

## CHANGES IN STUDENT DISCOURSE AFTER A MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP COURSE:

### Engaging Difference, Considering Others, Embracing Process, Practicing Resistance

#### Abstract

Inclusive leadership education espouses a generalized set of values that it hopes to impart to students, what Foucault (1978) would call discourse. However, students may choose to embrace, resist, alter, or challenge particular aspects of a class's discourse. Qualitative analysis compared multicultural leadership course students' pre-test and post-test responses to a question that asked them to define inclusion. Four changes in narratives emerged: some students 1) exhibited heightened awareness of difference, 2) transitioned away from egocentrism in leadership thinking, 3) expressed more comfort with thinking about inclusion as an abstract concept, and 4) challenged the charge to define inclusion.

#### Introduction

Although inclusive leadership is a concept without an agreed-upon definition (Fine, 2017), the concept's lofty, albeit praiseworthy, aims include societal transformation toward increased access to rights, resources, and full civic participation (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Dugan & Humbles, 2018; Oxoby, 2009). Foucault refers to the tacit understanding of what inclusive leadership is amongst leadership practitioners as discourse: the "authorized vocabulary" (1978, p. 17) that surrounds an abstract concept. Discourses are important because they govern the terms under which a concept can be understood and the concomitant actions that can be taken based on said concept within given contexts (Butler, 2004). Some in the field of leadership studies have embraced a discourse of inclusive leadership that seeks to foster favorable attitudes toward difference amongst developing leaders (Appiah, 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2009).

The belief that inclusion is paramount in leadership

relationships indicates a set of norms, expectations, and language surrounding an idealized practice. However, the persistent difficulty in defining the construct should be a concern for leadership educators who may wish to guide students through an exploration of the concept. If elements of discourse are left unsaid amongst leadership educators, then it is possible, if not probable, that a large gap exists between the discourse ideal and the degree to which students internalize elements of said discourse (You & Matteo, 2013). Participation in an intentional experience meant to facilitate the construction of new ways of looking at the world presumably will lead to students constructing shared discourses regarding abstract concepts such as inclusive leadership. An analysis of student narratives around the concepts of inclusion may provide a window into how students may internalize or resist the tenets of inclusive leadership after course exposure, providing directions for future curricular interventions.

Here, I use qualitative techniques to determine if

students' interpretation of their own learning aligns with a course's stated learning objectives (Mercer, 2004). By comparing student pre-test and post-test discursive responses on a course survey instrument, analysis yields four findings of note. First, students are likely to report difference as an important component of inclusion at far higher rates between pre-test and post-test data collection. Second, some students report a turn from self as the locus of interest in inclusive leadership to others or society throughout the course. Third, a group of responses demonstrate how students moved from viewing inclusive leadership as a concrete practice to a more generalizable abstract concept. Fourth, a select group of students resist the very project of defining inclusion through the survey at the post-test, even though they did so at the pre-test. The findings indicate that leadership education can yet make meaningful contributions to college students' understanding, reframing, and enactment of inclusive leadership discourses congruent with the field's ideals.

## Discourses: Leadership, Inclusion, Inclusive Leadership

**Leadership.** Foucauldian discourse permeates all social interaction, setting the terms under which we engage with one another. Language, a means by which discourse exercises its influence, provides a vocabulary by which to understand the world while simultaneously limiting the human capacity to understand concepts that fall outside its scope (Butler, 2005). Language also affects action, rendering some forms of engagement unspeakable while others are expected and normalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Foucault, 1978). Social institutions, including higher education, operate under their own forms of discourse that govern interpersonal interaction. For instance, Mercer's (2004) analysis of college classrooms demonstrates how instructors elicit responses from students, manage discussion, and emphasize learning, thereby co-constructing a

shared discourse of how spaces in higher education are expected to function.

Similarly, fields of inquiry like leadership studies have predominant discourses that set out norms and guide shared constructions of what leadership is, can be, or should be: a process rather than a position; goal-directed; or relationship-based (Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2012; Rost, 1991; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Although conflicting scripts do exist – one may think of leadership as an inherent quality instead of a process, or a function of position rather than contingent on relationships – a discourse approach to understanding leadership suggests a prevailing understanding that leadership is an interpersonal, targeted, inherently social phenomenon.

Part of leadership studies' dilemma, though, is that prevailing leadership discourse has the potential to be radically disruptive to other extant social discourses. To provide an example, if one believes authority is (near-)synonymous with leadership, critical leadership approaches that emphasize the emancipatory potential of thinking of leadership in times of social upheaval or in the midst of authority asserting hierarchical power may be especially troubling (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Barnes, Olson, & Reynolds, 2018). Students in leadership education contexts often feel the tension between two discourses: hegemonic societal discourse and that of more critical leadership studies approaches.

Examining narratives for constructed discourses is a powerful tool to show how respondents might internalize, resist, or transform educational interventions, thereby having the potential to affect their practice of leadership in their communities of practice (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Komives and colleagues' (2006) leader identity model traces the shift in thinking that leadership studies students undergo in conceptualizing of power, position, and

leadership as fluid constructs instead of fixed on position and person. Haber's (2012) examination of student definitions of leadership show that students' race, class, or gender may affect to which leadership discourses they consciously choose to subscribe.

**Inclusion and Inclusive Leadership.** Just as there are multiple discourses surrounding leadership, so too are there countless approaches to thinking about inclusion. Many studies have demonstrated how students' conceptualizations of multiculturalism, diversity, or inclusion have shifted as a result of course-based interventions (Fierke, Lui, Lepp, & Baldwin, 2014; Fine & Lee, 2017; You & Matteo, 2013). However, one challenge facing educators who focus on inclusive leadership is determining how they themselves think of the concept – and how they might then translate a concomitant ethos through classroom experiences. Dalton and Crosby (2013) trace the evolution of the discussion of human difference in the American academy as transitioning from a focus on diversity, or recognition of difference, to multiculturalism, or acceptance of difference. They argue that the next frontier in inclusive education is the transition from multiculturalism to pluralism, which they detail as “search[ing] for common ground with others – striving for empathetic understanding” (Dalton & Crosby, 2013, p. 285). Whereas the preceding two approaches in their schema are largely passive, pluralism advocates for co-constructed community spaces. If leadership educators endeavor to prompt students' examination or transformation of inclusive leadership discourse, then a critical reflection on one's own approach to thinking of navigating difference in a complex world may be necessary.

Leadership educators must also consider what it means to merge the two discourses of leadership and inclusion under the phrase “inclusive leadership.” The work here represents a critical examination of student discourse as it relates to inclusive leadership specifically; although students' discourses related to inclusion and leadership both have been studied, the intersection therein has received less attention. Broadly, many in the field of leadership studies hold some common values related to practicing leadership

in an inclusive manner: listening, empathizing, respecting common dignity, collaborating for a common purpose (Hollander, 2012; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Scharmer, 2009; Seemiller, 2014; Wheatley, 2009). However, despite the appearance of a commonly-accepted discourse surrounding inclusive leadership, leadership educators may run the risk of students leaving the course with wildly varying understandings of what it means to practice inclusive leadership if such discourses are not critiqued openly (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Fine, 2017).

## Methods

**Sample and Data.** The present analysis employs a qualitative approach to analyze student discourses as represented through narrative responses. Because the research question here is interested in students' constructed meaning, qualitative methods are appropriate (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Beyond gauging in-person classroom dynamics, students may also reflect constructed discourses through written responses (Mercer, 2004; Priest & de Campos Paula, 2016).

Data for analysis come from students enrolled in a sophomore-level college multicultural leadership course. The course is nested within an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor program that attracts students from multiple academic fields across campus. The course's learning objectives state that students are expected to: “Understand the impact of cultural identity, life experiences and world views on leadership relationships as it relates to privilege and inclusion,” and, “Practice inclusive leadership through advocacy for social change.” The course begins with academic content in the first third of the term, exploring concepts such as ethnocentrism (Bennett, 2004), social identities and privilege (Cullen, 2008), and Social Change Leadership (Komives & Wagner, 2009). Much of the remaining course time is spent exploring the practical application of these concepts through interaction, debate, and discussion of current inclusive leadership challenges.

Throughout the term, students engage in a number of experiences that endeavor to cultivate the skills necessary to effectively engage with others toward social change aims. Selected assignments include a “cultural plunge” activity, which asks students to immerse themselves in cultural contexts with which they are unfamiliar or toward which they are dismissive; a weeklong dialogue centered on cross-cultural communication with international students who primarily attend English language classes on campus; and a capstone social change, community-based research project that calls on students to develop strategies to enact inclusive change through intentional collaboration with community partners (Fine & Lee, 2017). Following Dalton and Crosby’s (2013) typology, the first student learning outcome adopts a multiculturalism ethos, whereas the second, which strives to prompt students’ active engagement with diverse others in co-created spaces toward social action, takes a pluralist approach.

Student data are collected at two points in the course using a pre-test / post-test design (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2004). Completion of the survey instrument was voluntary and conducted outside of class. In addition to a battery of quantitative items designed to measure attitudes, civic engagement, and empathy, students also are asked to respond to open-ended questions in narrative form. The answers explored in this analysis are in response to the following prompt: “Define inclusion. Describe why inclusion is an important concept for leaders.” Data come from all students from autumn 2013 to autumn 2016 terms who have matched data for both the pre-test and post-test on this prompt. Of the 1,243 students who took the course over the eight terms, 950 completed at least part of a pre-test, a post-test, or both at any point of data collection. (N=206) have complete data on the question analyzed here for both the pre-test and post-test, which translates to response rates of 16.6 percent of all students in the course and 21.7 percent of those who participated in any data collection.

Analytical Strategy. Because a student’s engagement with a course can take many forms (Stefani, 2008), student narratives can provide a unique, invaluable window into how they construct meaning out of their lived experience grounded in their individual approach to a course’s content (Mercer, 2004; Priest & De Campos Paula, 2016). To analyze change in students’ discourses related to inclusion between the pre-test and post-test in a multicultural leadership course, I employ two quantitative techniques. The use of two different qualitative methods is employed to triangulate the data, enhancing the results’ validity (Weiss, 1994).

First, I use computer-aided analysis of student narratives using word cloud queries to check for the frequencies of words across responses. Although they confine qualitative analysis to a single word in a larger piece of data, studying individual words in context can still yield results of interest (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Word clouds can be a useful way to visualize patterns in respondents’ results to determine if there are commonalities across qualitative data points (McNaught & Lam, 2010). Two separate word clouds are created using NVivo’s query functions: one for students’ pre-test responses, the other to students’ post-test responses. In creating word clouds from the discursive data, words that appeared in at least 20 students’ responses – or roughly 10 percent of all responses – were kept in the analysis. Words that were included in the question, such as “leaders” or “inclusion,” as well as forms thereof, are excluded from analysis, and stemmed words are clustered for parsimony (e.g., “make,” “making,” “makes” are collapsed into one data point).

Word clouds primarily are used for initial evaluation of qualitative data, as they are able to highlight only a single word devoid of context (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). However, if researchers are using word clouds to look for broad, striking patterns across responses, and if researchers can verify the usage of words in their nested contexts aligns with the *prima facie* results of word clouds, they can mitigate such limitations (Henderson & Segal, 2013). To verify the results of word cloud analysis, I take a subsample

of entries that used words of interest and read the entire student response to ascertain that frequency alone devoid of context did not compromise the findings presented.

The second method is an issue-focused analysis of student narratives. Although coding is aided through NVivo much like the word cloud queries, issue-focused analysis relies more on the researcher's interpretation of themes of interest that support an argument: if themes are repeated across narratives, then they can be used to demonstrate the concepts of interest to the study (Weiss, 1994). Responses that show similar patterns across responses are then grouped together to show what patterns may exist across cases. I use issue-focused analysis

here to determine if there was a noticeable change in approach, tone, vocabulary, or other markers of discourse between the pre-test and post-test data collection points (Priest & de Campos Paula, 2016). I make this analytical choice to best demonstrate what effect, if any, the course had on students' inclusive leadership discourse; I further explore potential limitations in the discussion section.

## Results

Computer-Aided Analysis: Word Clouds. Figure 1 shows the word cloud generated from students' pre-test data, and Figure 2 displays the word cloud from students' post-test data.



Figure 1. Word Cloud of Responses from Pre-Test Data.



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Responses from Post-Test Data.



Table 1 shows the frequency and weighted percentages (prevalence of the word as compared to other words in each response) of the top ten words in student responses for both the pre-test and post-test. Six of ten words appear on both the pre-test and post-test list within two positions' rank in the results: "everyone," "group," "people," "others,"

"making," and "feel." Between the pre-test and post-test, students appear to articulate the social and diversity components of inclusive leadership discourse by using words that talk about inclusion as an interpersonal process (Komives & Wagner, 2009; Wheatley, 2009).

**Table 1. Comparison of Top Ten Word Frequencies Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Assessment Data**

Pre-Test				Post-Test			
Rank	Word (Stem)	Freq.	Weighted %	Rank	Word (Stem)	Frequency	Weighted %
1	everyone	126	8.69	1	everyone	95	6.79
2	group	109	7.52	2	people	94	6.72
3	people	95	6.55	3	different	90	6.43
4	others	83	5.72	4	group	87	6.22
5	making	76	5.24	5	others	81	5.79
6	feel	70	4.83	6	making	67	4.79
7	sure	43	2.97	7	feel	48	3.43
8	need	37	2.55	8	ideas	35	2.50
9	different	36	2.48	9	work	34	2.43
10	involved	34	2.34	10	accepting	30	2.14
15/16	work	25	1.67	11	need	29	2.07
15/16	ideas	25	1.67	12	sure	28	2.00
41	accepting	11	0.74	14	involved	25	1.79
N		206					

One word appears in the top ten most mentioned words on both lists but makes a jump of six ranks between the pre-test and post-test: whereas "different" was the ninth-most mentioned word on the pre-test on 36 student narratives, it rises to the third-most mentioned word on the post-test, appearing in 90 responses. The word "accepting" appears in the top-ten on the post-test list for most-mentioned words, appearing in 30 student narratives. It appears in only 11 responses on the pre-test, ranking 41st of all mentions. The shift in the relative salience of "different" and "accepting," may indicate that students are moving from minimizing the presence of diversity in leadership relationships to being relatively comfortable with acknowledging its import in the practice of inclusion (Bennett, 2004). Subsample context analysis verified that use of the

word "different" was rather consistent across pre-test and post-test responses typically was used to indicate salience of those of varied social identities (e.g., "working with people who are different from me") and not as a reference to generalized change from the course (e.g., "I now have a different outlook on inclusion").

Meanwhile, three terms fell from the top ten most mentioned words in students' narratives between the pre-test and the post-test: "need" fell from the eighth-most mentioned word to the eleventh, "sure" (almost always in the phrase "make sure") fell from seventh to twelfth, and "involved" fell from tenth to fourteenth. The diminishing significance of "need," "sure," and "involved" as terms suggests that some students are taking less of a transactional approach to inclusive leadership and are instead recognizing it

as a complex interpersonal system (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), though this shift may be small in magnitude.

**Issue-Focused Analysis.** Coding of the student narratives yields three primary themes of interest after comparing pre-test and post-test data to one another:

**Theme one: Orientation shift from self to group / society.** The most prevalent code, demonstrated in 30 of the respondents' data, shows a shift in the locus of interest in leadership relationships from the leader themselves to others or, more rarely, society (Komives & Wagner, 2009). In some responses, this took the form of moving from egocentrism – a focus on circumstances in which the respondent felt (not) included – to considering how others might feel:

PRE-TEST: Being included in a group.

POST-TEST: Inclusion means the acknowledgement of other cultures around you and including them (and their people) in your everyday life. (R-205)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is getting everyone involved and leaving no one out. Everyone deserves their voice to be heard and that is why inclusion is critical for leaders. Especially myself being an introvert, my opinions are not heard sometimes.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is the act of including and having awareness for all kinds of people, regardless of any differences. Leaders need to be inclusive because they will never have the respect of many people when you are narrow-minded. (R-131)

The shift from egocentrism to considering the perspectives of others is fundamental in cognitive development (Perry, 1970) and the development of inclusive leadership capacity (Komives & Wagner, 2009). The responses in theme one indicate that the course facilitated students' ability to take on different perspectives.

In other responses, the shift from self to others / society took the form of thinking of inclusion as something a leader enacts for a group's benefit to either a property of the group or a process the group mutually undertakes. In this subset of responses, pre-test data often reflects on how a leader could behave inclusively, whereas the post-test focuses on what inclusion looked like, what it felt like, or how it could be facilitated:

PRE-TEST: Inclusion as a leader means making sure that everyone involved in whatever you're working on has a chance to actively participate.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is more than just an action every leader should take. I believe it is a mindset that everyone should try to adopt as much as possible. It means more than just making sure everyone in a group or project is involved, it means opening up. (R-34)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is when you let everyone participate and say or do their part. You make sure that everyone can do a part that they are good at and allow everyone to have an important part.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is listening and understanding what others are saying. It is not judging them or counting them out because of who they are and it is respecting them no matter what you might think. (R-76)

The above responses also indicate a shift from thinking about individuals to considering the group, but one that is distinctively centered on the practice of leadership as compared to the previous examples. The two students' pre-test responses are solidly leader-centered: "making sure everyone is included" or "can do their part" places the onus on the leader to create, manage, and maintain inclusive systems (Fine, 2017; Uhl-Bien

et al., 2007). The post-test responses indicate that the students are thinking of inclusion more as a social system or interpersonal phenomenon, not just a simple checkbox of leader behaviors to yield desired outcomes from followers (Brooks & Chapman, 2018; Scharmer, 2009).

Theme two: Concrete to abstract. Twenty-nine responses show a notable shift in definitions between the pre-test and post-test in terms of paradigm: instead of thinking of inclusion as something tangible or concrete at the time of the pre-test, post-test narratives show an ability to think of inclusion as an abstraction that has utility beyond the scope of a team or leadership position.

Two sub-patterns of interest emerge in this theme. In the first sub-pattern, several respondents make the shift from looking at inclusion as something that is work-, team-, or project-based to an interpersonal, social phenomenon. As opposed to the responses detailed in the first theme, the student discourses in theme two already consider groups as the leadership locus of interest. Instead, the paradigm shift comes from students being able to understand that inclusion is a process, not an end goal:

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is to strive to gain 100% participation within a group or project. Leaders should practice inclusion on an everyday basis.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is being able to... recognize that people can still work together through their differences. Inclusion is also being able to understand that you cannot include all people at all times, but you can strive for it. (R-9)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is making sure all the members of a team feel as though they play a role on said team.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is recognizing that there are views out in the world that are different than yours, and treating people with those views with love and compassion still. It is more about being open-hearted versus open-minded. (R-29)

Although it is entirely appropriate to conduct analyses of inclusion processes at the meso-level (Hollander, 2012), organizations and teams are themselves yet nested in sociohistorical contexts that necessitate the application of inclusive leadership principles (Choo & Ferree, 2010). That is, while it is valuable to think of inclusive leadership principles as they might be concretely applied in a particular context – in the pre-test responses above, in a group or on a team – the broadened definitions exhibited in the post-test exemplify more broadly translatable inclusion heuristics the students developed by the time of the post-test. By focusing on the process of inclusion as opposed to its content, these students articulate a vision of inclusion that is more readily translatable to multiple leadership contexts.

In the second subtheme, student responses deal explicitly with diversity in both the pre-test and post-test but demonstrate a shift in willingness or motivation to engage with difference. Students in this subtheme show growth not in terms of their understanding of inclusive leadership as nested in increasingly broadened contexts, but rather in their understanding of inclusion as a complicated phenomenon that may be easier said than done:

PRE-TEST: Bringing together different people from different groups and giving everyone a fair chance to provide their input without being judged or dominated by others.



POST-TEST: Inclusion is the ability to involve people of different cultures and backgrounds, and to be able to accept and understand them for what they are, not in spite of what they are. I think true inclusion develops an understanding of differences. (R-82)

In the pre-test response, the student indicates that difference is a part of their understanding of why inclusion is important, but their analysis hinges on an impersonal hypothetical group situation. The post-test response shows a shift in the student's framing of inclusion as something that actively engages with difference as opposed to managing conflict.

Some responses in the willingness subtheme indicate that theory from the class helped them to better understand how engaging with difference matters in the practice of leadership. These student responses tended to employ specific, technical vocabulary from the class that hearkened back to course material:

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is welcoming differing (and sometimes underrepresented) backgrounds to the table. Great leaders are capable of leading more than just the people like them.

POST-TEST: There are several concepts within inclusion. I think the central concept is working your way out of ethnocentrism by trying on different social and cultural lenses. Interaction with others is a huge part of leadership. (R-143)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is a concept that revolves around involving as many people as possible in a certain situation.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is ensuring the availability of opportunities to everyone, as long as the participation of one person doesn't prevent or detract from the

experience of another because of their social identities. (R-148)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is the act of including others and making them feel comfortable.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is all encompassing. It is the ability to see the world through any lens, or even being willing to try. Inclusion is not only seeing differences, but also understanding the value of these differences. (R-69)

Whereas the above student thought of inclusion as an "act" while taking the pre-test, they now come to think of inclusion as "all-encompassing." Instead of the goal of promoting comfort, the student uses verbs that indicate inclusion is a process without a stated goal: "see[ing]," "being willing to try," "understanding."

The above responses indicate that respondents were already aware of the social dimension of inclusion, but that concepts in the course gave them the ability to better articulate how inclusive leadership practice mutually constitutes the social realities of all. The student in response number 143 uses the language of ethnocentrism (Bennett, 2004) to describe their understanding of inclusion, and respondent 148 draws on the terminology of social identities to examine how worldview affects the practice of inclusion (Cullen, 2008). Both student responses contribute to the larger theme through demonstrating how engagement with difference is an essential consideration related to inclusive leadership.

Theme three: Resistance to define. Ten of the twenty-nine responses coded under theme two exhibit consternation at the project of defining inclusion at the pre-test. Although a resistance to define the concept of inclusive leadership could be considered another subtheme of theme two, the novelty of responses from

students in this vein merits separation into a third theme. Students whose responses fall in theme three express their reticence to define inclusion through acknowledging that the practice of truly understanding one another can be fraught with misunderstanding:

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is the act of being open-minded.

POST-TEST: Inclusion is a term that is very hard to define, and I think it shifts not only between people but between the context in which it is presented. (R-21)

PRE-TEST: Inclusion is including others, even though they may have different viewpoints as you.

POST-TEST: What?! This is the hardest question ever! It's what we try to figure out every class period, but never actually reach a finite definition. I think it's because that is such a broad term and everyone has a different idea of what it is. (R-146)

Given the relative tidiness of their pre-test answers, the narratives the students exhibit in the post-test show how they are struggling with thinking about how actors, context, and systems all interact to determine what inclusion might be. The "turn" in students' leadership discourse embracing inclusion as a contested space parallels the decentralization of self-as-leader from college students' constructed leadership identity (Komives et al., 2006). It is further notable that none of the responses in theme three express frustration toward the class or instructors; rather, the narratives indicate that students are engaging in the cognitive work needed to develop an understanding of inclusion that is context-specific, but not context-dependent.

Resistance can be a powerful tool as it seeks to disrupt dominant discourses,

challenging paradigms that affect how we see the world (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1978). In the practice of leadership, resistance can be a powerful tool to realize new social realities that broaden a shared understanding of who may be capable of its exercise (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Barnes et al., 2018; Dugan & Humbles, 2018). The student responses under this theme speak to the transformative potential for multicultural leadership education to change students' – and perhaps greater society's – inclusive leadership paradigms.

Other responses. Aside from theme three responses which also fell under the broader umbrella of theme two, no responses fit more than one issue-focused code. The bulk of responses otherwise not coded (N=147) fell into two categories. Some responses are perfunctory in nature, either in terms of brevity or in their overreliance on the word "inclusion" in constructing both pre-test and post-test narratives. For example: "Inclusion is the act of including others." Other responses show a level of sophistication that marked it as being of interest, but there is little change between the pre-test and post-test data collection points. As present analyses are confined to examining change in students' responses, they are not coded. For instance, if a student talked about empathy extensively in both pre-test and post-test data, their responses are not included in the analysis here.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Changes in student narratives between pre-test and post-test collection yield four results of interest for leadership educators. First, results indicate that inclusive leadership education can bring meaningful difference into focus for students. Comparisons of word frequencies as represented by the word clouds

shows the term “difference” exhibited a notable jump between the beginning and end of the course. This indicates that students may have been more likely to talk about inclusion in abstract, general terms when the class began. However, after taking the course, which devotes a sizable portion of its time to social identities and their salience, students appear to find a vocabulary with which to describe the importance of difference in the practice of leadership. Many student definitions of inclusion began with considerations of group dynamics: facilitating conversation or acting toward a common goal. The emergence of difference in post-test findings indicates that students were far more likely to explore the sociohistorical forces that can shape leadership relationships.

Second, multicultural and inclusive leadership education can prompt students to make the turn from a focus on self to a focus on others, lessening ethnocentrism and promoting empathy for others’ lived experiences. In keeping with the Social Change Model of Leadership (Komives & Wagner, 2009), some students after the course demonstrated a shift of locus of control from the leader-actor to the group. Whereas earlier definitions confined themselves to how a leader could exercise the promise of inclusion, later definitions took the group’s needs into account. This indicates that multicultural leadership has the promise of prompting students to move away from egocentrism as they practice leadership, de-coupling the individual from position, leadership from authority.

Third, leadership education that teaches inclusive leadership may make students more comfortable with thinking about the phenomenon as a process, not as an end goal. The transition to a discourse of process could be an indicator of student ability to tolerate ambiguity, analyze complex leadership systems, or apply inclusive principles to multiple contexts – all of which are strong indicators of leader development (Komives et al., 2006; Seemiller, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Leadership education centered on inclusion may foster some students’ cognitive development as they transition from dualism or

relativism to a principled, values-based stance (Appiah, 2006; Bennett, 2004; Perry, 1970). Further, the approach taken in inclusive leadership education – focusing on others, building empathy, hearing unique stories – may serve as a high-impact practice linked to global learning, enhancing students’ ability to think critically, take on others’ perspectives, and apply knowledge to new situations (Kuh, 2008).

Fourth, and perhaps most exciting, multicultural leadership education can help students trouble dominant discourses related to inclusion, leadership, and the nexus of the two concepts. Although small in number, a notable portion of the sample – nearly five percent – found the exercise of defining inclusion a troublesome one at the post-test, even though they willingly engaged in the project at the course’s outset. Resistance to constructing an overt inclusion discourse shows that multicultural leadership education has the potential to queer – that is, trouble in novel ways– prevailing inclusive leadership discourse (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008). Through such a contestation, students have the potential to create new, radical forms of inclusion that may exceed the bounds of the received knowledge from the course. This small group of students could yet represent the true emancipatory potential of inclusive leadership’s promise through the critical reconstruction of the term (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

Limitations. Because this work focuses on what change, if any, occurred in student discourses, the 147 narratives that are not coded exhibiting any shift are not analyzed. Although coding indicates that most students were not starting out at more sophisticated conceptualizations of inclusion (Bennett, 2004; Dalton & Crosby, 2013), it is telling that the lack of change indicates the course did little, if anything, to foster their learning on this particular question. A descriptive approach that analyzes all student narratives irrespective of discernable change may yet yield interesting data on students’ constructed meanings of inclusive leadership.

Although pre-test / post-test data collection methods can introduce ambiguity as to the effect of the course

as opposed to other lived experiences students may have outside of course contexts over the same period of time (Fine & Lee, 2017), it remains a practical and accepted means of collecting assessment data that yet speaks to generalized effects (Wholey et al., 2004; You & Matteo, 2013). Future work can use enhanced data collection techniques, particularly formative assessment, to further point to which course interventions effected change in students' constructed narratives most. For now, this piece argues that any changes in students' inclusive leadership discourses are a reflection, however incomplete or indirect, of the time students spent in the course.

Directions for Leadership Education. In an effort to promote a particular set of values related to inclusive leadership, the course analyzed here endeavors to shift student discourses related to pluralism. Results indicate that many students' constructed understandings of inclusion now consider others, conceptualize of leadership as a complex and ongoing process, and point to the exercise of leadership through resistance. Multicultural leadership education should capitalize on the gains similar students might exhibit following coursework that explores inclusive leadership. Educators may wish to evaluate their curricula to see if empathetic or Social Change approaches to leadership are stressed should they wish to prompt students to consider a shift from self to others. An overt attention to difference – say, through brining up topics like race, gender identity, or religion in the classroom – can help overcome the tendency of students to avoid direct engagement with thorny issues of social identity in the classroom.

The findings here further indicate that some students may be open to alternative conceptualizations of inclusive leadership discourse – or, at the least, find efforts to complicate discourse notable. As an instructor, it is tempting to act as an authority on subject matter, particularly when the topic at hand is one as politically and interpersonally fraught as inclusive leadership. Providing students with the space to engage with difficult questions about inclusive leadership, such as the task of defining

the very terms of the conversation, could bear proverbial fruit in students' reported ability to engage meaningfully with others and consider alternate points of view. Modeling the intellectual process of questioning one's fundamental assumptions, taking on multiple perspectives, and defining the mutual terms of the conversation may contribute to the whole class's mutual learning and intellectual nourishment.

Discourse constrains, but unearthing it has the potential for social change through intentional reconstruction (Butler, 2004; Dugan & Humbles, 2018). If educators endeavor to create a world where more actors are able to access the promise of leadership, then engaging in multicultural learning is imperative. Students' willingness to grapple with the difficulties encountered when interacting with difference demonstrates the promise of leadership education to move toward a more just world.

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