

**An Exploration of Diversity Education Perceptions Among Idaho State University
College of Education Administrators and Faculty**

“Identifying Where We Are and Where We Need to Go”

**Presented to & Shared with COE Faculty from the COE Diversity Committee
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Introduction of the Issue

“Education is a moral enterprise; it is not a neutral process...[it] is a social institution, [and as such, controls] access to important opportunities and resources” (Guyton, 2000, p. 108). With this in mind, education of and for all children becomes, and is, a moral mandate for a civil society (Dewey, 1944). Even so, overwhelming evidence suggests that the educational playing field is far from level (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Guyton, 2000; Kozol, 1991) and that the disconnect between teacher and student demographics is widening.

According to Bennett (2000), “the nation’s school-age population is becoming increasingly diverse, [while] the teaching force remains predominately White, middle class, and female” (p. 21). Beyond issues of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, immigration status, language, culture and socioeconomic status (SES), diversity variables including exceptionalities in education, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation and religion are also parts of the increasing complexity of America’s classrooms. It is within this context that teacher education programs are charged with the responsibility of preparing teachers with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively teach all children.

COE Conceptual Framework and the Diversity Committee

The mission of ISU COE is captured and expressed through its Conceptual Framework: “By Teaching We Learn.” The framework itself is grounded in standards, learning and teaching processes, assessment, and the creation of a learning community in which students, faculty and stakeholders are partners and co-learners. Underlying this framework is the assumption that teacher preparation programs must include a strong emphasis on the development of candidate knowledge, skills and dispositions relative to diversity. Because the region, state and local community reflect limited diversity, the COE faces the particular challenge of providing candidates with experiences within authentic contexts that will prepare them to work with diverse students. The COE Diversity Committee is charged with the responsibility of providing leadership in enhancing multicultural and diversity education in the College (COE Diversity Committee, 2000).

Purpose of the Study – Goals

The purpose of this study was to explore diversity education perceptions among faculty/ administrators teaching in the COE. The goals of this study were to determine: (a) where, and in what ways, diversity education takes place within the COE curriculum; (b) what efforts the COE does and/or should engage to grow the quantity and quality of diversity education within the curriculum; and (c) the most significant diversity education issue(s) the COE faces.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative descriptive research. This research design was deemed most appropriate for this study given its purpose and goals (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). The participants in this study included 32 faculty/administrators teaching in the COE during the 2000-2001 academic year (response rate: 78%). Fifty-three percent were male and 47% female, with 80% teaching undergraduate classes.

A structured interview protocol was employed to explore participant perceptions about diversity education in the COE. Four protocol questions, derived from the study goals, provided structure to the interview process.

The Questions Were:

1. In what ways, if any, do you feel diversity education is or would be appropriate to include in the classes you teach (review each class the faculty teaches)?
2. In what ways, if any, are you able to include diversity education in your course content? Examples?
3. What can the COE do to grow the quantity and quality of diversity education within the curriculum?
4. What do you think is the most significant diversity education issue the COE faces?

Interviews were conducted by the COE Diversity Committee Graduate Assistant and took place in the participant's office. Interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The primary method of data collection was note-taking. The data analysis involved a team of researchers who independently read and reread participant responses noting emergent single word and/or word combination themes. Independent code lists were developed and collapsed by each member of the research team. Team members then met to discuss theme codes and definitions. Data were then reread and coded independently by research team members. Once coded, the research team members met to review their independent analyses and reach consensus regarding code assignments. The qualitative data were then reviewed in terms of response strength as represented by code frequencies and corresponding percentages.

Findings

The first two interview questions addressed participant perceptions about diversity education in the COE.

- Almost 1/3 (29.3%) of participants believed diversity education should and/or did appear in the curriculum through Awareness/Action (i.e., explicit attempts to raise cultural awareness, and address issues of perspective, experience, bias, inclusiveness and valuing differences);
- Diversity should be and was, addressed through explicit Course Content/Curriculum (22.8%) and Teaching Methods/Strategies (16.3%);
- Interestingly, a fair number of participants responded to questions about the appropriateness and inclusion of diversity education from the perspective of specific course foci, meaning that although they believed diversity education was important, from their perspective, it should be, and was, localized in particular courses.

The third interview question addressed perceptions about efforts to grow and nurture diversity education in the COE curriculum.

- 26% of participants noted Climate/Culture as key to growing and nurturing diversity education within the COE (i.e., awareness, acceptance, perspectives, bias and explicit efforts to define diversity);
- Other important "growth" ingredients were:
 - Faculty Exposure/Education (20%);
 - Models/Mentors (16%);
 - Student Exposure/Education (14%);
 - Efforts in Recruiting/Retaining Diverse Faculty/Students (10%).

The fourth interview question asked participants what they considered to be the most significant diversity issue in the COE.

- Overwhelmingly Recruit/Retain Diverse Faculty was cited as the most significant COE diversity issue (42%);
- Recruit/Retain Diverse Students (26%);
- Climate/Culture (26%).

Discussion

The interview data revealed that Awareness/Action (Culture/Climate), defined in this study to include cultural awareness, perspectives, experiences, bias, valuing difference, etc., followed closely by Course Content/Curriculum and Teaching Methods/Strategies, were perceived to be the most important curricular ingredients to diversity education in the COE. **Participant responses emphasized the creation of a classroom culture/climate that implicitly (Awareness/Action) and explicitly (Course Content/Curriculum, Teaching Methods/ Strategies) valued and respected difference as needed, necessary and “absolutely appropriate.”** These data indicated a level of cognitive awareness of what needs to be done to address and engage diversity education.

To a lesser degree, participants indicated that diversity education was, and/or should be, addressed in Specific Courses, which were not, by their own admission, courses “they” taught. **These data may indicate somewhat of a disconnect between a general awareness of the importance and necessary ingredients of diversity education, and personal acknowledgement and acceptance of professional responsibility to address and actively engage diversity education.** This apparent disconnect could be viewed as “passing the buck.” However, it could also be viewed as **evidence of a foundation of readiness and disposition (cognitive Awareness/Action); meaning that faculty/administrators in the COE were and are aware of what needs to be done, as well as its importance with regard to diversity education, but, at least in some cases, believed others to be better equipped with the knowledge and skills to infuse it into their teaching content and practice.**

As with the first study goal, participant data revealed that creating a Climate/Culture, (i.e., “creat[ing] an inclusive institutional climate that promotes personal and professional growth through respect for human differences...”) was key to growing the quantity and quality of diversity education in the COE. Beyond Climate/Culture, participants believed Faculty Exposure/Education, and Models/Mentors were crucial to efforts to grow and nurture diversity education (i.e., “...we need to be taught more about diversity and how to teach it...”). **These data revealed a readiness to engage a process targeting enhanced diversity education, and an acknowledged need for professional development (i.e., “...[we] need workshops/books to help improve diversity education...”) as well as models/mentors (i.e., “...provid[ing]...high quality models...and mentor[s] would be helpful...”) to help lead the way.** Beyond faculty/administrator professional development, participants were explicit about the need to expose and educate students, and expressed concern about what they perceived to be a dearth of resources/materials currently available within the COE to do so effectively.

Overwhelmingly, “...attracting [and retaining] faculty of diverse peoples...” was viewed as the most significant diversity issue in the COE, followed by Climate/Culture and need to recruit and retain a diverse student body. The need to recruit and retain diverse faculty is clearly linked to the need for mentors/models cited by participants as a critical ingredient to growing diversity education in the COE. Further, “[h]istorical evidence suggests that diversity does not happen naturally, but requires the deliberate imposition of specific standards [i.e. affirmative action]” (Wilson, 2001, p. 33), that is, policy and practice “scaffolding” to support and direct recruiting/retention practice.

Moving From Data to Doing...Awareness to Action

“A critical purpose of the educational institution in a democratic society is to prepare its citizens for their role as participants in that society...[that is]...full and equal citizenship...[in a]...liberal democracy” (Lindsay & Justiz, 2001, p. 7). At all levels, America’s classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. Beyond explicit federal mandates, there is an underlying moral imperative that all students have the right to learn (Darling-Hammond, 1997). With this in mind, given the mission of the COE (re: teacher preparation), diversity education has become progressively important. To that end, despite local and regional demographic limitations, the COE Diversity Committee was and remains charged with the responsibility of providing leadership in enhancing multicultural and diversity education in the College. The attached tables outline the COE Diversity Committee actions and their alignment with the study findings.