



Research Article

Learning experiences within helping disciplines: Faculty and student observations

LaShondra Manning, Felicia Murray, Ebony Hall Lang, Beck Munsey and Tiffany Wigington

Tarleton State University, United States

Correspondence should be addressed to Ebony Hall Lang  ebonyhallphd@gmail.com
Received 20 April 2022; Revised 24 January 2023; Accepted 28 January 2023

Demographic changes in the United States population have created an increasing need for educators to leverage pedagogical approaches best suited to meet the learning styles and lived experiences of students in the classroom setting. These demographic changes have created a need for research that explores the role of race, ethnicity, cultural background, and other characteristics and their influence on student achievement. The purpose of this study was to begin examining the perspectives of students and educators on the existence of culturally responsive teaching in higher education human service disciplines, specifically counseling and social work. This qualitative research captures the environmental educational experience of students and faculty within two helping disciplines: counseling and social work. Their responses help researchers better understand the participants' perception of culturally responsive learning environments in a higher education setting in the southwest region of the United States. The response rate was 28% for student participants ($n = 191$) and 55% for faculty participants ($n = 21$). However, 76.4% ($n = 146$) of the student participants completed survey in its entirety and 67% ($n = 14$) of the faculty participants completed the survey in its entirety. Researchers reviewed the qualitative responses to identify themes. The study yielded three major themes. These themes characterized student and faculty experiences in the classroom and were identified as: 1) varied teaching methods, 2) engaged learning environments, and 3) culturally responsive versus cultural nonresponsive. The results support the need for educators to be mindful of curriculum that supports the type of learning environment experienced by students. When students have a sense of belonging, it influences their perception of safety within the learning environment. Faculty play a huge role in creating a safe space and educators must know how to facilitate safe spaces in the classroom for all students to be sensitive to diverse cultural experiences.

Keywords: Culturally inclusive, culturally responsive, safe learning environments, educational experience, helping disciplines

1. Introduction

Demographic changes in the United States population have created an increasing need for educators to leverage pedagogical approaches best suited to meet the learning styles and lived experiences of students in the classroom setting. Educators must be prepared to address the needs of these unique student populations; yet, research indicates a cultural gap exists between educators and learners (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) which may impact educators' ability to incorporate pedagogical approaches better suited to ensure positive learning outcomes for diverse student populations (Bottiani et al., 2018). These demographic changes have created a need for research that explores the role of race, ethnicity, cultural background, and other characteristics and their influence on student achievement (Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Additionally, students' background and experiences in the classroom and social environment should inform teachers' pedagogical choices. Moreover, culturally responsive practices serve to address inequity in education (Griner & Stewart, 2013).

Inadequate preparation and cultural blind spots can hamper teachers' effectiveness in the classroom with diverse students. Incorporating culturally responsive methods may close this gap. Gay (2018) defines culturally responsive teaching [CRT] as using cultural knowledge, prior

experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them. CRT should incorporate approaches that acknowledge the legitimacy of cultural heritage and differences, make connections between home and school experiences, value the lived experiences of students, incorporate a wide swath of pedagogical approaches to connect to diverse learning styles, and incorporate diverse instructional resources for subject matter content (Gay, 2018). The researchers sought to look at the gap in the research by looking at two research questions: to what extent are learning environments using culturally responsive teaching methods within helping disciplines and how does the perception of teaching impact the learning environment? Helping disciplines are defined as disciplines that are preparing students to be helping professionals who work in “occupations that provide health and education services to individuals and groups, including occupations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, and education” (American Psychological Association, 2022, p.1). For purposes of this research, the disciplines of counseling and social work are the two main disciplines of focus. The objectives of the study help provide insight into deeper discussion on culturally responsive learning environments and culturally responsive teaching practices based on the findings and qualitative responses.

1.1. Accreditation for Counseling and Social Work Helping Disciplines

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP] is the accreditation standard recognized by the American Counseling Association for standards in practice for counselor education. In Section One of the CACREP standards, there is importance placed on efforts of programs to have diverse groups of students and faculty to create inclusive learning environments (CACREP, 2015). Also, social and cultural diversity is one of the eight core areas of curriculum for CACREP (2015). To uphold academic standards in counseling, it is important that counseling programs look at how faculty and students perceive culturally inclusive learning environments in their courses and how programs can increase these environments to be more inclusive. As counselor educators, it is critical to model creating inclusive environments to help students understand how to take these skills into clinical sessions with clients. The ultimate goal of counselor education is to create affirmative clinical mental health counselors. This body is responsible for accrediting over 900-degree programs for graduate and doctoral counseling students representing more than 400 higher educational institutions within the United States (CACREP, 2022).

Social work programs are governed by the Council on Social Work Education [CSWE] which is responsible for creating and monitoring the accreditation standards for competency of students and that those programs are adequately meeting those standards. The accreditation process involves various steps and measures performed through CSWE including program self-studies, site visits, and Council on Accreditation [COA] reviews. There are over 900 accredited programs at the Bachelor of Social Work (n = 542) and Master of Social Work levels (n = 309) with an additional 50 in candidacy (n = 40) or pre-candidacy status (n = 15) (CSWE, n.d.). Defining and assessing professionalism in the social work profession demonstrates competence of these core competency behaviors (Poulin & Matis, 2015). Currently, the CSWE Educational and Policy Accreditation Standards (2015) uses a competency-based approach that focuses on “student learning outcomes” for using best practices that are holistic in nature (p. 6). A holistic practitioner is an individual that deals with a client and all the factors that influence their life. The drafted 2022 CSWE EPAS enters into the directive of integrating a competency standard that aligns itself to anti-racism as an approach to culturally responsive learning environments and work with one of the features integrated in the curriculum that deals specifically with antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A key component in facilitating a learning environment that promotes diversity, and is culturally responsive, is the ability to acknowledge one’s own cultural background and understanding of diversity (Pridham et al., 2015). Being mindful of curriculum inclusion is an

aspect that supports the type of learning environment experienced by students (Dutta et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019; Moore, 2020; Pendell & Schroeder, 2017; Tovar-Galvez, 2021). When students have a sense of belonging, it influences their perception of safety within the learning environment (Booker, 2016; Freeman et al., 2007; Kirby & Thomas, 2021; Osterman, 2010; Pichon, 2016). Faculty play a huge role in creating a safe space. Educators must know how to facilitate safe spaces in the classroom for all students to be sensitive to diverse cultural experiences (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2018). The rise of digital learning and technological platforms as well as learning that calls for applied approaches and critical thinking creates a great need for mentorship within academia, especially within inclusive learning environments that have the expectation of being culturally inclusive.

1.2. Theoretical Underpinnings

This study draws upon the theoretical framework of professional socialization to understand the formal and informal processes that promote or negate a culturally responsive learning environment within social work and counseling education programs. Driven by accreditation standards (CSWE, 2015; CACREP, 2015), both disciplines must ensure that pedagogical approaches and the learning environment promote a culture that is congruent with the values of each profession. While both professions respectively are in the helping field, the approach to “helping” is often vastly different. Yet, Yet, the curriculum for both disciplines is inherently designed for professional socialization through formal content delivery, educational internship experiences, and extracurricular elements. This framework captures the multidimensional (Condon & Sharts-Hopko, 2010), interactive, and transformative processes that are fostered in both the formal (explicit) and informal (implicit) curriculum (Black, 2013). Prior research demonstrates that faculty in higher education feel unprepared to guide students toward professional socialization (Clark & Holmes 2007; O’Shea & Kelly, 2007). Further, faculty in helping professions are often unseasoned in pedagogical processes that meet the diverse learning needs of students (Varghese, 2020) and create the dynamic process of engagement with formal and informal content. Instead, faculty often draw upon their understanding of theories and practice interventions, as opposed to understanding learning theories, to facilitate the learning experience (Varghese, 2020). Teaching and learning in both disciplines have a complex relationship (Fleck-Henderson, 2003; Hendricks, 2003) where faculty facilitate experiences to integrate abstract concepts with real-world experiences (Gitterman, 2004; Varghese, 2020) in an effort to introduce students to and nurture the development of a set of values that align with the profession (Zarshenas et al., 2014).

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

Researchers conducted a study that targeted students and faculty in a higher education setting in the southwest region of the United States. This article presents the qualitative findings as well as sample demographics from the overall research. The targeted sample size was 200 participants who were 18 years and older. There were no restrictions based on gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or sexual identity. Participants were either students or faculty within an accredited counseling or social work program.

2.2. Sampling

Student participants were either currently taking or had recently completed an internship/practicum within the program. These included undergraduate social work students who were currently taking or had completed internship/practicum and graduate counseling, and social work students who were currently taking or have completed internship/practicum. Faculty participants were currently teaching an accredited counseling or social work program. Participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study. Participants were recruited through a targeted email that shared information about the study and asked for their anonymous participation. The survey was available online for participants. After reading and acknowledging

the informed consent form, participants were directed to complete the online survey using Qualtrics. There were no identifying markers on the forms to collect the demographic information.

Majority of the student participants were female (89.3%; n = 166) and White (47.8%; n = 89), while 22% were Hispanic/Latinx (n = 41), 18.3% were African American (n = 34), and 11.7% classified as other (n = 17), Native American (n = 3), or Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 2) (see Figure 1a). The majority were graduate level students (65%; n = 137), considered full time (61%; n = 130) and receiving instruction through a hybrid method of teaching (49.7%; n = 95) or face to face (35.1%; n = 67). Half were first generation students (50.3%; n = 93) with 16% indicating English was not their first language (n = 30). Of the faculty participants, majority were female (84.2%; n = 16) and White (47%; n = 9); the remaining participants were African American (26.3%; n = 5), Hispanic/Latinx (15.8%; n = 3), and Native American (10.5%; n = 2). Two faculty participants chose not to answer (see Figure 1b).

Figure 1a
Race of Student Participants

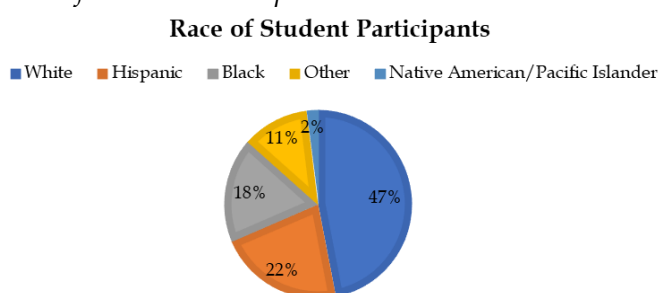
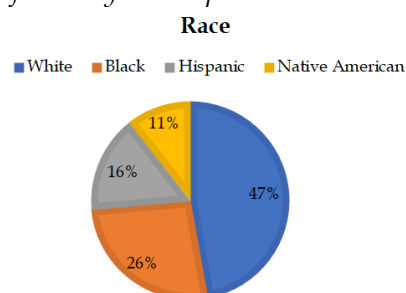


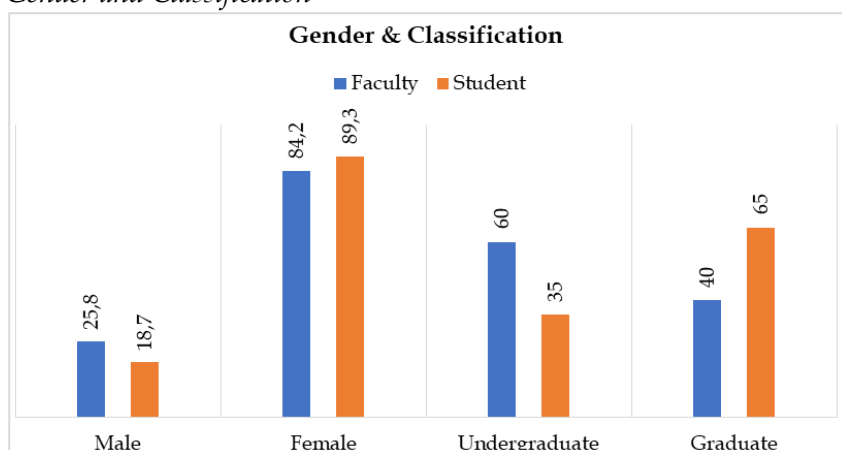
Figure 1b
Race of Faculty Participants



Note: The visual depicts the race of student and faculty participants by percentage. The actual numbers for each racial group is included in the text.

Most were married (68.4%; n = 13) with an income of \$75,000 a year or higher (63%; n = 12). Sixty percent taught the upper-level undergraduate courses and 40% taught the graduate level courses. The majority were taught face to face (67%; n = 14) or hybrid (29%; n = 6). Figure 2 provides a visual for gender and classification using with both student and faculty participants.

Figure 2
Gender and Classification



Note: This visual depicts the faculty and student gender percentages and the faculty and student classification percentages. Classification for student participants refers to the classification of the student and the classification for faculty participants refers to the classification of the courses they teach.

2.3. Instrument

The survey was comprised of four sections. The first section captured information about the participant’s status within the program. The second section captured participant demographics and had six questions. The third section of the survey contained questions specifically pertaining

to culturally responsive learning environments using a standardized instrument for participants who identified as student participants and a separate instrument for participants who identified as faculty participants. The last section of the survey was a qualitative inquiry. At the bottom of each of the instruments was an open-ended, qualitative question for the participants to answer to help researchers better understand the participants' perception of culturally responsive learning environments. The same question was given to students and faculty to answer, "In your own words, please describe the typical learning environment within your program (professor's teaching style, student engagement, assignments, textbook/lecture material, etc.)." This article focuses only on the qualitative results of the overall research. The researchers sought to explore the responses of the students and faculty relating to their observations of their learning environment. The qualitative questions on the instrument were developed by the researchers to capture overall observations of the learning environment as it specifically related to teaching style, student engagement, assignments, and lecture material.

2.4. Data Collection

All faculty and students currently in the Department of Counseling and the Department of Social Work who met inclusion criteria were sent an email to participate in the survey with a targeted sample size of 200 faculty and student participants. A follow-up email was sent through Canvas Announcements with the Department of Counseling and the Department of Social Work. The survey was administered to the participants online using Qualtrics. Participants utilized an online forum to take the survey which took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The email was distributed to a total of 38 faculty (including adjuncts) and 689 students. The response rate was 28% for student participants ($n = 191$) and 55% for faculty participants ($n = 21$). However, 76.4% ($n = 146$) of the student participants completed the survey in its entirety and 67% ($n = 14$) of the faculty participants completed the survey in its entirety.

2.5. Data Analyses

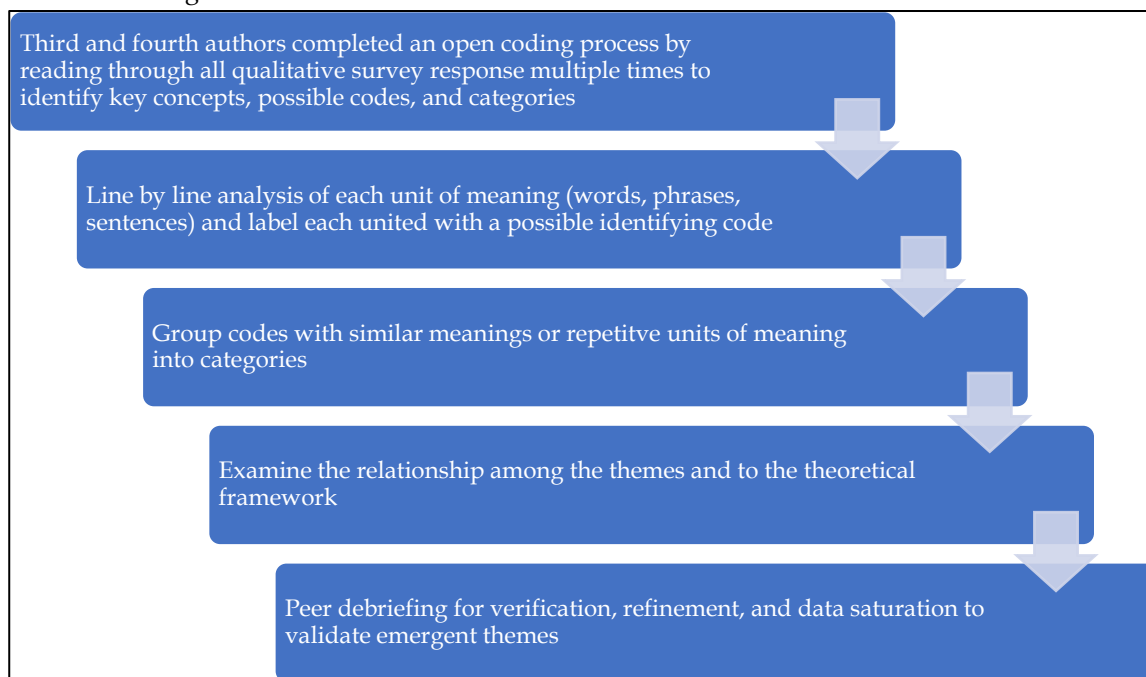
Researchers reviewed the qualitative responses to identify themes. Uncovering shared meaning, codes, and themes in qualitative data analysis must be structured and systematic (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The initial process involved data reduction techniques to develop initial codes. The third and fourth authors were responsible for preliminary code and theme development. They each conducted initial coding separately and then reviewed their work collectively to form a consensus with the process and data labels (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Generally speaking, coding data allows researchers to simplify data (Richards & Morse, 2007). To this end, the researchers incorporated manual approaches from Saldana (2013) and Bernard and Ryan (2010) for data analysis, coding, and theme development. The researchers employed first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) which required multiple reviews of verbatim text provided by study participants to identify emerging codes. Additionally, the researchers incorporated observational techniques from Bernard and Ryan (2010) for theme development. Specific techniques were repetition, similarities and differences, theory-related materials, word lists, and key words in context (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

In the first coding circle, the researchers used Holistic and Initial Coding (Saldana, 2013). Holistic Coding allowed the researchers to glean preliminary impressions about participant experience. Participants' statements were read and reread multiple times and assigned a word or phrase that captured their experience. These impressions were typically one word or short phrase. Initial coding was then incorporated for deeper meaning which involved the use of a table that contained the transcripts on one side and initial codes on the others. Again, each transcript was viewed line by line to reduce data down to words or short phrases. Forty individual codes were initially identified.

The code list was reviewed for repetition and similar ideas. Similar ideas were then clustered and numbered to indicate frequency of occurrence (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The preliminary was further reduced to eight codes (8) that were used to develop themes. Second cycle coding was used

to identify themes. Words and short phrases were used to summarize participants' responses into themes. These themes were informed by the analysis process, prior knowledge and theory (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) as well as the research question. The study yielded three major themes. These themes characterized student and faculty experiences in the classroom and were identified as: 1) varied teaching methods, 2) engaged learning environments, and 3) culturally responsive versus cultural nonresponsive (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Author's Coding Process



Note. This figure shows the step by step process used by the authors in identifying the three major themes for the study including: varied teaching methods, engaged learning environments, and inconsistent integration of culture.

3. Results

The thematic analysis revealed three themes concerning learning experiences in the helping disciplines: 1) varied teaching methods, 2) engaged learning environments, and 3) inconsistent integration of culture. Analyses of the findings are supported by the notion that culturally responsive teaching includes a wide variety of educational resources and acknowledges cultural traditions and practices within the learning environment. Findings below are organized and discussed by theme. The Participants' own words, through the use of direct quotes, are used to describe their experiences and to support the themes.

3.1. Varied Teaching Methods

The most common theme which exemplified learning experiences was varied teaching methods. Factors that aligned with this theme included types of course assignments, reading materials, as well as classroom and online interactive activities. Across the data it was evident that educators who incorporated a variety of tools into their pedagogy created more meaningful experiences for the study participants that valued their cultural locations. While each participant certainly had unique classroom experiences, a large number of them reflected on the diverse methods their professors used to share information and assess learning.

As part of describing the typical learning environments within social work and counseling, many similar varied teaching methods emerged that were deemed effective for students. Eighteen students found class discussions to be very beneficial and listed them as a part of their typical learning environments. Class discussions were evident in the face-to-face and online environments and often described as "frequent," "lots," and "hands-on." There was a subset of these students

(n = 9) that specifically mentioned that they enjoyed class discussions when they were done in small groups.

Nine students appreciated typical learning environments that included visual components. PowerPoints and textbooks that accompanied lectures were listed the most. One student stated that “many [professors] post visual components to assist in learning.” Another student discussed how visual components compliment his/her/their learning style, “I am a tactile learner and an expressive visual student who appreciates visual aids.” Whereas PowerPoints are beneficial to the students in class, textbooks are beneficial to students outside of class. For example, one student stated, “The teacher encourages us to read the chapters and reach out to her if we have any questions regarding the material.” The way that the textbook relates to the subject matter is also important. One student said that, “[The] textbook material is fantastic.” Other students concurred that the textbook and lecture materials were “very helpful in most classes” and “very adequate.” However, one student felt ambivalent about the textbooks. His/her/their sentiments depended upon the class, “Some of the books have not been really used/some texts or workbooks have been very useful.”

Seven students listed real life examples as a part of their effective learning or they seemed to desire more integration of real-life examples in their professors’ lectures. Responses regarding real life examples varied from a simple listing of “real world experiences” to “some give real life examples of past clients or experiences that help with learning.” Specific departments were listed, “Professors use their own experience to further our knowledge and help us be the best counselors possible,” and “They do use a lot of examples that are beneficial. [The] social work department is very hands-on when teaching. They give lots of examples and allow us to practice to further our understanding on a topic.” However, a criticism is that, “Some professors, I feel are not as competent in the material enough to give real life examples.” As a consensus, it seems that students appreciate that “professors provide relevant real-life examples drawing from their professional experience outside of the classroom.”

Lectures were simply listed by students and not thoroughly discussed. However, the professors that partook in this survey listed the varied teaching methods they integrated, many with a basis in lectures. For example, one professor who teaches graduate students said that a typical learning environment is “mostly lecture-based instruction with discussion and group work peppered in.” Likewise, four professors matched the students by highlighting discussions and groups in their instruction. One of the professors intentionally talked about integrating real life examples into their teaching. Although real life examples were omitted by the majority of the professors, perhaps providing real life examples is a natural part of teaching since so many students spoke about it. Videos were rarely mentioned by students but were mentioned by two professors. Other teaching methods mentioned by professors and not students were “role playing,” “pictures,” “games,” and “field trips.” Role playing and games were brought up by two professors so these efforts could possibly be taken for granted by students as effective teaching methods. Despite the differences between the varied teaching methods that were discussed amongst students and professors, engagement is going on in the classroom.

3.2. Engaged Learning Environments

Within varied teaching methods are learning environments that were described by this study’s participants as “engaging” or “interactive” and “inclusive” within a supportive teaching environment. The students liked having opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas with classmates. The positive aspects of engaging, interactive, and inclusive can be summarized by a student who says, “The typical learning environment includes an interactive teaching approach that focuses on student engagement.” Another recognizable benefit is that, “[s]tudent engagement during lectures is high with questions opening up dialogue to clarify and expand on class materials” as stated by one student. Student engagement is connected with inclusivity as noted by one student, “I have found the learning environment to be very inclusive. There is a safe environment to ask questions and the students seem to look out for each other.” Similar sentiments

from another participant noted that, "Assignments are designed to have students apply and reflect on real life situations in the classroom and classroom knowledge in real life."

Thus, students often learn more working with each other because they tend to speak the same language and interpret the material similarly in class. For example, one participant stated, "We spend a lot of time working together to understand material." Likewise, another student commented that, "Students are free to share ideas openly." Engagement also seemed to be more meaningful when students worked together on assignments that were "project-driven" and "application based." Thus, students desire to use their critical thinking skills to accomplish the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Participants also noted experiences where they felt encouraged or included. One participant described their classroom experiences as an "atmosphere of encouragement, students sharing pits and peaks, which I love." With this approach, learning seems to best take place when it is, "Interactive, [with] lots of discussion and group work, checks for understanding, [professors are] happy to clarify for those who do not understand, [and] check ins on how we're doing in general outside of class. Furthermore, another student stated that he/she/they liked engagement happening at different levels, "engagement between students for a check-up and then engagement as a group with the teacher." Yet, another participant remarked, "There are different teaching styles for each professor but I feel like they all take the time to get to know me and are always willing to answer questions."

Undergirding the learning process is the engagement of the professor. Specifically, the social work department in this study was given praise. One participant said, "The typical learning environment within the social work program is extremely interactive. Our professors strive for participation so that every individual in class can be heard whether the answer is right or wrong." Similarly, a student highlighted that, "The MSW program is interactive and the professors want you to succeed." Furthermore, another student stated, "The professors are very engaged with every student. They do all they can to make sure the assignments are understood."

None of the professors in this study spoke intently about student engagement. This very well could be an aspect of culturally responsive teaching that is taken for granted by professors. However, the predominantly positive, engaging learning environment described by the participants in this study sets the stage for the researchers to dive deeper to discover the intentional or unintentional integration of culture throughout the curriculum.

3.3. Inconsistent Integration of Culture

The qualitative question that was asked to garner responses for this study did not explicitly mention culture. Yet, participants discussed their perceptions about the integration or non-integration of conversations about culture in their courses. Student responses related to culture primarily captured perceptions of their views of faculty effectiveness or ineffectiveness in exploring issues and content related to culture. There were 14 total responses that mentioned culture; 13 responses coming from students and one faculty response.

To begin, some students had positive accounts about culture being integrated into their classes. One participant stated that [instruction was] conducive to all cultures represented within the classroom." Likewise, another participant likened, "My professors are very knowledgeable and give us time for class discussions and look at different cultures." With more detail another participant indicated:

Each of our classes has talked about stigmas various populations face, how to advocate for them, and how to be more understanding towards them. We are taught multicultural competencies each semester. Teachers speak to all students and show respect towards and interest in all students. All students are encouraged to share their thoughts in class. Some assignments allow students to explore and share their own culture if it is not the mainstream culture.

Another participant excitedly responded, "My professors are amazing!! They always bring their experiences to the classroom. They are very respectful of different cultures, they embrace and celebrate diversity!!!" Thus, this student's expression of his/her/their sentiments demonstrates

how meaningful the integration of culture into helping professionals' curriculum is. Two student respondents used language such as "respectful of different cultures" and "very focused on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and humility" when describing faculty." Exposure to other cultures seems appreciated. One participant credited, "My professors do their best to enlighten us in other cultures." Diversity and inclusion; multicultural, and inclusive were other terms that were mentioned within the responses, yet there was no further clarification on how the concept was integrated into curriculum.

Constructive criticism is an opportunity for growth. Here is one account from a participant that the faculty from the counseling and social work department need to consider:

The learning style is typical and when they say inclusive, that only stands for certain cultures and thoughts. Overall, everyone is trying and that can be seen. Most of us of different cultures and disabilities are used to taking a back seat and trying to make it through... The teaching styles are personal to each one and fine.

An additional criticism is that the professor...

Might need to speak more on multiculturalism. Professors are overly careful about using correct terms. I'm not into that. I believe that we all, as adults, know what is good and moral in a classroom unless there has been intense indoctrination about politically correct topics. I do wish we had more men and Hispanics in our classroom, so promotion to those groups would be good.

Representation matters; it is beneficial for academic programs to have faculty that represent the clients, patients, or constituents that will be served by future practitioners. By having diverse faculty, they can share their experiences which benefits students. The counseling department was acknowledged for this strength by one participant, "Some professors share their experiences related to their cultures, which is informative and helps all students feel welcome." Another participant concurred, "Very focused on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and humility. Dr. [X] and Dr. [Y] do a fantastic job to emphasize the importance of these considerations and their relationship to effective counseling." If faculty can share their experiences and encourage their students to do the same, awareness, empathy, and advocacy will be skills and competencies that will equip students to become better professionals. However, all faculty in the department need to demonstrate cultural competency and awareness to avoid the dichotomy of "professors" excel at culturally responsive and inclusive teaching while others do not" as described by one participant.

On the other hand, a few participants provided compelling accounts about culture, indicating that cultural considerations were not discussed in classes or that faculty may not be equipped to deliver content related to the non-White experience. The negligence of discussing culture can lead to a "Very Anglo-Saxon experience" as described by one participant. Two student responses suggest culturally responsive content is only presented in a "diversity course" and in other courses, there is "almost no discussion of how culture impacts content." Moreover, one participant offered, "I feel that we have a very diverse culture in the US. We should have more connections to different cultures and examples of how to approach those cultures who need assistance."

One faculty member described integrating culture and highlighting diversity if course materials, specifically the course textbook, features women or non-White contributors stating. Specifically, "I tend to lecture only about theorists from the textbook because there is no time to bring in other theorists. If they are diverse (i.e., female or non-White) I emphasize that." Thus, the counseling and social work programs in this study have made great strides in integrating culture in the curriculum, but there is still opportunity for improvement as this is the weakest theme of culturally responsive teaching.

4. Discussion

This study contributes to a growing body of literature recognizing the importance of culturally responsive teaching methods within higher education, specifically in counseling and social work (Bottiani et al., 2018; Gay, 2010; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The results of this study concur with the literature (Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011), highlighting the importance of developing a pedagogical approach that considers students' learning profiles,

including their preferences, strengths, and areas of development. All of which are particularly critical when engaging students from historically marginalized groups. Our findings revealed three themes characterizing student and faculty experiences in the classroom, adding to the growing literature defining culturally responsive teaching strategies (Gay, 2018). The first theme of *Varied Teaching Methods* provides insight into effective teaching methods that students perceive as beneficial in fostering a culturally responsive learning environment, i.e., class discussions, visual components, and real-life examples (Gay, 2018). Likewise, faculty reported integrating real-life examples into lectures and using activity-based tools and class discussions to facilitate a dynamic learning environment. The second theme, *Engaged Learning Environments*, directly correlates with varied teaching methods. Students reported that the opportunity to interact with peers and faculty about course content through the previously discussed instructional strategies promoted a positive, interactive learning environment that encouraged engagement with course materials (Gitterman, 2004; Varghese, 2020). Taken together, both themes highlight the importance of incorporating various instructional strategies (Adams et al., 2007) to facilitate the development of understanding the “connections between abstract concepts and real-life experiences” (Varghese, 2020, p. 148). Furthermore, the quality of interaction between and among faculty and students is imperative to the learning process (Gitterman, 2004) and crucial to creating a culturally responsive learning environment. The third theme to emerge, *Inconsistent Integration of Culture*, captured students' perception of faculty effectiveness in exploring issues and content related to culture. Overall, students perceived faculty as fostering inclusivity by demonstrating respect toward all students and creating a safe space for sharing their diverse backgrounds and experiences (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2018). Yet, at the same time, students reported course materials often were not culturally responsive or inclusive (Medin et al., 2017); or that faculty did not discuss how culture impacts course content. Furthermore, students perceived some faculty members as not being equipped to deliver content from diverse perspectives. While these findings are disheartening, they are not surprising.

Prior research established that faculty in helping professions reported feeling unprepared and unseasoned in pedagogical practices (Clark & Holmes, 2007; O'Shea & Kelly, 2007; Varghese, 2020), which might account for the inability to incorporate content beyond course materials. Varghese (2020) further found faculty were unable to connect instructional strategies to learning theories. While findings from this study provide evidence that culturally responsive instructional strategies were present in the learning environment, at a basic level, evidence supports the importance of developing faculty's understanding of theories that support student learning, with an intentional focus on culturally responsive methods. This study provided the opportunity to both faculty and students to share their insights on culturally responsive learning environments and culturally responsive teaching practices. Results from this type of study can serve as a catalyst for those in higher education to have deeper conversations about best practices. How do professors change the environments in both virtual or in-person classes in a culturally responsive lens? As professors, it is important to examine student feedback in order to determine what is working in the classroom and what is not in regard to student learning and engagement (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). In the social work and counseling professions, students are taught to learn how to take feedback and how to utilize it to make their clinical skills more therapeutic. As faculty, it is important to model integrating student feedback on the instructional process.

As educators prepare for instruction, we must consider students' learning profiles including their preferences, strengths, and areas of development. This is particularly critical when engaging students from historically marginalized groups. The purpose of this study was to begin examining the perspectives of students and educators on the existence of culturally responsive teaching in higher education human service disciplines, specifically counseling and social work. The three themes illuminate a basic teaching foundation that should exist for learning and gaining knowledge and skill competencies that lead to higher acquisition of Bloom's Taxonomy by faculty. To undergird these themes, there should be professors that are culturally responsive to the spoken and unspoken needs of students. So far, students responded positively that evidence of culturally

responsive teaching was present in the classroom. Yet, while culturally responsive teaching is present at a basic level, there needs to be some intentionality to dive deeper into this concept to provide a better learning experience for students. For example, professors should be encouraged to take formal or informal training on the topic. Formal training can be offered through higher education institutes or informally at conferences. The stigma of culturally responsive teaching also needs to be addressed. There may be negative misconceptions or challenges that being culturally responsive is not needed or political. Once professors have exposure to culturally responsive teaching, they realize that small yet intentional tweaks need to be made to enhance student success and retention. These changes to current instruction can augment the self-efficacy of students and serve as a catalyst of the impact that he/she/they can have upon future clients.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study gathered data from faculty and students regarding the use of, and perceived use of, culturally responsive teaching methods within higher education, specifically in counseling and social work programs. While the results are not generalizable, they add to a growing body of literature on culturally responsive learning environments and teaching practices in higher education. Findings provide a deeper understanding of the perceived learning environment, effective teaching strategies, and perceptions of inclusion or exclusion among faculty and students. While the number of participants was sufficient for a qualitative study sample size to reach thematic saturation, findings from this study are not generalizable. This study has several limitations. First, this study utilized participants from two helping professions at one university. While similar in pedagogy, differences in professional socialization approaches exist between the fields. Data simultaneously was collected for both faculty and students, thus limiting the researchers' opportunity to interview participants due to time constraints. Expanding the research beyond one institution would be critical to further understanding culturally responsive learning environments and teaching practices in higher education. Building on the findings from this study, researchers would include participant interviews to garner rich, contextual data about their experiences in the learning environment. Finally, identifying effective teaching methods that are culturally responsive and provide students with a sense of belonging could inform future faculty development.

Author contributions: All authors have sufficiently contributed to the study, and agreed with the results and conclusions.

Funding: No funding source is reported for this study.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

Declaration of interest: No conflict of interest is declared by authors.

References

- Adams, M. E., Bell, L. A. E., & Griffin, P. E. (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. Routledge.
- American Psychological Association. (2022). *Helping professions*. Author.
- Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2010). *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. Sage.
- Black, B. P. (2014). *Professional nursing: Concepts & challenges*. Saunders, an imprint of Elsevier Inc.
- Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Booker, K. (2016). Connection and commitment: How sense of belonging and classroom community influence degree persistence for African American undergraduate women. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28(2), 218–229.
- Booker, K. C., & Campbell-Whatley, G. D. (2018). How Faculty Create Learning Environments for Diversity and Inclusion. *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, 13, 14-27.

- Bottiani, J. H., Larson, K. E., Debnam, K. J., Bischoff, C. M., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2018). Promoting educators' use of culturally responsive practices: A systematic review of inservice interventions. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(4), 367–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117722553>
- Clark, T. & Holmes, S. (2007). Fit for practice? An exploration of the development of new qualified nurses using focus groups. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 44, 1210–1220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2006.05.010>
- Condon, E. & Sharts-Hopko, N. (2010). Socialization of Japanese nursing students. *Nursing Education Perspective*, 31(3), 167-70.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs. (2022). About CACREP. Retrieved November, 22, 2022 from <https://www.cacrep.org/about-cacrep/>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2015). 2016 CACREP Standards. Retrieved November, 22, 2022 from <http://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2016-Standards-with-Glossary-5.3.2018.pdf>
- Council on Social Work Education. (n.d.). 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Retrieved November, 22, 2022 from <https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/info/2022-epas/>
- Dutta, N., Maini, A., Afolabi, F., Forrest, D., Golding, B., Salami, R. K., & Kumar, S. (2021). Promoting cultural diversity and inclusion in undergraduate primary care education. *Education for Primary Care*, 32(4), 192–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2021.1900749>
- Fleck-Henderson, A. (2002). The modern student and the post-modern curriculum: Developmental issues in learning. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 22(1-2), 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v22n01_02
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 203-220.
- Gay, G. (2010). Acting on Beliefs in Teacher Education for Cultural Diversity. *Journal of Teacher Education* 61(1-2), 143–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347320>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gitterman, A. (2004). Interactive andragogy: Principles, methods, and skills. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 24(3/4), 95-112. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v24n03_07
- Graneheim, U. H. , & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures, and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105-112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001>
- Griner, A. C., & Stewart, M. L. (2013). Addressing the achievement gap and disproportionality through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices. *Urban Education*, 48(4), 585–621. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085912456847>
- Hendricks, C. O. (2003). Learning and teaching cultural competence in the practice of social work. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 23(1-2), 73-86. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v23n01_06
- Kirby, L. A., & Thomas, C. L. (2021). High-impact teaching practices foster a greater sense of belonging in the college classroom. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 368-381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1950659>
- Kumar, R., Karabenick, S. A., Warnke, J. H., Hany, S., & Seay, N. (2019). Culturally inclusive and responsive curricular learning environments (CIRCLEs): An exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 57, 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.10.005>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American students*. Jossey-Bass.
- Medin, D., Ojalehto, B., Marin, A. and Bang, M., (2017). Systems of (non-) diversity. *Nature Human Behavior*, 1, 0088. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0088>
- Moerer-Urdahl, T., & Creswell, J. W. (2004). Using transcendental phenomenology to explore the “ripple effect” in a leadership mentoring program. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(2), 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300202>
- Moore, R. L. (2020). Developing lifelong learning with heutagogy: contexts, critiques, and challenges. *Distance Education*, 41(3), 381-401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2020.1766949>
- Orosco, M. J., & Klingner, J. (2010). One school's implementation of RTI with English language learners: “Referring into RTI.” *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43(3), 269–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219409355474>
- O'Shea, M., & Kelly, B. (2007). The lived experiences of newly qualified nurses on clinical placement during the first six months following registration in the Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 16(8), 1534-1542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2006.01794.x>

- Osterman, K. F. (2010). Teacher practice and students' sense of belonging. In T. Lovat, R. Toomey & N. Clement (Eds.), *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing* (pp. 239-260). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8675-4_15
- Pendell, K., & Schroeder, R. (2017). Librarians as campus partners: Supporting culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum. *College & Research Libraries News*, 78(8), 414-443. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.78.8.414>
- Pichon, H. W. (2016). Developing a sense of belonging in the classroom: Community college students taking courses on a four-year college campus. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(1), 47-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2014.964429>
- Pridham, B., Martin, D., Walker, K., Rosengren, R., & Wadley, D. (2015). Culturally inclusive curriculum in higher education. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 44(1), 94-105. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/jie.2015.2>
- Poulin, J. & Matis, S. (2015). Social work competencies and multidimensional assessment. *The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 20(1), 117-135. <https://doi.org/10.18084/1084-7219.20.1.117>
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2007). *User's guide to qualitative research*. Sage.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C. G., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40(1), 85-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2011.12087730>
- Tovar-Gálvez, J. C. (2021). Bringing environmental education to the curriculum: Practical elements emergent from teaching experiences and research. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 17(3), e2236. <https://doi.org/10.21601/ijese/9606>
- Varghese, R. (2020). Teaching without being taught how: Social work practice faculty voices. *Social Work Education*, 39(2), 145-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1619684>
- Zarshenas, L., Sharif, F., Molazem, Z., Khayyer, M., Zare, N., & Ebadi, A. (2014). Professional socialization in nursing: A qualitative content analysis. *Iran Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*, 19(4), 432-438.