. This also allows the researcher a chance to validate the data that were primarily collected.

The Researcher

I, as the researcher, have worked in education for 17 years, with a 5-year term in the early childhood education department within a Christian higher education institution. I hold an associate's degree in early childhood education, a bachelor's degree in liberal arts, and a master's degree in curriculum and teaching with an emphasis in early childhood education. While I have had some professional interactions with all of the participants, the nature of these relationships did not present a conflict of interest or impart bias on the research study.

I have several hours of informal training in interviewing people, as my master's thesis was also a qualitative case study. My research skills include, but are not limited to, interview listening skills per a training taken while enrolled in graduate school at WCU, as well as successful completion of several qualitative research courses at Abilene Christian University.

Ethical Considerations

Before any research took place, the research plans were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on Abilene Christian University's campus. Submitting the research plans to the IRB regulates protection against human rights violations. Researchers are required by the IRB to assess their studies for potential risks to participants, which could be physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal. In addition, I considered if there were any special needs of the participant population. The precautions that were taken also included removing all identifying information of the university and individual participants involved in my study.

One of my primary concerns was to assure all face-to-face interviews remained confidential. My interview questions were designed to avoid discomfort and the feeling of stirring up any negative feelings about the university and its practices. Because of this, it was important for all verbal communication to occur in a confidential area. Prior to all interviews, informed consent was given to each participant, and the interview protocol (see Appendix C) was thoroughly discussed. All participants were asked if they understood the process and were asked to sign an informed consent document (see Appendix D). I also made certain that all participants understood their participation was voluntary and that they could stop participation at any time.

Ethical considerations continued to be a part of the study during and at the conclusion of the study, in terms of anonymity of the institution and participants, protecting them against any harm that might come to them through their participation. As the primary researcher involved, I was the only person with access to audio recordings, interview notes, internal documents, or any sensitive data or items connected to identifying information, and I made certain they were kept in a secure location and with appropriate digital security measures in place.

Assumptions

According to Terrell (2016), assumptions are areas in a study that are believed to be true but "cannot be verified" (p. 19). An assumption within this case study, was that each participant had participated in the trainings and workshops provided by the university regarding how to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies to increase student learning. The trainings are developed and provided to part-time and full-time faculty by the Diversity and Inclusion Office at WCU. Part-time and full-time faculty are expected to participate in the trainings; however, they are not required. The purpose behind the trainings and workshops provided is to strengthen

ways to build a more inclusive learning and working environment. With this assumption, I

expected that my participants would be at least marginally aware of issues of diversity and

inclusion and the university's approaches to addressing them within its instruction to students.

Summary

In summary, Chapter 3 provided an outline of the qualitative research methods that were

utilized in the study. This chapter provided information on the 12 participants who met the

criteria for the study. The faculty were those who taught in the early childhood education

program, specifically teaching the human diversity and exceptionalities courses. The chapter also

contained the rationale for employing purposeful sampling. Additionally, throughout the chapter,

there was a description of the research design that was chosen for the study as well as an

explanation as to why the qualitative case study design was appropriate. The instruments for the

case study were also described, and the procedures that were followed to carry out the study

were also included. I also described the methods used to gather and analyze the data, as well as

any ethical guidelines that were followed. The following chapter will feature the results of the

case study conducted to answer the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings of an investigation conducted with 12 early childhood education faculty concerning how student cultural differences influenced pedagogy within their courses. Additionally, I was seeking to understand how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. I also investigated what successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and what differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result. The findings throughout the chapter address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do WCU faculty perceive student cultural differences influencing their instructional pedagogies within their courses?

RQ2: How do WCU faculty describe their understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies, particularly within the context of a Christian university?

RQ3: What culturally diverse strategies are WCU faculty implementing, and what differences have they seen in their teaching and student learning as a result?

RQ4: What factors help facilitate or create barriers to WCU faculty implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies in their courses?

The following overarching themes (see Table 2) emerged from the data analysis: (a) lack of a unified vision and approach to diversity education, (b) faculty encountering challenges when implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies, and (c) recognition of the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies.

Table 2

Overarching Themes That Emerged From the Data Analysis

Lack of a unified vision and approach to diversity education	Faculty encountering challenges when implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies	Recognition of the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies

Lack of a Unified Vision and Approach to Diversity Education

The data from interview transcripts, student surveys, and documents showed that although diversity was highly valued by WCU faculty and staff, only a few of the participants reported that they effectively implemented the diversity values of the institution. More than half of the participants described having clarity around the implementation of the diversity values of WCU. Nine participants described WCU as an institution where the faculty discussed how to attend to diversity but implemented very little, if anything at all. Instead of showing the faculty how to implement it, the institution just made specific claims in the area of diversity regarding access; recruitment; admission and retention; diversifying faculty, staff, and administration; and reforming curriculum. According to the student surveys, more than half of the students reported that they felt that very few instructors treated diversity as an essential part of becoming an educator and did not feel that their instructor helped them develop knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives, global awareness, or other cultures.

On the university website, specifically within the vision statement, it showed that the institution celebrates diversity and welcomes culturally diverse teaching strategies. The vision statement also explained that the goals of WCU are to prepare students for service by providing a well-rounded Christian higher education, as well as to strengthen society's relationship with the church while celebrating diversity. Additionally, the vision statement described the commitment

to developing a cohesive idea for diversity. This cohesive idea consisted of clarifying the role of the University Diversity Committee and providing more training on diversity issues. The students, staff, administration, and faculty, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, age, sex, or ability, would each feel they belong and have access to participation in university life.

In combination with the above statements, WCU provided a rationale for embracing and promoting diversity, reasoning that diversity is "derived from our faith commitments as Christians." WCU's Diversity Rationale also explained that the institution's operational definition of diversity is at least "twofold" as WCU promotes that diversity is an intrinsic expression of God's creation and diversity is an attitude that effects organizational culture. Additionally, the Diversity Rationale discussed three components for diversity at WCU, with the first one being utilizing the Bible as an authoritative guide. The WCU's Diversity Rationale also described diversity as an example of God's creation that is inclusive of individuals as well as different groups of people who are to be embraced and valued as human beings created in God's image.

The second component of diversity at WCU is the WCU Idea Statement. The WCU Idea Statement is the university's commitment to diversity. It explained how the university is a Christian institution and operates as a community of learners and is prophetic. Additionally, the idea statement included the idea of learning as a "journey" and explained that WCU values all different types of students so that learning can be "nurtured" through many different teaching styles in different types of settings.

The third component within the core values described diversity as a viewpoint that focuses on "organizational culture and institutional structures, policies, and practices towards

human flourishing and shalom." Through the core values, WCU stands strong in its commitment to innovative ways to engage all students while remining faithful to all components of WCU's Diversity Rationale. From the university documents, it is clear that WCU is diverse and inclusive and views diversity as important while attempting to build on past traditions.

All but 2 of the participants described their understanding of diversity in the classroom in a way that was similar to that of WCU documents. To be more specific, 10 out of 12 participants' definitions included knowing who students are in the classroom, who students are in the community, and what role students play in their families. Additionally, participant definitions included knowing details about students such as their place of employment, how many people are in their family, and where students reside. The same participants also made connections to being a Christian institution, each discussing the importance of implementing diverse teaching strategies to reach all learners as well as providing inclusivity.

Faculty member Nessa stated, "Being mindful of our students' needs in terms of who they are is key to their learning in success and in life." Nessa also stated, "The idea of diversity goes hand-in-hand with being inclusive. I believe that as a professor, it is my job to be aware of not only student backgrounds but also student behaviors and what is normal to them." Nessa shared additional thoughts about inclusivity by stating,

> Inclusivity is key for providing a healthy classroom environment no matter what age your students are. It also should be done on a deeper level. Inclusivity should be meaningful and visible in all areas of the courses we teach. When professors, as well as the university, attempt to create inclusive classroom[s], there are so many things that need to be considered.

Cindy, who had been with WCU for many years, described similar ideas about diversity and shared her concern that she thinks many professors do not place much importance on diversity. Cindy stated,

When professors don't see our students' diverse characteristics as important, they are not doing the students or the course content any good. Professors should embrace diversity and not in a superficial way but a real way. Put effort into our students and their learning.

Cindy went on to explain that she thinks of diversity as "variety" because there are a wide variety of students in the university's classrooms. Cindy ended her interview by sharing that as a lead professor who supports new and veteran professors, she is sometimes disappointed that very few professors are clear about what diversity is and how it affects student learning. Cindy stated, "Believe it or not, I see the lack of value more often than not."

Similar understandings of what diversity means to them, in the classroom was agreed upon among 10 out of 12 participants. Many participants expressed their concern for the lack of clarity and implementation around diversity and hoped that it did not impact the students' learning too much or cost the early childhood program or the university its reputation for embracing diversity. For instance, Sabrina asserted,

Based on my teaching here at WCU, as well as the small role that I serve in curriculum and instruction, I have come to learn that most people in higher education, not just at WCU, understand the importance of diversity, but are not really clear about how to implement it into their courses. For some reason, professors think at this level because we are adults, everyone should be treated and taught the same. That would be possible if every student who came to WCU came from the same background, but they most definitely do not. Because of this, we as professors need to adjust not only to our content

delivery but maybe even our content. As a Christian institution, we should serve all students. If we do not, it may negatively impact learning and cost WCU its reputation. As a university and as an ECD program, we have established very high standards that everyone should meet. However, because of the misinterpretation of those standards, our students who are American Indian, African American, Hispanic, and/or Asian, among other nationalities and ethnicities, are not being appropriately served by us.

Like Sabrina, Jackie shared her experiences in her courses at WCU regarding addressing diversity by saying,

I hear a lot about embracing diversity, and I believe that it is very important. We as a university and I as a professor want to be able to cater to all students, students of color, international students, everyone. To me, diversity means "difference." When I look around in my diverse classroom, I see students with differences. It could be their background, race, nationality, ethnicity, skin color, language . . . I mean it could be anything. With that being said, I will be the first to admit that sometimes even though I talk the talk, I do not walk the walk. Sometimes I find myself just simply doing what I can to get by because of time and need or how much is on my plate. When I look back at WCU's diversity statement, sometimes I am embarrassed of myself. Sometimes I ask myself what does this mean to me? Additionally, I have thought about all of the support we have. Diversity statements, trainings, frameworks, and diversity officers—all of that, I think to myself what I am getting from it. At WCU we have a team who guides us through supporting diverse populations because they care about us and our students. I see this caring as part of growing and learning to be the best professor I can be. One of the things that I appreciate about WCU and the support in our program is that the value that

our leadership places on diversity is visible and can be heard in all that they do, which is something faculty should not only value but learn from.

Faculty member Nicole explained that professors each perceived the importance of diversity differently by sharing her thoughts and experiences:

One thing I have learned a lot about from teaching at WCU is that although many of us see diversity as important, we each perceive its level of importance differently. I can recall several instances at staff meetings or even our collaboration meetings where instructors disagree on diverse teaching strategies and or certain ways to deliver content to reach all students. Just recently, three instructors and I had a conversation about implementing something as simple as icebreakers to get to know our students and to get a glimpse of how they learn. Two of the instructors considered icebreakers to be elementary and explained that because we are teaching adults, they should be able to adjust to our teaching instead [of] us adjusting to the way our students learn. The other instructor and I brought up our international students as well as our students with disabilities. We thought, what about the modifications that they need so they can be successful? However, to the other instructors our job is to deliver the content, not to get to know the student. One instructor even commented that they would learn about different learning styles and different students in other courses, not ours.

Several of the participants also expressed their concern regarding faculty at WCU who they felt did not treat diversity as a significant part of the classroom. A few wondered if it was because they did not know a lot about diversity or how to implement it in the classroom. Faculty member Martin shared, "In my experience at the elementary, middle, and high school level[s], there are many educators that view diversity and its importance differently. It makes me wonder

if they have a full understanding of what it actually is." Martin further added, "Here at WCU, many of us talk about diversity, are offered resources, and share ideas but for some reason rarely implement [them]. I am not sure why that happens." Additionally, Martin shared,

> One thing I have noticed that is significant is that here at WCU, our leaders, meaning administrators, see diversity, culture, and the way we serve our students as important. I have team taught some courses with other professors and a lot of us think we have a clear understanding of diversity and know how to implement it, but we don't. Maybe these professors are not in a position where they are allowed to make decisions about what and how they teach, which makes our work in diversity and culturally relevant classroom strategies pretty hard to practice.

In addition to the professors who expressed their concerns that faculty and students viewed the importance of diversity differently, several students reported within their surveys that they felt the topic of working with diverse groups of students was something that would be automatically taught in the program. One student wrote, "Outside of the diversity class, the teachers did not really seem to think working with different groups of students was important." Another student wrote, "I felt like I was taught how to work with the type of students that the professors has worked with. I am from a rural area of town; I doubt our population of students will be the same." Within the student surveys, students also noted questions. Three surveys specifically asked, "Are the instructors trained to work with students of color?" Eight students also noted that as students they must be confused about the meaning and importance of diversity because it was never emphasized within the program.

Some student surveys also expressed concern about graduating from the program and entering classrooms with second language learners or disabilities. Student surveys showed the

students were concerned for their own lack of learning; however, many students felt that if the professors did not emphasize it, it must not be important. One student expressed great concern about the difference between her thoughts about diversity and her instructor's:

> The question is asking me if I think the instructor has helped me develop knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives, global awareness, and other cultures? The answer to that would have to be, no! I don't think the instructor thought that diversity was important. I asked several questions about working with students who are Hispanic, Caucasian, and African American and one day the instructor answered me with, they are all the same. Are they? I felt like this answer showed her lack of respect for culture as well as her lack of knowledge around how to teach different types of students. I suggest the program direct and this instructor revisit what it means to have a diverse perspective as well as some type of global awareness.

The findings revealed there is a lack of clarity around implementing the diverse values of the institution among adjunct professors and students at WCU. It seems that at WCU the mission and goals explained that diversity is valued and practiced; however, the interviews of the participants and student surveys showed a different picture. The explanations of the faculty's experiences and comments from student surveys implied that diversity may not have been fully understood within this program. As adjunct professor Martin suggested, when professors do not have the clarity they need, implementing diversity can be difficult.

The participants also shared their experiences about their classrooms, planning, and delivery of instruction with the leaders and other professors at WCU. Based on these experiences, the participants also shared several reasons why they were apprehensive to implement the university's diversity action plan into their classroom instruction. Two specific

concerns were most often shared by the participants: the first being how students on WCU campus interpreted racism and the second, personal beliefs and how they impacted diversity in the classroom.

Although the topic of race is not the same as implementing diversity in the classroom, several of the participants voiced concerns about the topic of racism in society and the understanding of it on the WCU campus. A few of the participants described situations where they felt students misunderstood institutional racism or felt like some areas of campus condoned stereotyping. For example, Katie explained that as a professor she is aware that she does not have to overtly discuss race and diversity; however, she felt like racism is misunderstood by the younger generations and does not want any of those misunderstandings in her classroom. Katie stated, "It really is too bad. If racism was better understood by everyone it wouldn't be such a challenge to better teach to each student's background and specific needs." Debbie also argued that we as educators should be able to talk about race and diversity openly; however, Debbie explained that educators are "up against a lot" when discussing the topic. Debbie also stated,

> I want to make it clear that I do not think that this is all about race. The topics that are
> tricky to discuss in class are those regarding religion, culture, and ability. Sometimes I
> am disappointed in myself when I chose to be silent after I have just heard or saw
> something that is inappropriate for our students. For example, at one of our regional
> campuses, an instructor had made a comment about a student who had limited access to
> the internet. The instructor understood and explained what the student could do to make
> up the points for missing the virtual meeting if her internet did not work, but it was what
> was said after the student had left that had surprised me. When the student left, the
> instructor turned to me and an interpreter and said, "Oh that poor student, living in a rural

area with limited access to the internet must be hard. It must be so hard to be Mexican

since most of them have to work on farms and fields." I don't know if it was a refusal to

respect the culture or just the lack of understanding on her part, but whatever it is, we

need to grow past it.

Adjunct professor Justin also shared a similar experience and concern:

Sometimes I am nervous when teaching specific courses, such as the exceptionalities

course. Most people think that the course is about students with disabilities, which it is,

but not fully. It is truly about what makes us exceptional, not our abilities or disabilities.

We discuss the topics of race, nationality, country of origin, as well as traditions that are

important to us. Again, it is what makes us exceptional. Although I have taught this

course for years, I have begun to dread certain weeks because I found that people are

more knowledgeable in their own beliefs and well, dare I say it, easily offended by

everything. As an adjunct instructor, I consider myself a leader and a role model here at

WCU, so if I am afraid to apply culturally responsive teaching strategies and

conversations in my classroom, what message am I sending?

Dani, an adjunct professor at WCU, expressed his apprehensions regarding culturally

responsive teaching strategies through a multicultural education lens:

Here at WCU, I have taught a long time. I have had the opportunity to see things from so

many different perspectives. One thing that has stood out to me is the idea that racism

still exists and sometimes it feels like we have to walk on eggshells in our classrooms and

with our colleagues. I feel like the need to incorporate a multicultural education is there,

but I also feel like it is a struggle. When I look at specific aspects of our program here at

WCU, sometimes I see that it isn't what you know but who you know. I have had several

students whose parents went here, so they had to come here too. This makes me realize that all races and nationalities do not have equal power in higher education.

The second concern that participants expressed was that although individual beliefs are key to each person's unique journey, they are also key when implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies. Many participants reported feeling alone in the beliefs and passions that they shared with students. Martin referred to the word "vital" when he discussed his own personal beliefs and passion for incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies. Martin also claimed, "As a Black man, teaching on a higher education campus that is predominately White and in a program that is mostly female pushes me even harder to incorporate different strategies in the classroom to get to know who my students are." Martin also explained, "This helps me not only teach them but to teach to who they are." Martin also added,

As a student, and even when I worked towards my doctorate, if my professors didn't see worth in getting to know me, I felt disrespected. The way I view culture causes me to believe that all educators would work to provide inclusive environments where they get to know everyone, and everyone feels welcome. I know that this isn't a perfect world, but there are too many flaws in the way we are going about servicing our students and tailoring our instruction for them.

Additionally, when adjunct faculty member Lisa discussed her perspective on culture and how it aligns with her personal beliefs, she emphasized that as a woman of color on campus, she feels that she has a good support system and that she gets along well and feels respected by the faculty and other leaders on campus. Lisa also explained that although she feels respected and understood by the others on campus members, she does not feel that way in the classroom. Lisa added,

When you are in a place and you are trying to share what is important to you and others don't feel the same way or have no interest in you or what you have to say, it is hard. In one of my classes, I felt that when I shared who I was, that some students had a prejudiced perspective of me, and that made me steer away from using some of my culturally responsive teaching strategies. In some of my courses, I have felt like I face large groups of students who think the opposite of what I do, and although that is okay, sometimes it is done in a way that can be harsh and discouraging for me, as well as other students. In one of my courses, I had trouble with a student who felt that some groups of people were born privileged and some just weren't and that is the way it was. I respect her opinion, but in class she seemed to rally students against me. No matter what I said that night, it didn't make a difference. I was the bad guy. Instances like this is what makes me very uncomfortable in sharing my personal beliefs and getting to know students, therefore leading me to not implement those culturally responsive leadership strategies.

Lastly, Patricia added,

I have learned that when discussing things such as culture, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc., you have to be in a place where people value this even if they don't have the same opinion as you. Eventually, through us, they will find their own ground and stand in their own beliefs. If we see that not everyone values their own nationality or race, that does not mean that we as professors give up. It just means that we need to find a way around it. Strategies in the classroom that are culturally responsive are key, regardless of what our opinion is. As educators, we should know what it is like to be in those students' shoes and what it feels like to be valued or not.

Faculty Encountering Challenges When Implementing Culturally Diverse Strategies

With many demographic changes and an increase in diverse student enrollment at the higher education level, the majority of the participants reported that it was critical for higher education faculty and its leaders to be knowledgeable of challenges that relate to diversity. Additionally, some faculty shared what challenges they faced when they attempted to address these challenges with program leaders. For example, Cindy said,

When I am in the classroom and I am trying to learn about my students, it just seems so difficult. For many reasons, students don't want to open up, and I don't think it is my place to push them. But what do I do? I am not trained in this area. I wish I was, but I am not and that makes implementation even that much more challenging. I also always find myself wondering what my colleagues are doing to combat this challenge. It seems that when we all meet, we learn that we are each doing something different. I get that we will each add our own flair to teaching, but I would appreciate having some type of guidelines to follow so that I am more in line with what my colleagues are implementing.

Martin also added,

I find this whole idea challenging because our students crave consistency, and we don't always provide that, especially in the area of diverse teaching strategies. The faculty who teach about exceptionalities and human development are great at it, but they don't necessarily have an open-door policy. What is there to hide? But is it really their job to model for us, or should our challenges be addressed by our directors? I feel that when it comes to certain classroom practices, we are all different. How can we overcome that?

Several participants expressed concerns similar to Martin and Cindy regarding not only the lack of consistent teaching practices within the environment but also faculty fear and

confusion due to lack of support and training and the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies.

A majority of the participants also expressed their concerns about inconsistent teaching practices and modeling within the environment at WCU. Nessa stated that the environment can sometimes be a "hinderance" to teaching and learning about each other. Additionally, many other participants also described the environment as "challenging." According to participant responses, there were two main concerns that stood out. The first was the lack of professional learning and modeling when it came to adjunct faculty and their teaching practices, and the second concern was that culture and diversity were not held to as high of a standard as other subjects. Patricia noted,

> The biggest reason I do not try my hardest to do the work is because I sometimes—I am
> not sure if I am doing it right. I am educated and have a pretty good understanding of
> what diversity and culture are, but sometimes when it comes to the classroom I don't
> know if what I am doing is correct. The idea that there is no real professional
> development, modeling, or coaching in this area is quite bothersome. It causes me to
> wonder if the university or our program leaders believe in this work as much as we do. In
> the past, when I have asked about professional development or any upcoming trainings,
> the attitudes have not been the best, and by that I mean just bad. The concern of time,
> money, and the fact that sometimes no one will participate always come up. It's almost
> like it's the same song and dance each time I ask. I have taught in higher education for a
> long time, and yes, time is always an issue and so is money. However, there are so many
> resources out there for us. There are grants, scholarships, free trainings, etc., that we
> could be taking advantage of. It all comes down to that support system and . . . the

professional development that WCU provides us. And in my eyes, it is nonexistent. I

have heard that there are things available, but maybe adjunct faculty just doesn't get the

memo. Having no support system when it comes these culturally diverse practices is

hard, and I am not doing well with it.

Sabrina added,

When I am trying to implement those types of practices, I feel like sometimes I fail and

there is no or very minimal support among our leaders. There is support among

colleagues, but how can we each be sure if we are providing each other the proper

support when we are not receiving any from the university? In this area of work, support

is key, and it's too bad that we don't have a lot of it. It is a major issue. Currently, I am

doing this work from my own understanding and what I think the university wants and

believes. Sometimes I may be implementing it with the views of myself and others in my

department, but that isn't the way it should be. With all the resources that we have, not

only should we self-educate, but we should also have that training from our institutions.

Additionally, interviewees Jackie, Nicole, and Katie suggested that sometimes the staff

meetings can be supportive environments if issues were properly addressed. For example, Jackie

stated,

Our program leaders are awesome and supportive in so many areas; however, I feel that

this is an area where they are maybe not so comfortable. In the past, there have been

several great staff meetings and trainings for us to attend whether online or face-to-face.

For some reason the idea of culture and diversity has fallen short. I do want to give them

some recognition, of course, because one of leaders has been sending us articles to read

online. But it would be nice to be able to physically put something into practice together

as a staff. When I have requested something of this nature be brought up for staff, it at first was not addressed. I didn't say anything because I assumed with all they have on their plate, maybe it was going to take some planning, but it never happened. At our most recent and last staff meeting, I was excited when we received an online form for input about what topics we should cover. I responded with culture and diversity and explained that I needed strategies to reach more students. In fact, as I worked with several of our adjunct faculty, I was told that several of us had requested more about that topic. When the day of the meeting came around, we were elated to learn that we had a speaker coming to address, culture, diversity, institutional racism, etc. I was eager to hear what more I could do for my students. When it came time, the speaker only presented for about 30 minutes. He started off with great information about how to define culture and diversity and what was institutional racism. He defined colorblind racism for us, which many of us were unfamiliar with, but then he passed out cards and left. Following him leaving, our program director asked for a show of hands if we enjoyed what he had to say. She asked what we learned from him and told us if we had any more questions, we could use his card. Then she proceeded to tell us that he was very expensive, and she feels that we could get a bigger bang for our buck if we just order is book. Interactions like this or lack of interactions around this topic are not supportive of what we should be doing for our students or what the university mission explains. I am capable of teaching myself; however, it would be nice to know what best practice among my institution is and within my program.

Nicole recalled a similar lack of support as she described her experience at a staff meeting. She described how she asked a question and then immediately felt like it was her lack of experience that was to blame. Nicole stated,

At the last staff meeting when Dr. Magdalena came to speak, I had inquired about more resources and if there were any other professional development resources that we could participate in. I was asked what exactly I was looking for, and I explained that I just needed some ideas of how to get to know my students better. That way I can teach to not only how they learn but who they are. I explained that I also wanted to see things from a multiple perspective not just my perspective, and I wasn't sure how to do that. Almost instantly, I was told that what I was asking for would come with more experience. Then I was told that I wouldn't have so many questions about this topic if I would have taken the initiative to learn and educate myself about this topic. I was told that diverse classrooms were a "hot" topic, and that it is expected that adjunct faculty take the initiative to seek out their own learning. I explained that I was doing that; I just wanted support from my workplace so that I make sure I am aligning my teaching with WCU's mission. The response was that professional development would be discussed, and I would get an email with more information. I did receive that email eventually, and it had some great articles attached as well as an opportunity to take a self-paced professional development course through WCU. I took the course, and it was very helpful. However, the whole experience just made me uneasy about asking for things. The interaction at the meeting was awkward, and after that I often feel uncomfortable in whole staff interactions because the environment just does not seem as supportive as it should.

Katie also explained,

I think I am a great professor. I have a lot of experience and have taught hundreds of

students, but I have never worked in a program with such a lack of professional growth

opportunities. I love what I do and who I work for, but I wish when we came together as

a staff for any type of meeting and/or learning opportunities that we actually walked

away feeling supported. I have to say that we are supported in several areas but not when

it comes to implementing diverse teaching strategies. I have asked questions time and

time again, as many of us have, and somehow it gets flipped to be my fault. Instead of

making faculty feel that way, we should come together as a staff and share what we each

are doing that is working. As our leaders, they should make suggestions and provide

resources and materials for us. The last time I asked a question was during one [of] our

fall meetings, and I was told in a very sharp tone that the courses were already written

and the weekly lesson plan of what and how to teach was provided. I think as a new

instructor, I would appreciate the guidance and resources, but as a seasoned professor that

answer wasn't sufficient and didn't help me further come up with any specific

pedagogical practices to use in the classroom.

In addition to the participants expressing that the environment felt challenging at times,

another concern that faculty expressed was that diversity was not seen as a priority compared to

the content of the courses. The participants expressed a lot of gratitude for the subject they taught

but were concerned with the fact that early childhood education was the only focus of the

program. Martin expressed,

I understand and believe that what we teach is greatly important. I see the value in it

every day in my students, my kids, my grandkids, and just in society. However, there are

other things that we should be teaching in the classroom and that should be priority—for

example, how to see things from a multiple perspective. These students are attending the

university because they want to be teachers. While teaching, they will be exposed to

some of the most diverse groups of people. What are we teaching them in our classrooms

that can aid them later in life as teachers? Early childhood education is my passion, but

that doesn't mean that everything else goes to the wayside because of it. Sometimes I

don't understand how the advisors and program directors guide our students. I have had

multiple students tell me that they are focusing on their biblical perspectives class while

they are enrolled in my early childhood class. I know that Bible class is required by the

university, but there should be some level of importance placed on each subject.

Martin also expressed his concerns about the way interviews were conducted upon

admission. Martin stated, "Each student is interviewed by our program director upon being

admitted to the program, and I am not sure that they explain what the mission of the university

is." Martin urged, "Each student upon admission needs to know what is required of them and

how important it all is. I think they know what courses they are taking but don't know why."

Like Martin, Debbie stated, "The students are more concerned with math and the Bible courses

than anything else. I believe the advisors and administration are as well." Debbie also briefly

described a conversation with a student:

> I teach ECD 305, which is the first early childhood course in the cohort, and I always
>
> have such a rough time getting the students to focus on the content of the course and how
>
> we should be impacting children in our care. This class is all about the child in the
>
> community. We discuss families and who they are in the community. Although this is the
>
> focus, for the first 2 weeks of class my students constantly chatter about the math courses
>
> or the Bible courses they need to pass. I have tried to redirect them several times, but they

always apologize and explain that the advisor told them that they won't be successful in the cohort if they don't pass the general ed courses. I can see some truth to that but not really. Our students can be successful in all courses. They just need to be provided the correct guidance. Advisors should discuss the idea of being successful in general, not just in the general education courses. At the university level, you can be successful at core courses and take the GE courses after. If you fail one, it doesn't . . . mean you fail the other; it just means that you may not be able to graduate on time. I don't think students are made to understand that. The ideal classroom in my head allows us to focus on being teachers, educators, servants to the community, getting to know our demographics, who are students are, and where they come from. Unfortunately, more times than not, we miss that opportunity.

Patricia and Sabrina both expressed their concern for the value the program places on diversity and culture. Both described being asked to take chunks of time from each of their courses to discuss concerns about other courses. For example, Patricia recalled,

During the fourth week of my curriculum course, I was asked if I could spend a chunk of time talking with the students about the Bible course. Our program director was concerned because there were so many complaints about the amount of work and level of reading that takes place in the Bible courses. So basically, we as faculty were asked to talk to the students about our own experience in the Bible courses because most of the faculty are WCU alumni, to hopefully ease their minds. I somewhat understood what she wanted us to do; I just did not think it was fair to ask us to do that during our class time. One thing that people do not understand about some of the required courses at WCU is that our students see them as major tasks because of the emphasis that is placed on them.

I do think that the importance of courses should be emphasized but not during our cohort

class time. If someone could have only been in there to see what panic these courses

spark. I had originally only planned on spending about 10 minutes on explaining my

experience, why the reading seems so rigorous, but as soon as I opened that can of

worms, I could not shut it. In the end, I did not appreciate that I was asked to take my

class time for that, and next time if I do, I will do it at the end of the night. The last thing

that I found to be upsetting was that after class, mind you after 10 o'clock at night, I

received a phone call asking how the conversation went. It was just unappreciated

because I have never received a phone call asking how class . . . went during any typical

class nights. It just goes to show that maybe our priorities need a small shift.

Like Patricia, Sabrina described a similar experience where she felt that diversity in the

classroom and within the early childhood cohort was not valued. Sharing her love for the

program and for the students, she also expressed concerns and worries for the future growth of

the program as well as the success of the students. Sabrina insisted,

Here at this regional center, WCU's admissions and advising team as well as our

directors need to do a better job of admitting and advising our students. I have worked

personally with the advisors before and have heard them emphasize the early childhood

curriculum, the general education classes, the Bible class, and a few other things, but they

never really emphasize how and why we work in small cohorts. They do not emphasize

the idea of building a community or building relationships amongst each other. It really is

too bad that we do not emphasize the different makeups of our classrooms and how we

come together to educate as one. In addition to all of that, I have been with WCU for

quite some time now and am unaware of any of the events that we have going on, on

campus. I know we have a lot of support for other subjects, but I would hope that at some point we would be able to hold different events that attend to who are students are—I think a cultural fair, a diversity night, or things of some sort to help promote and encourage the differences among everyone.

Provided the challenges that the world faces today when it comes to inclusion and intolerance for differences, having meaningful conversations around culture and diversity as well as implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies are vital if educators want to make the world a better place. While discussing challenges, Martin described his fear as "real." Martin stated that every day "he is afraid of offending someone and losing his job." Martin added,

I sometimes am worried about what I say in the classroom, especially in the exceptionalities course, because my students in the past have been so easily offended. I think it is vital that we as educators and leaders have our students' back, but I have felt that it can sometimes be at our [the faculty's] expense. I have taught at WCU in the School of Education as well as other departments, and the School of Education is the department that has done things differently. For example, last semester a student of mine went to the program director and complained about a word I had used in class. The word was "boombox." When I received an email stating that a student had a concern I was completely caught off guard and met with our program director immediately. During the meeting, I was told that I had used the term in a way that had offended the student. I am educated and can assume why one could be offended, but I was never really given a chance to provide context or any explanation for that matter. It all came down to what the student said, how the students felt, and what I needed to do in the future, which was very unclear. I have been called in to have quite a few discussions similar to this one. Again,

without being asked for an explanation, I was reminded that I shouldn't offend students. I wondered, though, what could they do to help and to help the students in this area.

Similar to the participant interviews, the student surveys revealed that they could feel the fear as well as the lack of training from the professors regarding diversity in class. One student survey described learning a lot about cultural activity within the diversity course but not throughout other parts of the program. Within the survey the student wrote,

> I wonder if the professors have training around what cultural activity is. For some reason the teachers feel like they have a guard up or they, like, don't know what it is. Maybe they are scared with all that is going on in the world today.

Dani, an adjunct professor, also described a scenario where he was fearful of losing his job or any type of seniority that he had earned at WCU. Similar to Martin, Dani described an experience where he was told that he had offended students and was unsure of how to move forward because he felt that WCU leadership did not provide him with a solution or any tools to improve. Dani said,

> One of the reasons why I find it challenging to be a culturally responsive leader is because I feel I have little to no support. My first year as a professor here at WCU I was motivated and excited about teaching, connecting with my students, and building relationships with those in the WCU community. Recently, maybe over the past 2 years or so, I have grown fearful of using any type of strategies in the classroom to reach my students based on culture or their diverse background. In class I do icebreakers to get to know a little about them, but I never really dig too deep because of things that have been misinterpreted in the past. Last semester, I started off the first night of an art and literature class with an icebreaker that had to do with music. To make a long story short, I

provided four genres and the students had to choose a genre and come up with an album title that described them as an educator / parent / role model in the community. The icebreaker went well, and I did in fact learn a few things about my students and how they see themselves in the lives of children. The next morning I received a phone call and was told that I was going to have a meeting with the program director and the dean of the School of Education. I wasn't sure exactly what happened, but they explained to me that a student had felt offended by my icebreaker. She felt that I had only included certain genres of music because I was making an assumption of what types of people lived in that community. That actually couldn't have been any further from the truth, but apparently she had spoken to the other students and they agreed. So she sent an email to our director representing the students, and I was assigned to teach another cohort. I was never really given an opportunity to explain, ask for support, or to address the students to clarify and apologize. About a month later, I emailed my director and the dean asking for resources so that I better understand how to implement culturally diverse strategies appropriately in higher education classrooms. I received some articles to read but have just had to end up researching this topic on my own. I do use some strategies in the classroom to teach to who my students are and how they learn, but it is not until after I get to know my students. But it is still done with fear for my job in mind.

Nessa, Jackie, and Nicole also shared similar experiences to Dani and Martin. The common factor among several faculty was the fear of implementing culturally diverse strategies. Nessa and Jackie both described short meetings with administration about offending students and not being clear of how or what they did that was offensive. Nicole, on the other hand, admitted her lack of training and being set in her own personal beliefs. Although she admitted that she had

been educating herself on the topic of diversity and culture, she also admitted that she struggled seeing things with a "multiple perspective." Nicole described what she referred to as an awkward moment in class:

> In the exceptionalities course, some of the content for the night was discussing different types of families and what makes a family diverse. On this night when we discussed the idea of diversity, it was in terms of differences. As we worked and shared out, a student had brought up a situation in her classroom where the child had [come] from a two-parent home but was reminded constantly by the student's father that his son was not to play with any dolls or in the playhouse area. The student had explained that Dad didn't want his son to be gay. The student had shared a specific incident where Dad came to pick up the child and the child was in the playhouse area with high heels and a wand in hand. Basically, Dad came in and ripped my student to pieces for not following his orders. My comment was, why didn't you? I would have reacted the same way. I explained that my beliefs were very traditional and that I disagreed. After the fact, I realized I shouldn't have said that. I didn't know my students that well, and I later found out that I had a student who was one of two moms with a small child. In the end, I should have known better. I deserved to be called in and reminded of how to speak to students. However, after that incident, I am reminded in passing, by email, and sometimes verbally not to do that again. I don't mind the reminder; I guess it is just how it's said. It is not even said formally but in a very informal "or else" type of way and in front of others. This type of behavior is what makes me fearful and redirect students when specific conversations come up.

In addition to the data from the participant interviews, another student reported that they felt like every time they asked a question about working with students who are learning English as a second language, the professors would respond with surface-level answers such as "you can use the same strategies for all students." Six additional surveys showed that students assumed that the professors had no training in the area of diversity or working with diverse groups of students. One survey particularly noted that the group of professors who taught in the program was not a diverse group of people. The student indicated that the majority of the faculty were Caucasian, which caused that survey respondent to question whether the faculty had a sufficient amount of experience working with diverse groups of students or any proper training.

Interview participants Justin, Lisa, and Cindy also shared the same concerns describing the confusion of what exactly they were supposed to do and say so that they did not offend students. Justin asked, "Can I have clarity?" Justin also explained instructors were reprimanded a lot more than they should have been, especially when there was no guidance or training to steer them in the right direction. Justin added,

> I am educated and I feel like a smart person. I have been in several positions where I have had to discuss the topic of culture and diversity in higher education classrooms, but I have never been in a setting where the topic seems to be taboo. When discussing a topic that is so pertinent in society and that is vital for our future teachers to be knowledgeable in, it is sad that instructors walk on eggshells not to offend students. No instructor should have to be in fear of not being assigned any classes to teach or, worse, being let go because of something that has not been made clear. I think diversity should be something that is valued, and strategies that help us get to know our students should be used more often.

Although the participants experienced many challenges when implementing culturally diverse strategies, Lisa and Cindy maintained that throughout the challenges they sustained certain aspects of culturally responsive teaching. Cindy shared her experience as an international student in the Netherlands and recalled how important certain aspects of culture and diversity were for her to be successful and feel as if she were at home.

Within the student surveys, it was also apparent that many students felt the need to be addressed and taught properly according to who they were and where they were from. One survey showed that a student felt "like the professors didn't know I was here internationally." Another student also reported, "In the physical education class, I was assigned to create a lesson plan on Tether Ball. I am from Yemen; I had no idea about most of the American activities we had to choose from." The student also expressed her feelings about authenticity within assignments by writing, "I asked about tether ball and was told to Google it. That was disappointing. The professors should work harder to get to know who they are teaching. Not all of us have the same life or experience as them."

Recognition of the Need for Culturally Diverse Teaching Strategies

The participant interview data clearly showed that the faculty understood the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies. By having utilized key words such as "need," "necessary," and "vital" as well as other key terms like "achievement" and "equity," the faculty communicated that what they know about their students guides their planning and delivery of course content. As said by Lisa and Cindy, despite their challenges and fears, many of the participants maintained utilizing culturally responsive teaching strategies by incorporating get-to-know-you activities and teaching how students learn. Lisa stated, "The need for utilizing these

types of strategies in the classroom is high, especially when it is something our leadership struggles with."

To begin, 11 out of 12 of the participants communicated that the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies is appropriate due to the ever-changing demographics. It was apparent that it is vital that the faculty in the school of education understand culture and diversity, as well as what strategies to implement in the classroom, because of the elevated number of students with disabilities, different cultural backgrounds, and different economic experiences. Additionally, all participants commonly stated that addressing the faculty's needs would be an appropriate first step so that they are prepared and all on the same page when walking into the diverse groups of students that are more and more present on campus. For example, Patricia stated,

> Because our higher education classrooms continue to become more and more beautifully diverse, instructors, adjunct or full-time, should be more knowledgeable when it comes to culturally responsive teaching strategies. A serious problem that I have encountered is that although kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers know many different teaching strategies, even culturally responsive teaching strategies, higher education instructors do not. Many of us talk about culture and diversity like we fully understand it, but I am not sure that we do. Being culturally responsive is so much more than just discussing culture and diversity; it is what we do with what we know and how we find out more about our students that will influence our teaching.

Cindy similarly said,

> In my experience here at WCU, many instructors and some leaders do not have the experience and background needed to understand and implement culturally diverse

teaching strategies. Unfortunately, when you do not have the experience, background, or understanding, we are not able to meet the needs of all students. If our administration can support us in better ways, it is my belief that having that knowledge and direction will not only help our program but also the university.

Nessa also shared her thoughts about the needs of culturally diverse teaching strategies and said,

Here at WCU, our student population is becoming more diverse. Especially in our ECE program. If the instructors or the leaders of our program are not experienced or knowledgeable in being responsive to student cultures, then we are not meeting our students' needs. I also believe that it isn't just the students that miss out; it is also their future students that will be impacted, as well faculty at WCU. As an educator, a mentor, and a lifelong learner, it is important to me to meet the needs of all my students.

Sabrina also shared her thoughts on why there is a need for culturally responsive teaching practices; however, through the lens of current research in higher education, she shared,

Unfortunately, I think that there are several social and contextual problems that make the idea of implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies a lot more difficult. Currently, in the United States, people of all races and nationalities are making moves to request equality, and many other people in the United States see that as a problem. Because of this, I am seeing that people are backing down from their beliefs, and this makes being a culturally diverse educator a lot harder. When you look at our current political state, diversity and culture is something that is not only being brought up in current and past elections, but it also something that is being criticized. Additionally, I think because of

our political state, educators who were once confident at having conversations around culture and diversity with their students are no longer as confident as they once were.

Jackie described what she thought about becoming a culturally diverse educator through the lens of an instructor and a leader at WCU:

I truly think our instructors are taking a better look at their classrooms and realizing how much more diverse they are. Especially our instructors that have been here for 10-plus years. With that view of our changing classrooms, I think we are also looking at which students are not doing so well in the courses we teach. As an instructor, when I look at grades, I also try and think of, what strategies can I use to engage my students in the content so that they perform successfully? There is a lot of research out there that says, culturally diverse teaching strategies can help, yet many of us are not using those strategies. As an instructor and a leader on WCU campus, I know that in order to be more effective, I need to have some of those culturally diverse teaching strategies in my toolbox, and with that I need to make sure to use those tools to improve my students' in- and out-of-class experiences when it comes to the course. When doing this, I also think that this will improve the morale for our instructors. For me, when I know that my students are engaged and doing well, I am happy and tend to enjoy teaching and my courses just a bit more. As a leader on campus, when I mentor students, I connect with my students starting with what I know about them. This connection could be based off culture, traditions, backgrounds, etc. This helps me modify how they need to be mentored and how I deliver instruction in class.

Nicole added to what Jackie shared by adding her perspective on what WCU's mission statement said:

At WCU we know that many diverse families choose WCU as a way for their student to grow in the Christian community, the work world, and in society. We hear about this all the time at our admission days, in our course evaluations, and sometimes directly from students. If we as educators, as a Christian institution, do not do what we can to assure our students that we teach to who they are, then we are not providing the proper service to our students and their families. As a diverse Christian institution, we need to stand by our mission and offer inclusivity while being welcoming and delivering content so that we meet the needs of all students as best as we can. This will allow instructors at WCU to meet the needs of our students and their families while serving the Lord and standing by the mission of WCU.

Katie provided examples and gave a similar opinion to Nicole:

All colleges and universities in the United States, public or private, should be able to provide their students with the proper inclusive education. The students should be able to learn regardless of their ability, color, home country, language, or economic status. Especially for WCU, if our mission explains that inclusivity is one of our goals, then implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies should be a priority. If or when it isn't, we are not addressing the needs or meeting the needs of our students. This goes back to what we discussed earlier. At WCU, are we just enrolling students for no rhyme or reason? Or are we thinking about their needs and who they are? The topic of culturally diverse teaching strategies in higher education means relaying information to our students so that they can relay the information to their family and their future students. If the instructors do not use every resource possible to meet the needs of their students, we are leaving them behind, and that is not okay. It all comes to down to each instructor and the

institutional leaders. If they are not using all the resources available to become a
culturally diverse educator, they are more likely to make choices based on their own
personal belief system.

Martin added his perspective as an instructor and a leader at WCU by saying,

I can tell you as an instructor and a leader on campus that there are some people I teach
with that only view degree, coursework, and their students through a very narrow and
skewed lens. Unfortunately, this narrow and skewed lens is how they make their
decisions about planning and content delivery in the classroom, which can be a problem
for not only students but for the university.

Many of the participants agreed that being respectful; welcoming understanding of
behaviors, values, and traditions; as well as open to communication were all part of positively
implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies. They also agreed that these strategies would
not only support the student directly but also have an indirect impact on the community. The
participants also agreed that if culturally diverse teaching strategies were utilized properly, the
students could reach higher educational goals, and they would have had a part in creating a
positive and inclusive campus culture.

Additionally, many of the participants pointed out that the goal of providing higher
education to students is to provide the equal educational opportunity regardless of who the
students are or where they come from. Ability, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality,
and/or economic status should not be a negative factor when educating any students. Education
is proven to be vital for students to succeed in the workforce and in society. The findings within
the data analysis prove that culturally diverse teaching strategies are important to the success of
the students.

Debbie thoughtfully shared why she believes culturally responsive teaching strategies are necessary in higher education:

I believe that culturally diverse teaching strategies are needed in higher education just as much as they are in K–12 education so that we continue to serve the community that exist[s] on and around the campus. Additionally, being a culturally diverse educator can also support all students that are from other states and countries. Being . . . culturally diverse would not only help WCU but would also help society locally and globally. Overall, our impact would improve the lives of our students and the community they impact.

Additionally, Debbie stated,

What it all comes down to is that the demographics of society are changing drastically. For this reason, all universities including WCU should be offering multiple opportunities to students to feel not only welcome on campus but to feel at home, so that way students can be successful in their work on and off campus.

Many of the participants also discussed the benefits that the university could offer to students when the instructors and leaders on campus implement culturally diverse teaching strategies. They all agreed that those strategies would help students answer questions that they have or that their future students might have. Justin suggested,

As educators we already know that there is a lot of research out there that discuss[es] the benefits of a diverse campus and how it impacts learning. We also know that when you use the term "culturally diverse teaching strategies" it goes hand in hand with the term "diversity." In order to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies, you have to know what diversity is and how to create and maintain it on your campus. When you do

that, the benefits flow in. Students begin learning from each other, and as graduates they

take what they have learned and implement it in an even larger world, which benefits us

all.

Dani agreed with Justin and commented,

From the professor perspective, when we understand and value diversity, we are setting a

good example of how it can benefit our lives in education and in the workforce. In the

end, our goal should be to educate our students according to who they are and where they

come from. In turn this will reap great benefits to our students by better preparing them

for the world they are about to take on, personally and professionally.

Lisa responded with a discussion about culturally diverse teaching strategies and

engagement and how these promote learning and increase achievement:

Being culturally responsive in the classroom benefits us all. As an instructor, I should

read more about different cultures, languages, and differences in our students. Doing this

would help me better understand our students and help us all learn from one another.

When I seek out this type of learning, not only would I be setting a good example for my

students, but I think I would be able to connect with them on a different level, which

would further engage them, ultimately positively impacting learning.

Debbie and Martin, who are both lead instructors in the exceptionalities course, both have

directly seen benefits to using culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom. Debbie

insisted,

Taking on this type of approach will promote a welcoming learning environment, which

will impact success in the course and in school. Using strategies that teach to each student

and who they are also prepare[s] our students for the outside world and aid[s] them in

working with students who come from different backgrounds and have different abilities

then them. When thinking about the impact culturally diverse teaching strategies can

have on our students, I also think about the skills my students will walk away with and

take into their work world.

Martin explained a similar belief and provided an example of his thinking:

Another benefit of culturally diverse teaching is the discourse that takes place in the

classroom. By supporting the diverse groups of students within our university, we seem

more welcoming to all students, especially students who are of a different culture than

our own. In this program, this provides more meaningful discourse around education,

teaching, learning, and building relationships with students and the community. For

example, I teach a course that delves into specific theories in early childhood education.

We discuss how children develop over time and learn that although every child visits

each stage of development, they visit each stage at different times. In this class, we also

learn how children from different countries develop differently. A child from Finland will

develop slightly different[ly] than a child from China and so on. As an instructor, we can

have a conversation about child development and how it varies depending on where you

come from, which can be so powerful. However, in another class, if a professor only

discusses the development of a child and does not relate it to where students are born or

where they grow up, that lesson as well as its discourse can fall flat. If there is no

discussion about differences, the lesson can create a disconnect between the students and

what they need to learn about diversity. When this happens, we are unfortunately creating

a specific lens for a student to look through when in fact we should be creating a multiple

lens for them to see the world through.

Finally, Katie added her thoughts about the benefits of a culturally diverse education:

When it all comes down to it, our students will benefit when we as instructors know more because they are being led by people who know about who they are and where they come from but also respect who they are and where they come from. When I was in working toward my community college credential, I wish I had more support in this area. As a student teacher and as an instructor at WCU, I would feel a lot more confident in my teaching and my strategies to reach all students and meet their needs.

Lastly, several of the participants brought up not only benefits to students but also benefits to the instructors. Participants explained that if they were more knowledgeable and supported in using culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom, then it would benefit them as well. Nicole explained that maybe she wouldn't view things through such a "narrow lens" if she knew more and felt more comfortable discussing diversity in her courses. Jackie and Sabrina also followed up with explaining that if they had the support and confidence they needed, they would be better at interacting with students and making them feel more welcome.

Cindy described her experience and how she felt about growing as an educator in the area of culturally diverse teaching and reaching all students:

I love teaching several of the courses because I feel that I learn from my students every session. Every class, every cohort, is its own journey. I learn something different and new every time. I truly do feel like interacting with my students makes me a better instructor. When I am comfortable, we each teach each other about our own lives and experiences. In some courses we have shared some personal journeys, and when I get to know my students in that way, it propels me to perform better as an instructor for my students and for myself. There have been several courses where students come into class, I teach and

hope that they learn, even though we never connect. Those are the experiences that I feel

cause me to stay in place and not grow as an educator. The other type pushes me to grow

and motivate[s] me to do better.

Finally, Patricia emphasized her growth and her love of teaching when she is able to feel

comfortable and supported in the classroom:

This may sound crazy, but I wish I could teach a lot less. I love teaching, but by that I

mean lecturing less. Depending on the group of students and the vibe I get, I would love

to allow them to learn from each other as well as myself through meaningful discussions.

I learn a lot about my students when I can value their voice and their opinion. If I stand

there and lecture the whole time, I learn nothing. It is as if I am just regurgitating content.

I have had some good semesters where I learn so much from my students through getting

to know who they are and all about their life experiences. Especially our international

students, they have taught us all about their life, their home country, and in some courses,

we have even had potlucks where we taste different types of foods. Overall, I am grateful

for those types of experiences and the learning that comes along with it. I just wish that I

felt supported and safe enough to make that happen in all my courses. I know not every

course will have so much of that cultural learning to offer me; however, the connection is

what is key and helps me be more effective as an educator.

Additionally, the data showed that a majority of the faculty had successfully implemented

culturally diverse teaching strategies at one point or another in several of their courses. Within

the data, it was clear that a majority of the participants all shared an agreement that it was vital to

encourage students to share their thoughts, incorporate diverse work as well as ways to study, get

to know each student's learning style and their specific needs, and imitate instruction styles from different cultures.

Martin reported he had found that one of the most effective ways to promote achievement in the classroom was to actively engage students during instruction. Additionally, once engaged, specific strategies could be used to promote diversity and the topic of culture and community building. Although several educators at WCU were aware of this, several of the participants shared that their students had reported they felt like a "bother" or "nuisance" when they asked questions or had an experience to share, even when it related directly to the content. Justin stated, "As educators, we have the power to improve our students' experiences by delivering instruction in a way that values student voice and student participation." Dani also added,

Utilizing student voice not only to increase engagement and impact learning but to promote culture and diversity while building a community in the classroom is key. There is a lot of research out that explains how the amount of discourse in the classroom is directly related to success in college. There are several strategies that we can use in our courses to value student voice, increase discourse among students, and create and maintain relationships, as well get to know each other and foster a sense of belonging. All these key areas go hand in hand with diversity and culture. One of the strategies I implement is the classroom ritual. I do this at the beginning of each course during each night of class. Often times, students show up to class with their minds full of worry. Most of my students are coming from work or from having to make dinner and leave their children with a babysitter. They have a lot going on, so to sort of distract them from that, I start off with something that is predictable. The way the welcoming ritual works is different every time. For example, just recently in a course when my students came in,

they wrote their name on a popsicle stick. I used these sticks as equity sticks to break

them into groups. The prompt for the ritual that night was to "share breaking news." I

normally model this by sharing something about my day while also still connecting to the

content of the course. I must admit, implementing the welcome ritual has been key to

getting to know my students; it just depends how effectively I implement it in each

course. In the end, this ritual allows the students to share their thoughts in a safe space,

ultimately resulting in building relationships with their peers, fostering a sense of

belonging, and creating safe space where students are accepted for who they are.

Lisa also provided her input on the effectiveness of student voice and provided an

example and the changes that she noticed in her student learning as a result:

As I plan and prepare for a new course there are several steps that I take to try and offer

multiple opportunities for students to voice their thinking. As I plan each week, I try and

think hard about meaningful questioning as well as activities that will allow students to

actively learn. In addition, I make sure to think about how often students are talking,

speaking from the front of the room, writing on the whiteboard, and/or demonstrating an

activity for the class or a small group. I also try and offer students choices when it comes

to the work they have to complete. Sometimes they can choose a topic or a tool to use if it

is for an assignment where we have some freedom. With all of this in mind, I also try and

make sure that whatever we are doing in the classroom, they can relate to their real-life

context. In a perfect world, my goal would be that my students are in a classroom where

they learn more about who their classmates are, who they are, and who they want to be

personally and professionally. The only way this will happen is by working

collaboratively, adding their voice to classroom conversations. Ultimately, this will

support a student sense of belonging and a sense of community in the classroom. As far

as the impact on learning and difference I have seen, I have to say they have been quite

great. When I am comfortable and I feel safe enough with a group to implement these

strategies, I notice a few things. First, just in body language and attitude, they seem to

come in more relaxed and with an open mind, just ready to soak up all they can from

each other. Second, because we are a Christian university, the devotions in Moodle

become deeper and are very authentic. The students open up more and soon after even

feel comfortable enough to ask for prayer. When it comes to academics, the writing is

also impacted because they are not afraid to ask for support or clarification. I also have

noticed that they often will support one another in academics, again because we have

built that community and they are comfortable. As for me, because I have learned a lot

about them and how they learn, I can provide information in multiple mediums. Grading

and giving feedback become a lot more meaningful because they have a lot of the

resources and support they need.

Similarly, Debbie explained,

One of my strategies is just digging for information about my students. At the start of the

course, I try and gauge attitudes and what type of students I am working with. At the end

of the first night, I have a simple Google form that I share that asks about interest and

learning styles. Once I gather that information, I hold an open discussion that allows

students to share what has worked for them in past courses, or they can share any other

positive learning experiences they have had. At the end, I tell them the reason for taking

the time to learn about them and explain that now that I have some information about

who they are and how they learn, I can adjust my delivery of content and planning of

activities to fit their specific needs. Valuing student voice in this way has really helped

my students be themselves, ask more questions, and collaborate more comfortabl[y]

because they know that they are in a safe space. Most of the time when students learn that

I am here to support them, they warm up to the course, their classmates, and to me

quickly.

Martin taught a curriculum course as well as a capstone course that covered

professionalism and searching for a teaching position. He shared a short explanation of how he

used student voice as well as other activities to better understand his students:

A strategy that most students and I enjoy [is] holding student interviews. Interviewing

students not only allows me to get to know more about my students' habits and values but

also allows them to learn about each other. Additionally, we all learn about each other's

strengths and weaknesses. Because this is a capstone course that teaches the students all

about etiquette and developing a professional resume for the field of education, these

mock interviews are very helpful. During the interviews we ask about hobbies, interest,

their favorite types of lessons and activities, as well as how they like to sharpen their own

skills. After I gather all of that data, I am able to take that learning and modify instruction

as well as my teaching strategies to who my students are, their abilities, and how they

learn. Relating my teaching to their lives and their strengths has resulted in increased

engagement, which has had a positive impact on learning. When this is not done

successfully, I have noticed that discourse and engagement are lacking; therefore, what

we learn in class about each other and about content is less existent.

Katie excitedly urged that everyone should try and use real-world problems in their

classrooms. Katie, who has taught a math and science for young children course, shared all about

how she saw her students take a greater interest in learning when she provided situations in a real-world context for her students. Katie said,

> It can be so simple when the students cooperate. Sometimes the space just doesn't feel safe, and I am not as good at it when the students think it is silly. But I still try and go for it. When it comes to teaching how to teach math and science to young children, I usually . . . try to get to know my students first. I try and gauge their attitude to ensure that I won't just make myself look silly, but then I dive in. When discussing specific scenarios, I try and use local places or use their names in problems. I also make sure that I use different modalities of learning. All my videos have captions, and we take field trips around campus to learn about math and science. I also use student interest. For example, a student was sharing one day that she loves to bake and has several recipes from her grandma who lives in the Philippines. I took that information and geared learning towards cooking and recipes from other cultures. The discourse and engagement were so rich that night. The point of this is to help establish a culturally responsive classroom while engaging students and making them feel valued. I truly believe that everyone should try and utilize this in instruction, I have found that my students open up more and participate more when they are directly involved in the context of the course. My hopes would be to do this with all courses, but when sometimes when I feel that I am not supported by administration or when the students have negative attitudes, I pull back and we all suffer.

Nicole added to the data and explained that sometimes she incorporated teaching strategies from other cultures in her course. For example, when she was teaching one of her favorite courses, children's art and literature, she used art and storytelling as part of her activities

and classroom teaching. Nicole described culturally diverse teaching strategies and storytelling as follows:

> Powerful! When I think about culturally diverse teaching in higher education, in an early childhood development program, I get excited. The goal in my mind is to provide my students with the tools to support cognitive and intellectual development as well as provide a good dose of social-emotional learning. When doing this, I also make sure to think about ways I can relate directly to the students. Will it be through language, prior knowledge, or hobbies such as art and music? Most of the time, I find that my students can relate best to art and storytelling. Every student that walks in has their own story to tell and their own culture. Storytelling in most settings are stories that are passed down from person to person, some from long ago and some fresh from the generation before. Within my courses, I use storytelling as a tool to connect with my students and to promote the connection between their peers. Research says that students retain more information when they can connect on a deeper level to the content in the classroom, and that is what I strive for. In class, storytelling usually takes place after we explore the content and meaning of a few children's books. Normally I use some nifty way to break up the students and then provide them with a few prompts, or they can make up their own. The idea is to tell a story about themselves. We talk about the use of colorful words, describing words, the setting, and more, so that the story can come alive. This is one [of] my favorite strategies to implement because it really allows each student to share who they are and learn about their peers. Storytelling promotes language [and] relationship building and illustrates different cultural concepts for students who may or may not know about specific cultures and traditions. When I implement this strategy, I notice a

difference in teaching from peer to peer and in learning. My students come in with a positive attitude and take ownership of their space in the classroom. Their written and verbal communication improves in class and within their assignments. And lastly, it just seems like they have a better respect for each other because we have used storytelling to share pieces of our lives.

In addition to faculty interviews, the student surveys also showed that students were needing the professors to be more aware of who is sitting in their classroom. When describing how the instructors used what they knew about the students' background to facilitate learning, the responses were all very similar. To be more specific, 11 students described not being comfortable with all of the professors and not taking part in any get-to-know-you activities. One student specifically wrote, "I am not a child, but normally the teachers make us introduce ourselves in some silly way. I hate doing it but know that we need it as well as the instructors do." Several students also shared their own experience in working in early childhood classrooms and were able to connect their own procedures for planning in their classrooms. A student wrote,

When it comes to using our background to facilitate learning, the instructors should make sure to do that in every class. As an associate teacher at a child development center, one of the essential components of planning is knowing our students. We get to know our students not only in person but through looking at past records, observing them, working with them, and by asking questions. On the first day of school, we also play games and get to know their family upon arrival and departure times. Although a different environment because of the age group, the point is that we as students need to be recognized for who we are so that our teachers can plan to deliver instruction appropriately. I feel like the need for this is great, and I may have missed out.

This final theme described the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies in higher education. Participants shared explanations of what strategies are needed and what strategies have worked within their courses, as well as what differences they have seen in student learning as a result. However, all faculty agreed that if they had more support and training, their efforts would improve, and the faculty would incorporate more culturally diverse teaching strategies confidently.

Summary

Chapter 4 reported the views of 12 adjunct faculty about utilizing culturally diverse teaching strategies in WCU classrooms. The document analysis, interviews, and survey data displayed that the faculty felt the environment was challenging and the lack of support made it difficult to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies. However, their individual responses showed that the faculty had a wealth of knowledge around the topic and did implement culturally diverse teaching strategies when the environment was safe to do so. Additionally, the faculty interviews revealed that there were many benefits to utilizing culturally diverse teaching strategies for faculty, students, their families, and the community. Lastly, the findings revealed that culturally diverse teaching strategies not only were successfully implemented at WCU but also were positively impacting student learning and teaching.

Chapter 5 contains a review of the findings of this study and connects them to prior literature regarding culturally diverse teaching strategies in higher education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study was designed to investigate the apparent lack of necessary knowledge of many professors, including those at WCU, to integrate and promote strategies to meet the needs of students in a culturally diverse classroom (Gay, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2018; Scandura & Mouriño, 2017). The research literature suggested that in order to provide a more effective response to the growing demographic shift in the student population, professors should seek out strategies to work with students who are from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure they receive a high-quality education (MacDonald, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010). Essential changes and implications of culturally responsive leadership are called for due to the shifting demographic trends (Gay, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how student cultural differences influenced WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I was seeking to understand how WCU faculty described their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation uncovered the successes and challenges professors faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom, if any, and the differences they saw in their teaching and student learning as a result. Lastly, I drew specific conclusions based on the interpretation of the data collected.

Discussion

In this chapter, I describe the lack of a unified vision according to the faculty, as well as efforts put forth and challenges that faculty faced when implementing culturally diverse strategies. The participants of this study shared a wealth of information through their lived experiences in the classroom as well as in their leadership positions. The participants also presented their understandings of cultural differences in the classroom, their challenges, and their

own experiences implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom. Three overarching themes emerged from the data collection, revealing a lack of a unified vision and approach to diversity education within their department at WCU, the challenges the faculty experienced such as the implementation of culturally diverse strategies, and the faculty's recognition of the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies. These themes revealed a complicated problem and provided a glimpse of how implementing culturally diverse strategies is a complex and challenging task.

Research Question 1: How Do WCU Faculty Perceive Student Cultural Differences Influencing Their Instructional Pedagogies Within Their Courses?

WCU faculty perceived student cultural differences to have a big impact on instructional pedagogies within their courses. The findings of the study showed that the faculty participants believed they had a positive influence on their students when it came to respecting each of their differences. For example, faculty member Nicole explained using icebreaker activities to learn about each student, specifically to learn how each student learns. I also found that the faculty had been diligently working toward providing a classroom that is free of judgment and based on building and maintaining relationships. Martin explained that if faculty wanted students to work hard and succeed, they needed to get to know the students and teach the way they learn. This was evident through Martin's description about his and his fellow faculty members' planning of their lessons and content delivery strategies, for which they carefully considered their students' home language, as well as their role within their family. This was done to better understand how their students learn and to respect their students' differences and identities, which Martin believed encouraged them to become more engaged in class.

Filene (2005) explained that students need more than just a professor standing there and lecturing to the class. Filene (2005) insisted that content needs to be delivered in a way to actively engage students. Filene (2005) stated, "Our students deserve to be taught in ways that actively engage them in the learning process, are student-centered, and evaluate their learning using a variety of measures" (p. 56). Unfortunately, researchers found that sometimes even though some professors were well versed in their field, they were not aware of effective instructional or assessment techniques or were not always using them in the higher education classroom.

Among the participants in this study, there was familiarity with the term "pedagogy," and there was a shared understanding of how it is impacted by student cultural differences. At WCU, the faculty were aware that not all students and the way they learn are the same. The faculty also agreed that addressing cultural differences within teaching and learning was vital to the success of all students and was something that is perceived to be part of what influences their planning and content delivery in the classroom. Nunan (1999) explained that when perceiving cultural differences as important, the interactions between instructor thought and student experience influence more complex tasks.

The findings within this study show that cultural differences are important in relation to pedagogy because professors are faced with an increasingly diverse population within their classrooms. The culturally responsive leadership framework is based on the work by Gay (2010) around culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Gay's (2010) work defined culturally responsive teaching as "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory" (p. 36). Additionally, the faculty agreed that culture should be addressed because of the large gap in achievement between minority and nonminority groups at

WCU. Although the professors agreed that student cultural differences had a big impact on instructional pedagogy, it was found that the professors at WCU were the ultimate advocates for teaching and learning. But many of them were not aware of what experiences or challenges students dealt with once they left campus. This unknown causes researchers to suggest that instructors should perceive students as active participants in the learning process, getting to know who their students are and how they learn, which will ultimately impact learning (Nunan, 1999).

Gay (2010) found that having knowledge about cultural diversity includes "understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups" (p. 108). Even though some educators may find this overwhelming, many researchers support the idea that culture is very complex and educators need only be knowledgeable in the areas that have to do with teaching and learning (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Case, 2013; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016). For example, among different ethnic groups in a higher education setting, an educator should be aware of cultural values, traditions, communication style, learning style, as well as contributions to the community and other experiences that students have off campus. Being knowledgeable in these areas is supported by the first tenet of Gay's (2010) framework and further confirms that to support an ethnically diverse student population and increase academic achievement, knowledge about cultural diversity and its impact on pedagogy is needed.

Research Question 2: How Do WCU Faculty Describe Their Understanding of Culturally Diverse Teaching Strategies, Particularly Within the Context of a Christian University?

WCU faculty described their understanding of implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies as an idea with no clear plan for implementation. These findings show that although there was a lot of discussion about culturally diverse teaching strategies, none of the faculty had a clear idea of how to consistently implement the strategies. On the university website,

specifically within the vision statement, it explained that WCU celebrates diversity and welcomes culturally diverse teaching strategies and that the goals of WCU are to strengthen society's relationship with the church while celebrating diversity. However, faculty members Jackie and Sabrina recognized that although the university provided a description of the beliefs and values, as well as a detailed diversity rationale, there still was no clear direction of how to implement these strategies. Faculty member Sabrina explained how she often felt embarrassed that she did not "understand" the diversity statement and rationale of WCU; however, she recognized that many of her colleagues including herself felt the lack of direction and clarity, which led to having a misunderstanding about what was expected. Similarly, several students reported within their surveys that they had assumed they would be learning to work with diverse groups of students through examples and hands-on models, but that did not happen. One student reported she felt that the professor was uncomfortable utilizing different strategies in the classroom and had a lack of understand about the topic, making the group work mundane and unengaging.

In addition to understanding culturally diverse teaching strategies, educators also need to know how to implement them and be aware of different strategies for the delivery of content. If there is a lack of understanding, successful implementation will not happen (Andrade et al., 2020). Gay (2002) explained that within the culturally responsive framework, in order to accelerate student learning, there should be an understanding of different types of curricula that are present in the classroom. This understanding should then lead the instructors to offer several opportunities to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies (Gay, 2002).

Gay (2002) explained one of the goals of the culturally responsive framework is the understanding of ethnically diverse teaching strategies that positively impact student academic

achievement. Additionally, Gay (2002) stated, "Promoting the understanding of cultural awareness and diversity in the classroom starts with the teachers" and how they go about understanding each student. Researchers also encourage educators to take the time to learn about student backgrounds, traditions, hobbies, learning styles, and anything else that makes them unique (Ingram, 2015).

Ultimately, the hopes of WCU professors were that collaboration and access to more resources would support their understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Additionally, professors would like to understand and implement diverse teaching strategies in the way that WCU promotes to the community. Because WCU is an institution that calls students of all faith backgrounds to learn, examine, and challenge their faith and education in a safe space, it was important to the study's professors that they understand and deliver diverse content in a way that reaches all students.

Research Question 3: What Culturally Diverse Strategies Are WCU Faculty Implementing, and What Differences Have They Seen in Their Teaching and Student Learning as a Result?

Some WCU faculty were implementing strategies at the beginning of their courses to get to know their students, which had a positive impact on student learning. Although the participants reported these icebreaker strategies were effective, they were not consistently being used throughout all of the courses. Professors who implemented these strategies used them to get to know students or introduce students to each other. Faculty member Nicole stated, "Icebreakers are a great way for students to open up about who they are to other students." Nicole also added, "This is a great way to build and maintain relationships based on shared interest and background knowledge." The study showed that when WCU faculty utilized these icebreaker activities, it was to learn about their students who come from different backgrounds as well as allow each

student to connect and get to know each other. According to faculty members Justin and Martin, they believe icebreakers promoted an increased level of bonding and collaboration among everyone in the classroom, which led them to see a difference in student learning and relationships because students were putting in more effort to learn and to get to know each other.

D. Chen and Yang (2017) examined the "effectiveness of implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies in an adult ESL classroom" (p. 79). D. Chen and Yang (2017) found when culturally responsive teaching strategies are utilized, student participation increased. Also, it was found that when the instruction employed different types of delivery, there was an increase in students' involvement, communication, and communication skills (D. Chen & Yang, 2017). Nieto and Bode (2018) explained that changes that impact implementation of culturally diverse strategies can be made at any level and still have a positive impact on student achievement. Either way, achieving diversity through successful implementation is a difficult task. The findings of this study show that the faculty at WCU had discussed diversity and diverse teaching strategies but had not yet implemented any specific strategies. The data showed the lack of clarity and implementation around diversity as well as the impact on students.

Many researchers have discovered that cultural diversity in the classroom is on the rise (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016). In recent years, higher education institutions have hit a "minority majority milestone," surpassing the number of White students on campus (Bennett, 2019, p. 69). Because of the increase in cultural diversity in the classroom, it is key not only to implement culturally diverse strategies but also to measure student learning as a result (Garibay, 2015). Although many of the participants shared that the strategies they implemented in the classroom rarely impeded student learning, several participants discussed the topics of race, nationality, country of origin, as well as traditions that

were important to them, including what abilities make us exceptional. Although many of the participants shared that they keep their guard up, they did discuss the topics when appropriate. Additionally, all participants shared that one of the most important strategies was getting to know who students are at the beginning of each course. Specifically, in participant Nicole's interview, she described how she and other professors in the program used icebreakers not only to get to know the students on a more personal level but also to understand how they learn.

All in all, utilizing strategies such as icebreakers can serve as a critical element that improves the comfort level of all students and the professor (Wells & Edwards, 2013). Doing these simple get-to-know-you activities can help students become more familiar and comfortable with each other, encourage students to engage with each other when they learn they have common interests, and even serve as a preassessment for the professor (Chlup & Collins, 2010). Ultimately, the goal of WCU professors is that as students partake in the icebreaker activities, everyone will find a connection with one another, accepting each other's differences. As for student learning at WCU, not one of the participants felt that what they had attempted to implement negatively affected student learning. A few participants shared that some students felt more inclined to put in more of an effort in class and ask more questions after the icebreakers because they felt more comfortable with the professors and in the classroom.

Research Question 4: What Factors Help Facilitate or Create Barriers to WCU Faculty Implementing Culturally Diverse Teaching Strategies in Their Courses?

WCU faculty are implementing very few diverse teaching strategies due to lack of clarity, consistent teaching practices, and modeling. Specifically, I found that the faculty were not consistent with their strategies and expectations for their students. This caused the faculty to express their concern regarding the lack of consistency, collaboration, and training. Faculty

member Cindy explained that she knew of only a few professors who had worked together to provide consistency for their students. However, she also explained that they did not really care to collaborate with others, so they often did not share information or model strategies. The findings also showed that the WCU faculty needed a model to support their concerns. Martin added, "I would like to see how they implement the strategies that we are always discussing." Martin also discussed snowball coaching and explained that it would be helpful to support each other as professors so that they were not only consistent but also more knowledgeable. According to Karkouti (2016), diversity is a powerful agent of social change sometimes not fully embraced by higher education institutions like WCU. The study showed that this lack of consistent implementation caused these professors to feel that if they could see or experience the correct implementation of diverse teaching strategies, they would be more consistent and effective in their own instruction.

According to Parker and Pascarella (2013), a university is seen as an organization in society that must embrace diversity and not standardization, which demands the organization, its students, and leaders make a commitment to cultural diversity and promote the supposition that diversity is anticipated at all levels. Gay's (2010) work defined culturally responsive teaching as "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory" (p. 36). Several researchers have described culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics of their students as ways to deliver instruction more effectively (D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Gay, 2010; Genao, 2016; Maingi, 2017). When specific strategies are utilized to deliver content in a way that students can relate to, the interest of the student is heightened, and the academic content becomes more meaningful and more easily retained (Genao, 2016). However,

in the case of WCU faculty, very few are practicing culturally responsive leadership or implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies.

This study revealed that there are several opportunities to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom, but according to several participant interviews, the opportunities are not taken. A few of the participants felt that teaching to different cultures could be a barrier to other student learning for the simple fact that, those students are in the United States and should assimilate into American cultural values to fit in. Unfortunately, faculty who feel this way can be a hinderance to student learning, forcing students from other cultures to lose their home language, possibly isolate themselves, and even experience a cultural identity crisis (Genao, 2016).

Additionally, faculty who are not implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies have a fear of offending someone and being reprimanded or are worried students and other faculty will take certain things out of context, as participants Cindy and Martin reported in their interviews. Some participants also explained that the reason they did not take the opportunity to implement strategies and get to know all their students on a personal level was because they were concerned about what the director would think. All of the participants shared their concern for a lack of clarity around the program values. Participants Katie and Nicole described sharing successes and challenges with their program director and felt as if they were being made to feel bad about lessons that did not go well. Many participants also shared that they tried and worked together to model lessons for each other, but with the lack of clarity, they still felt they were not consistent and even inadequate. Additionally, several other participants shared the reason they rarely implemented culturally diverse teaching strategies was because they did not feel like the WCU valued diversity as much as it did other subjects. This idea led professors to focus on other

subjects, ultimately putting culture and diversity on the back burner. In the end, the feelings of fear and the idea that diversity is not of high value created a negative impact on the practice of cultural responsiveness and the implementation of culturally diverse teaching strategies at WCU.

The four research questions were addressed by participants throughout the chapter. I found that the WCU faculty all perceived student cultural differences to have a large impact on their instructional pedagogy. The findings show that when considering student cultural differences, the faculty were positively impacting instruction at the classroom level. This ultimately created a more social and judgment-free learning environment because they were addressing the needs of all students. The findings also show that the faculty members who were considering students' home language and culture were showing respect for the students' personal identity as well as who they are in their family and the community. These findings ultimately show when faculty took into account student cultural differences, they were also influencing not only the way their students viewed the world but also how faculty viewed and implemented pedagogy and the abilities of their students.

In addition to describing the impact of student cultural differences, the faculty also described their understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies. The findings clearly showed that there was a lot of talk about implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies, but no clear plan for implementation. The faculty were aware that being an effective professor required more than delivering content but were not comfortable implementing culturally diverse strategies with no consistent plan. This caused the faculty to be concerned about the lack of consistency among specific strategies used by other faculty in the program. Additionally, the faculty questioned a lot about the use of and how to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities while consistently and effectively monitoring student progress. Adapting

instruction for students was also an area that was a concern for the WCU faculty. The findings of this study showed that although the faculty wanted to positively contribute to the development of students who value diversity, with little collaboration, consistency, and collaboration with other faculty, culturally diverse teaching strategies would continue not to be the essence of effective classroom teaching.

The culturally diverse teaching strategies that were being implemented by WCU faculty were effective but were not consistently found throughout all courses. I found that a majority of the faculty were using mostly icebreakers at the beginning of the course to get to know their students. The study proves that when WCU faculty utilized these icebreaker activities, it was to learn about their students who come from different backgrounds as well as allow each student to connect and get to know each other. At WCU this promoted an increased level of bonding and collaboration among students and the faculty. It was found that the faculty did see a difference in student learning and relationships in that their students were putting in more effort to learn and to get to know each other.

Lastly, I found that there were a few factors that kept the faculty from implementing the culturally diverse teaching strategies in their courses. The first reason was the lack of consistency. It was easily found that the faculty was not consistent with their strategies and expectation for their students. This caused the faculty to express their concern regarding the lack of consistency, collaboration, and training. The findings also showed that the faculty needed a model to support their concerns. Clearly, the faculty felt that if they could see or experience the correct implementation of strategies, then they would be more effective.

Limitations of the Study

There were three limitations within this study. First, this study was conducted at a specific university that had a few new faculty members. Interviewing new faculty members could cause the data to be unclear because of the lack of the new faculty interaction on campus, as they may not be aware of diversity efforts on campus or specifically in the program in which they teach.

Second, a limitation was the time of the year that the interviews were conducted since the summer semester was coming and some faculty were not on campus. The availability of faculty for face-to-face interviews was vital for this qualitative study so that during interviews the researcher could note body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, and respond accordingly.

The last limitation of this study was associated with my being a novice researcher and an inexperienced interviewer. The study was designed to use a semistructured interview protocol, meaning it did not include everything that I had hoped to learn from my participants. Although each interview used prepared open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to open up about their experiences, I believe that I missed some opportunities for more in-depth follow-up questioning of my participants. Additional follow-up questions would have likely provided richer data to analyze, which might have influenced the study's findings.

Recommendations

The findings from this study helped highlight new ways to help professors understand and implement culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom. In addition, the study revealed new ways to overcome challenges when practicing culturally responsive leadership as well as opportunities for collaboration among all stakeholders. As a result, there are

recommendations for practical application for administrators and faculty at WCU and similar universities to strengthen their current work in the classroom or redesign it, taking into consideration the findings of this study. A unified vision and recognition of the need for culturally diverse teaching strategies are among some of the changes that are needed. Lastly, included are recommendations for future research, which point out steps that can be taken to enhance the understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom.

Recommendations for Practical Application

The following recommendations are based on the study's findings, as well as the components of the culturally responsive framework by Gay (2010). Gay (2010) argued, "This framework consists of a stronger focus on teacher's strategies and practices, which is considered the doing of teaching" (p. 104). Gay (2010) explained the framework is the basis of an approach that focuses on using "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 46).

Additionally, Gay (2010) recommended that practitioners of the culturally responsive framework make "positive changes on multiple levels" (p. 45). These changes include delivery of instruction, instructional materials, student teacher relationships, the classroom as a community, and their own self-awareness to improve student learning. Also, Gay (2010) believed that an "asset-based view of students is fundamental to ensuring a higher degree of success from students of various cultural groups" (p. 79).

Lastly, in order to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies, one should understand what culturally diverse teaching strategies are, how to implement them, and how to advocate for change (Gay, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2018; Scandura & Mouriño, 2017). When

considering the framework by Gay (2010), among other researchers, and the results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested.

Understanding Culturally Diverse Teaching Strategies

The findings of this study show that most of the faculty in the Early Childhood Education Department at WCU do not fully understand what culturally diverse teaching strategies are and the benefits of implementation. Additionally, to successfully implement culturally diverse teaching strategies, Gay (2010) stated that one needs to understand what culturally responsive leadership is. Culturally responsive leadership is defined by Gay (2010) as "using strategies that make learning relevant, effective, and relatable to culturally diverse students." In addition to Gay's (2010) definition, I recommend practice within the following definition. Culturally responsive leadership is communicating interculturally, being aware of the pros and cons of culturally responsive leadership, and taking responsibility by promoting actions that address challenges related to cultural diversity on higher education campuses with students or faculty and staff (D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Gay, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2018; Scandura & Mouriño, 2017). This definition is recommended for two reasons. First, the students in the classroom have the freedom to ask questions regarding culture and diversity, which makes them an important part of the definition. Second, it ties directly to the culturally responsive leadership framework and connects theory to direct action according to other researchers.

In order to comprehend this definition and put it into practice, college and university academic administrators and faculty, including those at WCU, will have to pay close attention to each component of the recommended definition. The definition consists of important components, such as the qualities of a culturally responsive leader, as well as the importance of addressing the different cultures in higher education in students, faculty, and staff. To put this

definition into practice, college and university academic administrators and faculty should seek out information regarding what qualities a culturally responsive leader should have and model those. Additionally, information about the importance as well as academic benefits should also be further investigated so those ideas can be the foundation for planning lessons and delivering content. Also, the recommended definition contains a component that covers theory and practice as it relates to promoting actions that address challenges related to cultural diversity. Lastly, the definition covers communication because it is important that a culturally responsive leader efficiently communicate with individuals from different backgrounds.

Understanding What Affects the Implementation of Diverse Teaching Strategies

In order for one to be a culturally responsive leader and implement culturally diverse teaching strategies, one should have an understanding of the culture in their community, specifically of the students in their classroom and on their campus. Additionally, in order to implement culturally diverse teaching strategies effectively, one must be able to question their own "values, commitments, beliefs, and prejudices" (D. Chen & Yang, 2017, p. 81). Lucey and White (2017) suggested that "implementing culturally responsive strategies in the classroom is intellectual work" (p. 12). Lucey and White (2017) also suggested that this work requires "imaginative thought, critical analysis, careful study, and collaborative actions from individuals in higher education" (p. 14). This study shows that applying culturally diverse teaching strategies in the higher education classroom is the responsibility not just of educators or leaders but of all stakeholders such as faculty, staff, administration, students, community members, and leaders at the state and federal levels. As a result, the following are recommendations to achieve a better understanding of diversity through the implementation of culturally diverse teaching strategies.

The participants reported that the role of the faculty and staff, in terms of diversity, is to make sure that students of diverse religious backgrounds feel their beliefs are understood and respected. Additionally, as students learn to examine their own beliefs and values, they will ask questions, which can lead faculty to lead group discussions, conferences, and dialogues between diverse groups of students. It is my recommendation that college and university academic administrators and faculty provide literature to students regarding diversity and culture within the community, ultimately supporting students in building a global perspective. In order for this literature to have a positive impact on learning, administrators should collaborate with faculty to choose literature that provides information about culture and diversity within each course. Within each course subject, the literature is suggested to be integrated into classroom activities and in assignments. Integrating literature on the topic of culture and diversity in each course subject in collaboration with the faculty ensures that students and faculty are being provided more resources to elevate their understanding of culture and diversity in their community and in the global sense, ultimately promoting respect for students and their cultures in the classroom.

Overcoming Challenges

In addition to understanding culturally diverse teaching strategies and the role that each stakeholder plays in advocating for change, it is important to know what needs to be done to overcome challenges when implementing diverse teaching strategies in the classroom. Based on the findings of this study, I also recommend addressing the following two challenges: lack of consistent teaching practices and lack of support and training. These two challenges go hand in hand and should be viewed as a collective way to increase the understanding and implementation of culturally diverse teaching strategies with professional development and more workshop opportunities, ultimately overcoming the challenges that the participants reported having.

Lack of Consistent Teaching Practices. Educators enter the classroom with specific points of view, values, and goals regarding the purpose of education and how students are to be taught (Osman & Warner, 2020). Within the classroom are educators whose beliefs and practices shape the educational opportunities for students. One of the key components that aids students in their educational success but is being overlooked at WCU is consistency. This study revealed that professors were not consistent with their teaching practices in the classroom, which had an impact not only on student learning but also on the consistency among professors and practitioners in the field. For example, within the study, some participants opened up each course with icebreakers, allowing for students to get to know one another. Others did not use icebreakers and opened up a course directly by introducing course content.

Success in the classroom requires consistency in classroom procedures, teaching styles, assignments, and grading (Osman & Warner, 2020). There are several different pathways that WCU directors and faculty can take to become consistent in their teaching practices. Osman and Warner (2020) supported the idea that a healthy work environment is important when you want the faculty to stay consistent in their work. Professors who are consistent are more likely to perform better in the classroom than professors who perform more sporadically, which negatively impacts student learning (Hempel et al., 2020). According to Hempel et al. (2020), it is "the leader's responsibility for creating an environment where faculty feel comfortable putting more effort in to teaching and connecting with other faculty as well as students" (p.49).

To help create and maintain consistency, my first recommendation is for college and university academic administrators to plan to hold regular meetings with their faculty departments with time dedicated to culture and diversity in each meeting. This study revealed that several professors at WCU felt the lack of regular meetings caused them to be inconsistent

with their teaching practices, especially those around culture and diversity, which had an impact not only on student learning but also on the consistency among professors. Hagan and Houchens (2016) explained one of the best tactics in education is to organize and hold staff meetings on a regular basis. According to Hagan and Houchens (2016), a faculty meeting in education is defined as "a meeting with professors and administrators or anyone who is directly involved with the education plan of the school" (p. 88). The purpose of these meetings would be to provide positive interactions among professors. Because professor consistency is key to student learning, these meetings should be used to discuss culturally diverse teaching strategies, supply sources, and grading policies. When sharing these practices with each other, participants would increase stability and consistency within the program. These collaboration meetings would also be useful to provide information to new faculty as well as provide a different point of view for experienced faculty.

In the end, professors should leave faculty meetings with a greater understanding of what is expected of them and their students according to their program guidelines. Additionally, professors should leave faculty meetings feeling encouraged and inspired to do well in their work with students. Getting to hear and possibly see what other professors are implementing in their classrooms could be considered an incentive to develop their teaching skills, especially in the area of culture and diversity. Lastly, faculty meetings can provide positive communication through discussions and possible modeling, which can provide a strong foundation for consistency among teaching practices in the future, which is what WCU needs.

Lack of Support and Training. As suggested in this study, educational institutions will continue to shift from a homogeneous culture to an environment containing a multiethnic, multicultural, and economically diverse student body (A. Chen, 2017; D. Chen & Yang, 2017;

Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). As a result, Harden (2020) suggested that higher education

institutions increase professional development opportunities. I found that WCU professor

participants lacked the necessary support and training to effectively implement culturally

responsive teaching practices in their classes. As such, I recommend that academic leaders

ensure that their instructional staff are equipped through regular professional development

opportunities.

To begin, it is important to know the goals of professional development. Researchers

explain that the aim of professional development and trainings are to enhance an educator's skills

as well as offer new ones (Harden, 2020; Kadt, 2020). The findings of this study show that

professors at WCU have some knowledge about how to implement culturally diverse strategies

in the classroom but are unsure how to implement them. Therefore, my recommendation of

offering professional development opportunities should address how to work with diverse

student populations. These professional development opportunities and trainings should be

offered to anyone who is in the classroom, works directly with students, and writes or plans

curriculum. It is more than likely with these types of professional development opportunities,

professors will grow their skills in the area of culturally responsive leadership and in

implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies—specifically, learning how to become more

attuned to the needs of students so that each student is able to experience a truly personalized

education.

Lastly, it is my recommendation that colleges and universities, consider the hiring

process and diversify their faculty. For example, WCU's hiring process has not resulted in

sufficient faculty diversity, which has led to a lack of practicing cultural responsiveness. One

step that colleges and universities could take to aid them in diversifying the faculty is to put

together a diverse team of staff members to seek out faculty who have different perspectives and expertise and demonstrate a commitment to culture and diversity within the community. Diversifying the faculty will help colleges and universities in practicing cultural responsiveness in order to meet the needs of all students and positively impact learning, which will benefit those at WCU as well (Goulden et al., 2019).

Advocating for Change. This study revealed that WCU has an established mission and diversity rationale but takes very little action to ensure that all faculty are aware of opportunities or events on campus or that those faculty feel confident in their understanding and implementation of culturally responsive leadership. My recommendation is that colleges and universities take actions such as providing more literature and trainings that lead to actual change, which is vital for this method to work, especially at WCU. Gay (2010) stated, "Culturally responsive leadership is an active approach" (p. 108). Within the college and university system, actions can be taken at the schoolwide level or individual program level, meaning that educators are prioritizing the needs of individual students when planning and delivering lessons.

At the individual program level, college and university administrators can promote individualized learning by providing resources and materials that explain the culturally responsive approach. Faculty within colleges and universities can also seek out resources that further explain the theoretical and practical skills of culturally responsive leadership. Additionally, they can increase their interactions and even learn from students and others in their classroom setting. In the end, for professors, taking a moment to listen and learn from students and colleagues can be helpful to understanding the needs of diverse individuals, thereby growing one's skills in working with a diverse student population.

Recommendations for Future Research

While much has been learned from this study about implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies and overcoming the challenges that come along with the topic, more research is needed to further understand and successfully implement these strategies consistently in the classroom. To broaden the research on the topic and enhance the findings of this study, I recommend the following pathways for future research.

My first recommendation is to conduct a study with a larger sample size of students. Although the focus of this study was to gather data primarily from professors and secondarily from students, a study in which the researcher collects data primarily from students would strengthen the understanding of implementation of culturally diverse teaching strategies and influence how faculty leaders design courses and deliver content by providing a different point of view regarding how higher education institutions handle the topic of culture and diversity through the culturally responsive leadership framework. Students might be more inclined to share what challenges they are having in the classroom when it comes to learning in a second language, with a disability, or another factor that makes them unique. These student data could be used to learn areas of strength in the implementation of culturally responsive leadership and culturally diverse teaching strategies, as well as areas of growth. Additionally, from these data, administrators and faculty could learn where students are succeeding and struggling, ultimately identifying what is working and what is not.

My second recommendation for future research is in the area of K–12 education. Although there is a wealth of information already on this topic in that arena, there is a limited amount of data collected from on-site leaders at elementary schools, such as principals and coaches. If this study were altered to fit the elementary school system, the researcher might get a

better picture of how all educators understand and implement culturally diverse teaching strategies at their school sites and how it impacts student learning. If researchers are able to get a more detailed account of how educators in K–12 education implement culturally diverse teaching strategies from school leaders, they could potentially better prepare students and educators as they move into higher education to be more receptive and comfortable with the culturally responsive leadership framework.

Summary

As researchers continue to assert, leadership and diversity go hand in hand as educational institutions shift from homogeneous cultures to an environment containing multiethnic, multicultural, and economically diverse student bodies (A. Chen, 2017; D. Chen & Yang, 2017; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). Ingram (2015) also indicated that in order for a higher education institution to be effective and successful, it is beneficial for leaders to recognize cultural differences and disparities in among their diverse student population. Higher education campuses need faculty who can properly educate students who are living and working in within a diverse society. However, higher education leaders must be cognizant of the fact that the faculty who practice culturally responsive leadership and address the topics of culture and diversity on campus do so based on their personal experiences in the classroom.

I found there was a lack of clarity around implementing the diversity values of the case institution. The findings revealed that at WCU the institutional mission and goals explained that diversity is valued and practiced; however, the interviews of the participants and student surveys revealed something different. The explanations of the faculty's experiences and comments from student surveys indicated that diversity may not be fully understood within the early childhood development program. As the faculty participants described through interviews in this study,

there are several areas of skills and knowledge that professors had that were not being accessed due to certain misunderstandings. For example, several faculty members explained different ways to deliver content and differentiate instruction in the classroom but did not feel comfortable due to lack of support from the director. Additionally, participants described wanting to expand conversations on certain topics, such as abilities in the classroom but did not want to offend students. Due to lack of support and a clear understanding of what was expected, these skills and strategies were not implemented.

Although there was little implementation of culturally diverse teaching strategies such as differentiation, this study revealed that all of the participants not only believed in culturally diverse teaching strategies but also saw great value in implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies in the classroom. All 12 participants described how they could see these strategies benefiting individual students, the university itself, other practitioners, and society as a whole. The participant interviews also revealed that the faculty in the early childhood development department at WCU not only believed in culturally diverse teaching but also had been involved with it in some way. Most of the participants had either read about it, attempted to implement it, practiced it at other levels of education, or collaborated with others about it.

If it is the goal of higher education to educate students according to who they are and where they are coming from, it should also be to prepare students to live and work in a nation that is becoming more diverse. It is time for educators to increase their skills and strategies in the classroom and treat their roles as a key part of educating the nation's future leaders in making positive contributions to society. University stakeholders should begin taking steps to advocate for positive changes that will benefit the diverse population they serve because current demographics reflect what campuses will continue to look like in the future.

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Appendix A: Institutional Contact

Good Afternoon,

My name is Christina Corona and I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University. I am writing a dissertation regarding how student cultural differences influence faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I am seeking to understand how faculty describe their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies in an Early Childhood Education program.

I am contacting you because I was hoping that you would be able to provide me with contact information for professors who meet the criteria and whom you think would be interested. Individual participants at the institution will need to teach for the university in the Early Childhood Education Program.

If you are willing to help me, I can meet with you directly or you can reply to this email (⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛). You can also call or text me on my cell phone at ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛.

Thank you, I am looking forward to hearing from you soon,

Christina Corona

Appendix B: Participant Email Interview

Good Afternoon,

My name is Christina Corona and I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University. I am writing a dissertation regarding how student cultural differences influence faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, I am seeking to understand how faculty describe their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies.

I'm contacting you because I have had communication with an institutional contact at WCU who has identified you as someone who is a faculty member who teaches at WCU in the Early Childhood Education Program. As part of my study, I hope to interview you on your campus for approximately one hour. I would be willing to buy you a coffee and a pastry from the campus coffee shop as you meet with me and am willing to interview you in any location on campus where you feel most comfortable, including your office or classroom.

With your permission, I will be taping the conversation with a digital tape recorder, so it would be best if the location is not a loud and busy location. I would appreciate hearing your experience about how student cultural differences influence pedagogy within your courses. Additionally, I would like to hear your understanding of culturally diverse teaching strategies as well as successes and challenges you have faced, if any and what differences you noticed in your teaching and student learning. The information I receive will be used as part of the data for my doctoral dissertation. This interview and data will be completely confidential, and your identity will not be revealed in the study by not using your real name or even institution name, in the writing.

Lastly, I will be providing you the transcript of your interview to help me identify if I accurately represented you in the interview. If you are willing to meet with me for up to an hour-long interview, would you please reply to this email (███████████████) or call or text me on my cell phone ██████████████ to indicate what time would be best for you, and where you would like to meet. I am familiar with the campus, so there would be no need to provide me with any directions.

Thank you, I am looking forward to hearing from you soon,

Christina Corona

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Name of Institution: _____

Name & Title (Interviewee): _____

Interviewer: Christina Corona

Date of Interview: _____

<u>Interviewer Introduction:</u>

Thank you for meeting with me today and for being willing to participate in this interview for my doctoral dissertation titled: Implementing Culturally Diverse Strategies in Higher Education Classrooms.

I currently serve as an Adjunct Professor at a faith-based institution in Western California. I transitioned into higher education from teaching elementary school for eight years. I am a firm believer in high quality education and I not only have high standards for myself but also for my students. I have been associated with WCU for almost 10 years as a student and adjunct professor. Throughout my time at WCU there has been a demographic shift in the student population, prompting professors to seek out strategies to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure they receive a high-quality education. As an adjunct professor I have often wondered how student cultural differences influence WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. I enrolled in Abilene Christian University's Organizational Leadership Doctoral program in August 2016, partly, to help understand how WCU faculty describe their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies as well as their experiences.

<u>Interview Explanation:</u>

The purpose of my study is to determine how student cultural differences influence WCU faculty pedagogies within their courses. Additionally, the researcher is seeking to understand how WCU faculty describe their understanding and awareness of culturally diverse teaching strategies. Further investigation will uncover what successes and challenges professors face when implementing culturally diverse strategies in the classroom if any and what differences they have seen in their teaching and student learning as a result.

The intended goal of this research is to be helpful to my organization, West Coast University, by bridging the cultural gap between faculty and students resulting in an enhanced organizational culture that will better serve the increasingly diverse student body. Furthermore, this study could offer practical recommendations such as modifications in teaching materials and classroom teaching strategies.

<u>Interview Introduction:</u>

Before we get started, I have a few details that I would like to share with you about today's interview. This interview will be held in the strictest of confidence and your first or last name will not be provided in my completed study. During the interview and afterward, I do plan to make some handwritten and computer-generated notes to help me better recall the details of our interview. I would also like to record the audio portion of today's interview because this will help me keep my records as accurate as possible, which is especially important all participants involved in the study. Your participation is voluntary, and the interview may be stopped

immediately if at any point you are not comfortable with our discussion. Are these details agreeable with you? If they are, would you please sign this consent form regarding today's interview?

This interview is not intended to last beyond one hour. The questions following this have been designed to help me better understand the research area for my study pertaining to: Implementing Culturally Diverse Strategies in Higher Education Classrooms. I believe your role and experiences can help me better understand this research area from your perspective, as it pertains to your institution. Thank you again for meeting with me. May we please begin with the interview?

Set the audio recorder to audiotape the interview.

Assign a method to differentiate between each interviewee's recording.

The first questions are to establish the context of the interview and gain an understanding of the participants work.

1. As we begin the interview, how about we start with you telling me a little bit about yourself and your role at this higher learning institution?
2. How long have you been a university instructor? At WCU?
3. What types of courses do you teach?
4. How does what you learn about your students guide your planning and delivery of instruction each semester?
5. How much do you seek to learn about your student's values, culture, and beliefs each semester in your planning to teach?
6. What strategies do you utilize to learn about your students' values, culture, and beliefs?
7. Culturally responsive leadership is defined by Geneva Gay (2010) as, "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective" (p. 46). How does that definition, relate to your instructional planning and practices at the university?
8. What are some examples of this type of instructional approach being used at this university?
9. In what ways do you see how utilizing culturally diverse teaching strategies might relate to the goals of Christian higher education?
10. What do you hope to accomplish when implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies?
11. What actions on campus support your work implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies?
12. What challenges hinder your implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies and what are their impacts?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that may be important concerning the implementation of Culturally Diverse Strategies in Higher Education Classrooms at WCU?

Appendix D: Consent Form

Thank you for reading this information consent form, which summarizes important areas of the interview process as has just been discussed with you by the interviewer. If you are comfortable and in full agreement to participate in this interview, please read this form and sign below.

I confirm to having understood the interview protocol process just previously discussed with the interviewer and that I had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation in the interview today is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without a need to provide any reason and without any negative consequences for withdrawing from the interview.

I understand that my answers to the interview questions today will be given at my own discretion and that I am free to decline answering any question or questions of my choosing.

I understand the confidential nature of this interview process. My name or the name of this higher learning institution will not be included in any completed version of this study or further presentations, conferences, or articles resulting from this study.

I understand the audio from this interview will be recorded and used to assist the interviewer for analysis following this interview. I understand that I will not be personally identified in the audio recordings used by the interviewer for this study or in any presentations, conferences, or articles resulting from this study. I understand no other use will be made of the audio recordings without my written permission, and only the research team will have access to these recordings.

I agree that all data given by me in this interview may be kept to benefit future research, such as publications or other related studies to institutional turnaround, but will remain anonymous.

I understand that all research has certain risks, but such are minimal in this study.

I agree to participate in this interview.

_____   _____   _____
Name of the Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of the Interviewer   Signature   Date

Once all parties have signed and dated this interview consent form, each will receive a copy of the (1) interview protocol, (2) interview questions and (3) interview consent form. A copy of the signed and dated consent form is to be securely kept with the main research at a location selected by the interviewer.

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

January 23, 2020

Christina Corona
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Christina,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Implementing Culturally Diverse Strategies in Higher Education Classrooms",

(IRB# 20-005   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs