

## Teaching Multi-Cultural Knowledge and Attitudes within Social Work Programs with Inclusion of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

*Individuals with learning disabilities face challenges in the academic setting. Even though learning disabilities are well documented in the literature, the very definition itself remains a controversy. This exploratory descriptive study examined the opinions of social work faculty/instructors on teaching multicultural content with the inclusion of individuals with learning disabilities (LD).*

*The social work literature is devoid of individuals with LD included within the definition of human diversity and possessing a unique culture. This exploratory research is the first attempt to measure the teaching of two constructs of knowledge and attitudes of multicultural competency with the inclusion of individuals with LD. Approximately 1000 regionally stratified social work faculty/instructors were surveyed during January and February 2006, and 326 Internet questionnaires (32%) were completed. A Likert scale was constructed to measure faculty teaching interest on Multicultural groups and LD as a category of this diversity spectrum. The two constructs of knowledge and attitudes of multicultural competency as adapted from Crisp and DiNitto (2004) and Lum (1999) with inclusion of LD content. Ten multicultural diverse groups were defined, with the inclusion of individuals with LD. Findings of this study show that multicultural content on individuals with LD is not consistently taught in accredited schools of social work. This oversight suggests the medical model of addressing disabilities is still the primary paradigm from which individuals with LD are viewed. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed along with supporting suggestions for more social work faculty approaches to individuals with LD.*

Social Work faculty like others struggle to understand how multicultural status affects students, and what types of interventions work best for students faced with challenges. Learning Disabilities (LD) are part of the multicultural spectrum and considered a part of the broader disability category. This paper attempts to enlighten the reader on LD and look at the amount of LD content taught within social work programs across the United States. This research defines individuals with learning disabilities (LD) within a human diversity framework and within the inclusion of the definition of multicultural diverse groups. Historical oversight of individuals with LD being included within the definition of multicultural diverse groups is discussed and reasons for the oversight are explained.

Learning Disabilities adversely affect the day-to-day life of an individual possessing the disability. Significant and persistent difficulty in learning is a genuine disability commonly referred to as a "learning disability." Like many types of disability, learning disabilities (LD) may be biological in origin and are possibly caused by subtle differences in the structure and function of the central nervous system (Shaywitz, 2003). Individuals with LD may possess social skills deficits often linked to unemployment, substance abuse, and suicide. In the United States (US), more than half of all placements into special education classes are children with learning disabilities (Burns & Ysseldycke, 2009). A review of the social work literature shows a critical absence of content on knowledge, attitudes, and skills regarding individuals with LD.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Approximately 38% of the population may possess learning disabilities (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1999). People with learning disabilities are found in all socioeconomic groups, and LD affect approximately the same number of females as males. Studies of twins indicate that LD are inherited 35 to 45% of the time (Rich & Shapiro, 1999). Furthermore, many individuals with LD experience problems succeeding academically because they develop social skill deficits, and as a result they experience problems with interpersonal relationships with both peers and faculty (Mercer, 1997). However, environmental factors such as early interventions and personal support at home and at school can certainly mediate some of the problems faced by individuals with LD (Rich & Shapiro, 1999). One goal of social work education is to attain a better understanding of multicultural groups, and thus to achieve a basic level of cultural competency.

There is a need to define individuals with learning disabilities as a multicultural group and include those individuals within the teaching content at accredited schools of social work content. Individuals with LD face unique challenges. The fundamental challenge of learning is compounded by the fact that individuals with LD are prone to withdraw and hide their disability rather than to ask for help (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992). Failure to seek assistance may place the individual further and further behind in completing and turning-in scholastic assignments. As they get further behind in their educational tasks, they are vulnerable to withdrawing from difficult tasks and situations. For individuals with LD, this process of falling behind and withdrawal can increase their anxiety to the level of self-doubt.

More specifically, these individuals face problems during their educational experience that are just now being understood. For example, they must traverse the same difficulties faced by non-learning-disabled individuals such as reading hundreds of pages of information, writing, and being tested on what is presented. However, they must study for many more hours than the non-LD student because often they struggle with simple reading, writing, and mathematical assignments. No matter how simple these tasks may seem to others, for the individual with LD the same tasks may take days or weeks instead of hours.

A national study found that 60% of students with school-identified LD wanted to attend a post-secondary program, and yet only 30% were found to have enrolled in any program (Blackorby, & Wagner, 1996). This same study also indicated that of those students fortunate enough to enroll in a program, only

one-half of one percent (0.005%) completed a program or earned a degree within three to five years after graduating high school. In contrast, the percentages of bachelor degrees awarded in the year 2010 to other diverse groups indicate between 7-9% graduate with a Bachelorette degree (U.S. Dept of Education, 2008). The U.S. Department of Education report further states that no other at-risk group possesses such a low rate of post-secondary attendance or such poor graduation rates as individuals with LD. This poor graduation rate affects individuals with LD despite federal mandates to provide reasonable academic accommodations through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

### **Environmental and Educational System**

Even though many recommendations exist in the literature for educating faculty regarding individuals with LD, it is uncertain whether these strategies are actually working to address faculty needs (Scott & Gregg, 2000). In response to federal mandates, Offices of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) emerged intended to address faculty and student education on the subject of individuals with LD. Yet challenges exist because learning disabilities are invisible, and faculty education pertaining to this diverse group was found to be particularly difficult (HEATH, 1994). In fact, rather than educators addressing the needs of individuals with LD, universities often charge their support services to meet the needs of the individual with LD.

Despite the need to maintain accommodations for all individuals, including the special needs of the disabled, the faculty/instructors are also charged with maintaining academic requirements and standards of the courses taught (Scott & Gregg, 2000). The balance of these two tasks can only be accomplished through an ongoing educational process for faculty/instructors. The overall consensus of literature concludes that faculty education must occur over time, requiring varied and multiple forms of outreach (Geis, Morris, & Leuenberger, 1989; Rose, 1993). The literature often discusses educating faculty by increasing the knowledge and attitudes toward individuals with LD (Geis et al., 1989; Rose, 1993). The literature defines the areas of faculty knowledge needed in areas of LD in pertinent legislation, characteristics of LD, and services provided by the OSSD (Scott & Gregg, 2000). The attitudinal questions used in most studies on LD target comfort level of faculty toward individuals with LD and perceived success potential for the individual with LD (Scott & Gregg, 2000).

### **Diversity Content in Social Work Education**

The field of social work is now focusing on people with disabilities, which includes learning disabilities often as part of the diversity spectrum. Social work education is guided by the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policies and Accreditations Standards (EPAS), which support the present level of knowledge and skills for scientifically-based interventions. The EPAS provide support to the social work profession to improve interventions that will help those in need, while respecting all cultures and diverse groups.

The social work profession attempts to teach multicultural awareness and equality of a variety of groups. Teaching diverse multicultural awareness is now one of the hallmarks of the social work mission. However, the issue of how to accomplish this teaching task is much more difficult than the mere statement of the mission. An educational plan to develop awareness, understanding, and appreciation of diverse multicultural group content must be created. Clearly, such a plan should include awareness of individuals with LD. Additionally, social work educators must recognize and address the fact that the evolution of multicultural awareness for the disabled, including the learning disabled, has been slow to develop when compared to other diverse groups.

The field of social work has proactively addressed the issues of many diverse groups including a diverse aging society, women, people of color, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. While discrimination, oppression, and bias exist for all multicultural diverse groups, some groups have been discussed differentially during the educational process. The SAGE-SW project encouraged social work individuals to enter specific areas of gerontology by providing scholarships to interested individuals. The project motivated CSWE to better educate social work students on the multifaceted issues of aged and diverse populations (CSWE, 2001). In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement gave social workers the motivation to establish research and education regarding diversity. This movement can be linked to the 1973 decision of the CSWE that considered the degree to which social work programs incorporated content on women and people of color when making accreditation decisions (Gallegos, 1984). The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Public Social Policy Statement on gay issues condemned sexual discrimination in 1977, and during the 1980s and 1990s, many researchers identified the need for a greater focus on lesbian and gay men's issues in the social work literature. In 1992, the CSWE mandated in its Curriculum Policy Statement that diversity content on lesbians and gay men be included in both BSW and MSW education (CSWE, 1992). Yet at present, the multicultural diverse group comprised of individuals with LD has neither been addressed nor adequately included in teaching content during social work education.

### **Individuals with Learning Disabilities**

As Pinker (1994) states, the spoken language is innate and instinctive. That is to say, language does not have to be taught but that children only need to be exposed to the common language during early childhood. Neural circuitry deep within the human brain genetically establishes the phonological module, and the small sound parts are put together to make words. The brain automatically assembles these small sound parts into words for the speaker and then reassembles the phonemes, which are the spoken word parts, into a response for the listener (Pinker, 1994). Therefore, the spoken language takes place at an unconscious level and becomes virtually effortless. This process can be explained by DeFrancis (1989), who states that *Homo sapiens* have been using speech as the dominant mode of communication for over 50,000 years when compared to reading and written languages, which have only been in use for the past 5000 years by a limited number of people. Even though reading and written languages have been present for 5000 years, few individuals were literate until the existence of an inviting academic environment.

While speech may be an ancient and inherently easy process for most individuals, reading and writing are relatively new. The education of individuals in writing and reading skills developed over several centuries after the advent of academic environments, and yet only in the past century has this education become relatively commonplace. Thus, many present day academics who are deciphering the origins of LD theorize that an evolutionary failure exists and the human genetic coding has not had the time to compensate for this recent phenomenon (Shaywitz, 2003). Research may indeed explain a biological learning disability. Regarding LD, Shaywitz and Shaywitz (1999) stated that a biological evolution failure occurs for some individuals to process reading and writing; but they also point out two distinct subgroups of individuals with LD. While some individuals with LD may possess a biological deficit, other individuals with LD may exhibit no biological deficit and simply may be the products of an inadequate environmental and education systems. Research supports that individuals with learning disabilities who possess biological failure in the left side of the brain will be poor readers for life. However, individuals with LD who possess no biological left-brain failure but who were simply not exposed as children to appropriate reading and writing skills can improve reading skills at better rates (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1999). It is important to note

that both groups are clearly defined as learning disabled, regardless of whether the disability is biological in origin.

Learning disabilities involve “a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction.” (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 1994, p. 65). Learning disabilities are typically linked to areas related to academics, specifically in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics (Siegel, 1999). Thus, while literacy may have existed for a small portion of the population for centuries, LD were virtually unnoticed until the last 50-plus years.

### **Background and Significance of Learning Disabilities**

The history of LD research has been difficult because with each new finding additional unanswered questions have been raised. Challenges originate primarily from the recentness of the field and they bring to the forefront a need for continued research on the subject of LD (NJCLD, 1994). In 1987, Congress mandated both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Education to assess federal research and findings regarding LD in order to establish national priorities to increase the effectiveness of LD research (Health Research Extension Act of 1985, P.L. 99 – 158). From this mandate, four NIH-funded centers were dedicated to increase the understanding of LD. One of these centers at Yale University initiated the Connecticut Longitudinal Study to determine whether LD was a common or rare problem. There were 445 children enrolled in the study and they were selected to represent the geographic and demographic diversity of all school age children in the state of Connecticut. Information was gathered on a broad range of items including mental ability, academic achievement, behaviors both in the classroom and at home, and self-perceptions (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1999). The Connecticut study found that reading disabilities affect approximately one in five children. The study reported that from a national perspective 38% of fourth graders had not achieved even the basic rudimentary skills in reading (Shaywitz, 2003).

Roughly speaking, this means that LD may affect almost every other family in America. Other findings from this landmark study show the existence of an apparent large-scale under-identification of LD by public schools, which usually identify only the most severe LD cases; and usually identification only occurs after the child is past the third grade. This late identification creates a problem for individuals with LD because it occurs past the optimal age, after which time the child’s brain is cognitively less flexible, and thereby less malleable for rerouting neural circuits, something that an early intervention would allow (Shaywitz, 2003). The Connecticut Study found no significant difference in the number of boys possessing a reading disability when compared to girls when each child was individually tested on achievement (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1999). The study also reported that, typically, teacher rating of girls’ behavior is biased when compared to boys’ ratings of behavior because boys typically are more rambunctious and thus are sent for testing more often than the well-mannered girls (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1999). Therefore, the girls are less frequently diagnosed with LD in school settings.

Additional research indicates that individuals with LD receive less positive reinforcement from both parents and teachers (Mercer, 1997). Teachers tend to display attitudes that are more negative and use fewer positive behaviors in their interactions with individuals with LD, especially as these individuals move into preadolescence (Bryan & Bryan, 1983). Individuals with learning disabilities are reported to have lower levels of self-esteem, experience less emotional support, and have greater academic and personal-emotional adjustment difficulty than their peers without LD (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1993; Hill, 1996; Stolowitz, 1995). Feelings of social isolation and not fitting-in with others were found to create barriers for individuals with LD during their high school educational experience (Hill, 1996; Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg,

1993). As these children and adolescents with LD become adults with LD, they face new challenges in the college experience. Learning to cope in the college environment is important and the literature outlines some of the skills needed to make this transition.

Studies suggest the success for individuals with LD in college is affected by better understanding their LD, by prior educational experiences, and by other factors such as asking for help from tutoring and counseling services (Vogel, Hruba, & Adelman, 1993). With respect to the field of social work, we hope that the potential for success of individuals with LD is more easily accomplished if faculty/instructors possess greater interest and experience in teaching the topic of individuals with LD as a multicultural diverse group.

In reviewing attitudes of faculty toward individuals with LD, the results of two studies found that the surveyed faculty presented varying levels of attitudes. For instance, faculty possessed a willingness to provide extra accommodations for individuals with LD (Baggett, 1994; Nelson, Smith & Dodd, 1990). However, not all studies agree on attitudes toward individuals with LD and one study found that negative attitudes or “negative stereotypes” of faculty existed toward individuals with LD when individuals possessed poor levels of academic achievement (Minner & Prater, 1984). Empirical findings from the study state that these negative stereotypes create barriers for individuals with LD in achieving educational success when compared to their nonlearning-disabled peers (Minner & Prater, 1984). Controversy does exist and other researchers state that faculty attitudes should not be defined as negative or positive toward individuals with LD, but as either lacking or possessing knowledge of the difficulties and how best to provide accommodations for these individuals (Nelson et al., 1990).

In an important study Vogel, Leyser, Wyland and Brulle (1999) findings showed that the faculty were most likely to allow recorded lectures; provide examinations to be proctored in the Offices of Services for Students with Disabilities; and allow extended time. They were least likely to provide outlines of lectures or assignments in alternative format or willing to alter format of examinations. Other factors found to influence faculty attitudes were faculty age, the school or discipline where taught, number of years teaching, professional rank, and experience teaching individuals with LD.

Science now provides hard evidence to show that LD exists and that some are indeed biological in origin (Shaywitz, 2003; Price, Moore, & Frackowiak, 1996). Still controversies exist because the LD field of study is new when compared to other research fields such as physical and emotional disabilities. During the 60s, 70s, and 80s, researchers Roger Barker and Beatrice Wright based their work on the theoretical framework of Kurt Lewin. Their work showed that similarities existed between the experiences of the disabled and minority groups (Meyerson, 1990). Like minority groups, the disabled person also possesses lower status, which will affect the behaviors of any disenfranchised people. Barker and Wright delineated for the first time the idea that the focus of the problem of disability does not lie within the disabled but rather within society and how it negatively identifies the disabled (Meyerson, 1990). The Social/Minority Model (SMM), which defines a disabled person as a minority group within a dominant society that fails to identify with the disabled (Makelprang & Salsgiver, 1996). Therefore, interventions should be targeted toward changing and improving the debilitating society, not toward the disabled person (Makelprang & Salsgiver, 1996). Similarly, the field of social work benefits from recognizing individuals with LD as being a minority group, disenfranchised from their nonlearning-disabled peers. As Makelprang and Salsgiver (1996) point out, interventions should target society; and measuring the interest of social work faculty/instructors in teaching this topic as a multicultural diversity issue may be a critical beginning to enlightening the society of social workers.

## **Methods**

This research has attempted to identify the unknown extent to which content on individuals with learning disabilities is taught. The research questions that ask whether content on individuals with LD is included in multicultural diverse content taught at schools of social work. Variables included faculty knowledge and attitudes regarding teaching multicultural content including LD. The effect of several faculty demographic variables, were also measured and analyzed to establish what correlations they might have regarding faculty knowledge and interest in teaching multicultural content on individuals including LD.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into public law in 1990 because Congress found that persons with disabilities experience discrimination in virtually every aspect of their lives (Pardeck, 1998). The experience of discrimination identifies individuals with LD as a multicultural diverse group and brings to the forefront a need to encourage social work faculty/instructors to teach content under the ADA, and more specifically, to educate all people working with individuals with LD of their inclusion within the services provided by the ADA.

Furthermore, prior to 1994, the very definition of disability curricula content was defined within a medical model philosophy, which helps explain the educational oversight that occurred.

In the medical model, the disabled person possesses a deficit perceived as a curable illness, not an element of human diversity. Hence, many social workers could only see disabled people through a deficit treatment lens (Gilson & DePoy, 2001). Individuals with LD experience this same plight due to the medical model approach.

From a theoretical perspective, this manuscript approaches individuals with LD from a constructionist approach, which states that individuals with LD must be identified as a unique multicultural group. The research is based on a constructionist approach versus a medical model theory. As with a constructionist approach to any multicultural diverse group, the social work community first encourages research to understand a unique culture, acceptance without change or attempts to cure the unique culture, and acknowledgement of the experiences unique to that culture. Following initial research into a unique group, social workers can begin to recognize and meet the needs of the unique culture.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This exploratory study measured whether social work faculty/instructors teach multicultural diversity content, specifically including individuals with learning disabilities (LD). It is posited that if faculty teaching of multicultural content can be measured, then measurement of content on LD may be identified. Further, the study attempts to measure which, if any, demographics affect teaching content on individuals with LD. This goal is determined by assessing the knowledge and attitudes of what faculty/instructors teach on multicultural diversity content in comparison to material on individuals with LD. Social work educators rated what multicultural diversity content they teach, then this information was compared to ratings of their interest in teaching multicultural diversity content concerning individuals with LD.

Ultimately, the goal of teaching multicultural diversity content is to develop cultural competency. As adapted from Crisp and DiNitto (2004) and Lum (1999), this exploratory research measured two constructs of cultural competency: (a) teaching the areas of knowledge, and (b) attitudes regarding multicultural diverse groups. An understanding of both constructs is needed by social work faculty/instructors in order to develop an educational program on the multicultural diverse group of individuals with LD. The social work profession must encourage teaching content on individuals with LD, and this study is a step toward this obligation.

## Methods

### Development of the Survey Instrument

The constructed instrument measured ratings of teaching ten aspects of multicultural diversity content as compared to teaching content on individuals with LD. In order to make the design of this instrument measure the teaching of multicultural diversity content when compared to interest in teaching multicultural diversity content as related to LD, this research attempted to narrow this measure with specific descriptions of the two identified constructs. The construct of attitudes was based on the self-examination of culturally sensitive attitudes as adapted from Lum (1999) in his description of social work cultural awareness tools and as adapted from Crisp and DiNitto (2004). The rating scales for the statements were based on a six-point Likert-type scale for the original questions and are as follows: Strongly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Moderately Agree, and Strongly Agree. No mid-point was used on this exploratory research survey. Face validity of the research instrument was established through use of a construct and structure expert panels whose focus was to improve the development of the constructs needing measured and to lower any obvious errors.

A sample of content of knowledge and attitude questions that included seven knowledge and five attitude questions scored on the above mentioned six-point Likert type scale for all 10 identified multicultural groups is listed below:

Within the last 3 semesters (knowledge):

I have held class discussions on the following key terminology(ies):

I have provided the demographic characteristics of the following multicultural group(s):

I have facilitated an understanding of the diversity of the following multicultural group(s):

I have provided content on the history of the following multicultural group(s):

Within the last 3 semesters (Attitude):

I have encouraged students to self-reflect on their experiences with the following multicultural group(s):

I have taught students to develop personal contact with the following multicultural group(s):

I have encouraged discussions in class on students' reactions with the following multicultural group(s):

### Sample

The sample for the study was regionally randomly stratified chosen social work (SW) faculty/instructors gathered from a current list of the accredited 503 MSW and BSW programs by the CSWE within the U.S.. Each accredited CSWE social work school was contacted by mail explaining the research and asked for a list of all current faculty/instructors. A standard sample size of 22% of the population (with a minimum of 30 for each variable) was considered sufficient to provide reasonable control over sampling error (Grinnell, 1997). For example, the State of Illinois has 229 faculty/instructors, and 22% were randomly chosen to generate 50 participants to represent that region/state. Region/state stratification participants were chosen by this method to represent the entire U.S., Puerto Rico, and Guam. From this random regionally stratified sampling method, every region was represented by the accurate number of each faculty/instructor representing that region/state until all 1005 potential respondents were identified. When data fields for any chosen name were missing, the researcher returned to the second wave chosen for that region/state for replacement. Therefore each region/state 32 percent represented resembled the original plan of region/state stratified method of selection.

The study was conducted using a one-time mailed letter with a link to a password protected Internet survey site and with follow-up email reminders; approximately 1005 survey information letters were mailed to social work faculty who taught at CSWE accredited colleges and universities within the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Guam. The survey information letters and corresponding follow-up emails were chosen by regionally/state stratified random sampling. An application to conduct research using human subjects was completed and was submitted to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Houston. A total of 326 surveys were completed over the Internet by the deadline. The sample consisted of 326 respondents for a 32% response rate. This regional/state stratified method of selection helped ensure that all regions/states were properly represented from the population of the original 4500 CSWE national faculty/instructors.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The issue this study sought to address was: Do social work (SW) faculty/instructors teach multicultural diversity content of individuals with LD when compared to teaching content on other multicultural diverse groups? The second hypothesis focused on the construct of attitudes taught regarding the multicultural diverse group of individuals with LD. This construct describes the use of self-awareness of potential underlying personal bias, values, and egocentric philosophies experienced by the multicultural diverse groups. The third research hypothesis sought to answer how demographics of faculty influence knowledge and attitudes. The faculty/instructor membership within a multicultural diversity group was hypothesized to increase interest in teaching their own unique multicultural content more than content on individuals with LD.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

There is a significant reduction between teaching the multicultural content construct of knowledge regarding individuals with LD, when compared to teaching knowledge of other multicultural groups.

#### **Hypothesis 2**

There is a significant reduction in teaching the multicultural content construct of attitudes toward individuals with LD when compared to teaching attitudinal information of other multicultural groups.

#### **Hypothesis 3**

Gender, age, race/ethnicity, degrees earned, work region, number of years teaching, tenured/nontenured, and rank of faculty/instructors will have a significant effect on interest in teaching multicultural content of individuals with LD when compared to teaching information of other multicultural groups.

### **Research Design**

This study consists of an exploratory survey based on an outline adapted from DeVellis (1991), and the underlying theory is based on two constructs of multicultural competency. The challenge of creating this instrument was to identify actual teaching of multicultural diversity content inclusive of individuals with LD. After the design of the survey instrument, survey letters and emails asked the chosen faculty/instructors to go to an Internet site and complete the survey online. Answering the survey online implied implicit permission by the participants in the study. The control variables speculated to influence faculty ratings were Age, Gender, Race-ethnicity, Degrees earned by faculty/instructor respondents, Tenured status, Years of teaching experience, Primary areas of instruction, State/region location, and Faculty rank/position.

## Data Analysis

The demographic control variables speculated to influence faculty in their teaching of all identified groups compared to interest in teaching content on individuals with LD were: Age; Gender; Race-ethnicity; Highest degree held by faculty/instructor respondents; Tenured status; Years of teaching experience; State/region location; Faculty rank/position; and Inclusion within a multicultural group.

The purpose of the study was to test whether social work educators rated teaching the first nine identified multicultural groups higher than the LD group variable. The hypothesized directional results suggested that there would be a significantly higher interest between teaching other multicultural content than teaching content on individuals with LD. Based on this speculation the three hypotheses were formulated and tested. Tests used on the 20 variables included Factor Analysis, Cronbach's alpha, descriptive means, Pearson's correlations, t-tests, and ANOVA tests.

The majority of the group who completed the survey was female. The group consisted of 61% females and 38% males. One transgendered faculty completed the survey. Only 69% of the respondents answered the survey question on identified racial/ethnic demographic information. A review of the responses revealed Caucasians as the largest number of respondents. Other respondents included 6% Hispanic/Latinos, First nations/Alaska natives 0.02%, Asian/Pacific Island Americans 0.04%, African American 11%, and "other" 0.07%.

Approximately 87% of the participants answered the survey question on identified age demographic information. A review of the responses revealed the highest frequency category was 40% for ages 51 to 60, followed by 24% for ages 41 to 50, 12.0% for ages 61 to 65, 10% for ages 21 to 40 0.009% for ages over 65 and 0.006% for 30 and under. The degrees earned by survey respondents ranged from BSW to DSW and Ph.D. The largest percentage was MSW. The second highest frequency of degrees obtained was that of Ph.D. in Social Work without an MSW. Participants who held MSW, alone or with another degree, made up 76% of those answering and 10% of respondents acknowledged that they held both their MSW and Ph.D. degrees in social work. Within years of teaching 1% reported less than one year of teaching experience 17% reported one to five years of experience 24% reported experience of 11 to 20 years, 21% reported six to ten years of experience and 23% reported having over 20 years of teaching experience .

Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, New York, Michigan and California comprised approximately 37% of the respondents.. The Midwest constituted 28% of the survey respondents. The South comprised 26% of the survey respondents. The West comprised 21% of the survey respondents. Respondents were also asked to give their university/college rank. Instructor/faculty rank revealed 2% for deans/professors, 20% full professors, 20% associate professors, 30% assistant professors, and 30% adjunct/part-time professors.

Demographic data questions regarding faculty indicated Approximately 7% of respondents belonged to the multicultural group of individuals with physical disabilities, and 8% indicated that they belonged to the multicultural group of GLBT. Furthermore, 5% indicated that they belonged to the multicultural group of individuals with mental health disabilities.

Regarding the multicultural group of individuals with learning disabilities, 3% respondents indicated that they considered themselves members of this multicultural group. However, it is important to note that of the twelve respondents who identified themselves as possessing learning disabilities, three indicated that they had attention deficit disorder, which is not an acknowledged learning disability but rather a mental health disorder as defined by the DSM-TR IV (2000). Therefore, for purposes of this study, one could arguably eliminate three of these responses and identify only respondents who truly belong to the unique multicultural group of individuals with LD.

These three responses from individuals who identify themselves with LD are worthy of discussion insofar as it shows the extent to which learning disabilities are misunderstood, even among those who

believe they possess such disability. Almost a quarter of the identified group thought that ADHD is a form of learning disability; and one participant identified the problem of reversing letters and numbers, a myth that is very common but has little to do possessing a learning disability.

## Results

Survey questions utilized two six-point Likert scales that measured frequency of teaching multicultural diversity content and interest in teaching multicultural diversity content. A Cronbach's alpha test was run on each of the 22 variables. This analysis started with a review of the coefficient of reliability through the use Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency for each variable was based on the average inter-item correlation and the correlation on constructs ranged between .88 and .93.

The means and standard deviations were compiled for each variable. The Multicultural content comparison of descriptive mean scores and standard deviations are given in Table 1. Comparing mean scores showed teaching content on women was rated the highest followed closely by content on African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos. At the low end of the ratings was teaching content on First Nations/Alaska Natives, and last was teaching content on individuals with LD. The teaching of knowledge toward LD is lower than any other grouping. These data support Hypothesis 1 where there is a significant difference between teaching the multicultural content construct of knowledge regarding individuals with LD when compared to teaching knowledge content of other identified multicultural groups.

**Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Multi-cultural Content Groups**

| Grouping                        | Knowledge |      |     | Attitude |      |     |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------|-----|----------|------|-----|
|                                 | M         | SD   | N   | M        | SD   | N   |
| African American                | 4.38      | 1.13 | 318 | 4.14     | 1.27 | 312 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander American | 3.58      | 1.34 | 315 | 3.49     | 1.44 | 309 |
| Elderly                         | 4.02      | 1.23 | 318 | 3.99     | 1.31 | 310 |
| First Nations/Alaska Native     | 3.50      | 1.47 | 318 | 3.41     | 1.49 | 310 |
| GLBT                            | 4.14      | 1.18 | 319 | 4.14     | 1.25 | 311 |
| Hispanic/Latinos                | 4.18      | 1.19 | 320 | 4.04     | 1.33 | 311 |
| Mental Health Disabilities      | 4.07      | 1.25 | 315 | 4.02     | 1.31 | 310 |
| Physical Disabilities           | 3.83      | 1.30 | 315 | 3.74     | 1.36 | 310 |
| Women                           | 4.43      | 1.18 | 320 | 4.03     | 1.35 | 311 |
| Learning Disabilities           | 3.25      | 1.37 | 314 | 3.25     | 1.44 | 311 |

Note. M= Mean, SD = Standard deviation, N = Sample Size.

Multicultural grouping content on both knowledge and attitudes showed similar patterns. The comparison shows women, African Americans, and GLBT had the largest reported mean scores with smaller standard deviation numbers. African American content was tied with GLBT as the highest rated mean scores with women scores running a close second. Rating at the lowest level of teaching content were First Nations/Alaska Natives and individuals with LD. A review of mean scores and standard deviation indicate that content on groups first mandated by the CSWE (women, people of color, and then decades later, GLBT) are rated as taught more often and have smaller standard deviations (showing more consistency in responses) across the faculty/instructors surveyed.

**Table 2: Knowledge Comparison of Each Identified Multi-cultural Group to the LD Grouping**

|  | MD   | SD   | t     | d       |
|--|------|------|-------|---------|
| African American                               | 1.12 | 1.30 | 15.32 | .86 *   |
| Asian/Pacific<br>Islander<br>American          | 0.32 | 1.38 | 4.04  | .23 *** |
| Elderly  | 0.76 | 1.18 | 11.44 | .64 **  |
| First Nations/Alaska Native                    | 0.24 | 1.42 | 3.06  | .17 *** |
| GLBT   | 0.88 | 1.22 | 12.72 | .72 **  |
| Hispanic/Latinos                               | 0.91 | 1.28 | 12.70 | .71 **  |
| Individuals with Mental<br>Health Disabilities | 0.82 | 1.02 | 14.25 | .80 *   |
| Individuals with Physical<br>Disabilities      | 0.51 | 0.87 | 10.29 | .59 **  |
| Women  | 1.16 | 1.24 | 16.72 | .93 *   |

Note. Coefficients are all significant at  $p < .01$ , except where noted NS. Cohen's ratings of effect size: \* = large, \*\* = medium, and \*\*\* = small. MD = Mean difference, SD = Standard deviation, t = t-test score, d = effect size.

Table 2 documents the sample t-tests show that the comparison of teaching knowledge content on individuals with LD when compared to the teaching knowledge content of the other identified multicultural groups show a significant reduction in LD content taught versus the other groups.

Effect sizes were reported to facilitate the degree of magnitude change for easy determination of the differences between variables. Thompson (2000) states that when reporting  $p$  or probability statements there should also be effect sizes because it is good research practice. Stating an effect size helps the study's results better fit within existing literature. Thompson (2000) states to use Cohen (1988) rules on ratings effect size, that of large = 0.8 and up, medium = 0.05 up to 0.79, and small = 0.02 and below. The effect size ( $d$ ) is calculated by dividing the mean scores by the standard deviation, and effect sizes are included in Tables 2 and 3 t-tests scores. Hypothesis 2: Do social work faculty/instructors teach multicultural construct of attitudes regarding individuals with LD when compared to teaching attitudes content of other multicultural groups? Yes there is a significant reduction in interest in teaching the multicultural content construct of attitude regarding individuals with LD, when compared to attitudes of other identified multicultural groups. Table 3 shows data for the t-tests. Likewise, similar to the knowledge data The teaching of attitudes toward LD is lower than any other grouping.

**Table 3: Attitudes Comparison of Each Identified Multi-cultural Group to the LD Grouping**

|  | MD  | SD   | t         | d      |
|--|-----|------|-----------|--------|
| African American                               | .87 | 1.18 | 12.94     | .73**  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander<br>American             | .22 | 1.34 | 2.88      | .16*** |
| Elderly  | .72 | 1.13 | 11.22     | .64**  |
| First Nations/Alaska Native                    | .15 | 1.33 | 1.97 (NS) | .11*** |
| GLBT   | .87 | 1.14 | 13.38     | .76**  |
| Hispanic/Latinos                               | .77 | 1.20 | 11.34     | .64**  |
| Individuals with Mental<br>Health Disabilities | .75 | 1.02 | 12.91     | .74**  |
| Individuals with Physical<br>Disabilities      | .47 | .88  | 9.47      | .34**  |
| Women  | .76 | 1.18 | 11.32     | .64**  |

Note. Coefficients are all significant at  $p < .01$ , except where noted NS. Cohen's ratings of effect size: \* = large, \*\* = medium, and \*\*\* = small. MD = Mean difference, SD = Standard deviation, t = t-test score, d = effect size.

Hypothesis 3 was tested with the comparison of respondent demographic information and sought to answer whether these factors affect knowledge and attitudes in teaching multicultural content inclusive of LD. All of the demographic data analysis had either t-tests or ANOVA tests depending on the level of measurement. The research hypothesis stated age, gender, race/ethnicity, degrees earned, work region, number of years teaching, tenured/nontenured, and rank of faculty/instructors would have significant effect on knowledge or interest in multicultural content. Most of these tests regarding faculty demographics were not significant. Each test outcome is briefly described.

#### **Age ANOVA Tests**

All variables were tested in a one-way ANOVA test. The six categories of participants for age were 30 and under, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 65, and over 65. Within the knowledge content set, results indicated the only variable found to be significant was elderly knowledge ( $F(5, 275) = 2.92, p < 0.01$ ). Post hoc analysis was examined for all of the omnibus F tests. Further review of the post hoc tests with regard to the knowledge content and teaching elderly content, the only two groups showing significant difference were ages 41 to 50 and 51 to 60. That is, the age group 51 to 60 rated knowledge on teaching elderly content significantly higher than the age group of 41 to 50 ( $p = .007$ , with a mean difference of 0.61).

#### **Gender t-Tests**

Twenty-two independent sample t-tests run on participant responses to gender to determine the difference in means between males and females in teaching multicultural diversity content of each group (10, Knowledge and 10, Attitude) and in interest in teaching content on individuals with LD (1, Knowledge and 1, Attitude). A review of equality of variance showed results that were not significant for any of the comparison tested. Therefore, equal variance can be assumed. Findings from the 22 t-tests indicate that

gender does not affect interest in teaching content on individuals with LD nor does gender affect teaching content of the 10 identified multicultural groups in either knowledge or attitudes taught.

### ***Race/Ethnicity ANOVA Tests***

All 22 variables were again tested in one-way ANOVA tests and differences in the mean scores on participant race/ethnicity. The categories of choice were African American, Asian/Pacific Islander American, Caucasian, First Nations/Alaska Natives, Hispanic/Latinos, and other. There were four omnibus ANOVA tests that found significant difference of means regarding the knowledge content set: that of Asian (AS), elderly (EL), learning disabilities (LD), and women (W). Review of post hoc pair wise analysis showed that Asian (AS) and learning disabilities (LD) could not be identified as to which race categories had significant differences in teaching content of either group.

Further review of post hoc pair wise analysis showed that in comparison of the knowledge content and teaching of elderly content, there were two groups that showed significant difference: that of Caucasian and “other;” and African American and other. That is, the other group rated knowledge on teaching elderly content significantly higher than Caucasians ( $p = .004$ , with a mean difference of 1.45). There were only two groups that showed significant differences: that of Caucasian and “other.” That is, the other group rated knowledge on teaching women content significantly higher than Caucasians ( $p = .003$ , with a mean difference of 1.34).

There were also seven significant omnibus ANOVAS regarding attitude: that of Asian (AS), elderly (EL), GLBT (GL), Hispanic (HL), physical disabilities (PD), learning disabilities (LD), and women (W). Review of post hoc pair wise analysis showed that Asian (AS), GLBT (GL), physical disabilities (PD), and learning disabilities (LD) had no mean differences significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Further review of post hoc pair wise analysis showed the comparison of the attitude content to teaching of elderly content, and there were two groups that showed significant mean differences: Caucasian and other; That is, the others group rated attitude on teaching women content significantly higher than did Caucasians ( $p = .001$ , with a mean difference of 1.35).

With regard to Attitude content set and to teaching women content, there were two groups that showed significant mean differences: Caucasian and other. Again, the others group rated attitude on teaching women content significantly higher than Caucasians ( $p = .000$ , with a mean difference of 1.52).

### ***Degrees Earned ANOVA Tests***

All 22 variables were tested in one-way ANOVA tests, differences in the scores as means were compared on degrees earned by participants, and the content sets were compared for the nine categories. The nine categories of participant's degrees earned were MSW, DSW, PhD, BSW and PhD, MSW and PhD, MSW and DSW, BSW and MSW and PhD, BSW and MSW, and other. Findings indicate that degrees earned does not have significant mean differences in teaching content on individuals with LD when compared to ratings on teaching content of the 10 identified multicultural groups in either scale.

### ***Region/State ANOVA Tests***

One-way ANOVA tests for all 22 variables were computed for differences in the mean scores on the work regions/states of participants. The content sets were compared for the four created regions of West, Midwest, South, and Northeast. The findings indicate that regions where participants work does not have significant mean differences between interests in teaching content on individuals with LD when compared to teaching content of the 10 identified multicultural groups in either knowledge or attitude content sets.

### ***Years Teaching ANOVA Tests***

All variables were tested in a one-way ANOVA test and comparing differences in the scores as means on the number of years teaching and the content sets were compared for the five categories. The five categories of years teaching are less than one year, 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years, and 20 plus years. Findings indicate that years teaching do not show significant differences between interests in teaching content on individuals with LD when compared to teaching content of the 10 identified multicultural groups in either scale.

### ***Tenured Status t-Tests***

Independent sample *t*-tests were run on responses to determine the difference in means between tenured and nontenured status and how that difference affects the 22 identified variables. Findings indicate that tenured/nontenured status of participants did not show significant mean differences between interests in teaching content on individuals with LD when compared to teaching content of the 10 identified multicultural groups tested.

### ***Rank Status ANOVA Tests***

All 22 variables were tested in a one-way ANOVA test and differences in the mean scores on rank status of participants and the identified content sets were compared. The seven categories of rank status are adjunct/part-time, assistant professor, clinical/ nontenured track, associate professor, full professor, dean/professor, and other.

There were three significant omnibus ANOVA tests regarding knowledge content MGK that showed African American (AA), Asian (AS), and First Nations (FN), had higher mean scores but none of the three groups had any pairs significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

There were four significant omnibus ANOVA tests regarding attitude content MGA showing that First Nations (FN), GLBT (GL), and Hispanics (HL) had higher mean scores. Post hoc pair wise analysis revealed that the three groups showed a significant pairs differences at the  $p < .01$  level. Regarding the teaching of First Nations content, the only two groups that showed significant difference were that of associate professor and "other." The others group rated attitude on teaching First Nations content significantly higher mean scores than did associate professors ( $p = .005$ , with a mean difference of 1.17).

Regarding the teaching of GLBT content, the only two groups that showed significant difference were that of associate and assistant professor. That is, the assistant professor group rated attitude on teaching GLBT content significantly higher than did associate professors ( $p = .002$ , with a mean difference of 0.73). Regarding the teaching of Hispanic content, the only two groups that showed significant difference were that of associate professor and assistant professor. The assistant professor group rated attitude on teaching GLBT content significantly higher than did associate professors ( $p = .004$ , with a mean difference of 0.75).

### **Conclusions**

The exploratory survey was designed to ascertain the opinions of social work faculty/instructors regarding teaching multicultural content to improve educational information on individuals with LD. The survey data anticipated findings that would potentially improve social work curriculum and assist university/college social work programs in meeting CSWE guidelines of teaching multicultural content. The foremost strength of the study is that, for the first time, the study attempts to delineate individuals with LD within a human diversity framework.

Quantitative data analyzed from the first two hypotheses were positive. There exist valid and important observations about the hypotheses. That is, social work faculty/instructors do not teach

multicultural content on individuals with LD but express an interest in learning more on the topic. Furthermore, the qualitative data surprisingly showed positive feedback from surveyed social work participants who expressed genuine interest in including multicultural content concerning the field of LD. Many participants acknowledged little or no knowledge on the topic, and this exploratory survey may be the impetus to improve skills for educators, social workers, and those working with individuals with LD.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that demographics would affect the actual teaching of other multicultural content when compared to teaching content on individuals with LD. A review of Hypothesis 3 *t*-tests of gender and tenured/nontenured and review of ANOVA tests on age, degrees held, work region, and number of years teaching reflected minimal significant influence on teaching information of each multicultural groups tested separately. Minimal results were found in race/ethnicity ANOVA tests. Results show the participants who identified themselves “other” were more likely than Caucasians to teach content on women knowledge, women attitudes, and elderly attitude content. ANOVA tests run on the rank of survey participants revealed minimal results. In the demographic category of rank, data indicate that “others” were more likely than identified associate professors to teach First Nations/Alaska Native attitude content. Other significant tests showed that identified assistant professors rated teaching GLBT and Hispanic/Latinos content more often than did identified associate professors.

A documented trend in social work literature indicates that among faculty, women, people of color, and instructors with less experience exhibit more interest in teaching multicultural content (Gutierrez, et al., 1999). These findings were anticipated in the results but were, in fact, not indicated. This is presumably due to poor survey design in that all variables were so highly correlated, and the power of variables was so low. This means that the exploratory instrument design failed to measure the underlying latent variables when compared to demographic data gathered from participants in ANOVA and *t*-tests. The null hypothesis could not be rejected on most tests.

The main weakness of the study is the lack of internal and external validity because of its exploratory nature. Since no other studies in the social work literature existed to guide the direction of this exploratory research, all results must be taken with caution. Therefore, the scale even though created from long term multicultural theory had never been used for measuring the constructs of knowledge and attitude of the diversity group of Individuals with LD. Rubin and Babbie (1997) state that good internal validity is having confidence that the results of a study accurately reflect whether “one variable is or is not the cause of another” (p. 277). This research needs follow-up studies to further show whether one variable causes another. Secondly, the very subject of multicultural content creates a problem with social desirability for all faculty/instructors obligated by the CSWE mandates to teach this content across curriculum. It is surmised that the mere asking of the question “Do you teach content?” to subjects that are employed to teach such content would have biased opinions whether positive or negative.

Future research is encouraged on emphasizing the teaching content of individuals with LD within the social work accredited schools of social work and evaluating whether content on individuals with LD is actually taught. This research identified that faculty/instructors understand individuals with LD within the use of a medical model perspective. Future research is encouraged on establishing an educational process on the Constructionist approach for faculty/instructors at all schools of social work. Education from a different more humanistic framework may change basic teaching perspectives of all educators, even those who do not teach multicultural content. Examples include, open forums on varied teaching perspectives for faculty/instructors and then testing responses to multicultural survey questions for all faculty/instructors who attended the forum. Becoming educated on all multicultural groups from a humanist perspective encourages growth on the educational value for all social work faculty/instructors.

All CSWE accredited schools of social work teach content on multicultural diversity in an attempt to

provide their students with cultural competency. Based on survey responses, multicultural diversity is taught and probably would be taught, to varying degrees, regardless of EPAS mandates. This is a very encouraging conclusion of the study in that most faculty are quite motivated to teach diversity content, whether through personal motivation or EPAS mandates. However, the study also indicated that many instructors did not feel completely comfortable in teaching all multicultural diversity content. For instance, one respondent commented that he was a white male, and as such, he indicated that perhaps he was not fully prepared to understand all multicultural content within his curriculum; or perhaps he was perceived by his students as ill equipped to understand their unique culture. In any event, the study concludes that there are definite challenges to teaching all multicultural content; and the identified challenges ranged from: (a) faculty admission of their own inability to relate; (b) curriculum limitations, including time and content, (c) and issues involving student problems.

An unfortunate conclusion of this study was that some faculty/instructors are frustrated with teaching multicultural diversity when, despite the content framework, their students do not always obtain cultural competency because of an inherent, arguably ingrained, refusal to let go of personal bias and prejudice. Other respondents simply did not like the frequency with which the term multicultural was used in their curriculum. As one respondent said, "where will the list of groups end?" Frankly, it was interesting to note that resistance exists on faculty's frustration with the large workload including the many multicultural groups that must be included in the curriculum. Even if resistance to teach multicultural content exists in social work education, it is imperative that faculty/instructors continue to educate themselves on new diversity issues brought to their attention by new research. Being open to learning more and expanding their knowledge base is the only way that teaching can continue to be effective. Knowing individuals' differences allows the opportunity to accept the value of all people; and if a large portion of the population is suffering from an 'invisible' disability, then education of that disability must occur.

It must be concluded that while most educators strive to teach content on knowledge and attitudes, faculty are not completely confident that students leaving the programs are culturally competent on a wide range of multicultural issues. If content on individuals with LD is not taught, it must be concluded that students cannot possibly hope to graduate with any measure of cultural competency in the areas of LD. Still, because of the primary goal of the social work profession, we must continue to broaden the scope of diversity in order to attain the pinnacle of the profession: multicultural competency.

The majority of the survey respondents teach social work practice; therefore, this survey concludes that respondents well understood the importance of multicultural content but still failed to include content on individuals with LD. One undeniably strong conclusion was obtained from this study: most social work educators have given little or no thought to the idea that individuals with LD are indeed a unique multicultural group. However, in the mere act of responding to the survey, the majority of participants expressed interest and even thanks for bringing the topic to their attention. This is a clear indication that social work faculty/instructors might welcome information on LD knowledge and attitude constructs within their curriculum. In fact, in responding to the survey, faculty and instructors overwhelmingly expressed intrigue that individuals with LD could be defined within a multicultural diverse group. Though educators had strong opinions regarding the benefit in defining LD within teaching multicultural diversity, most agreed that more attention was needed in educating students on the unique challenges facing individuals with LD.

Teaching multicultural diversity content is imperative and part of the mission of social worker educator's. They can positively affect the lives of individuals with LD and their families; and a necessary beginning to end discrimination.

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