Author's response to reviews

Title: "That Never Would Have Occurred To Me": A Qualitative Study of Medical Students' Views of a Cultural Competence Curriculum

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Dear Editors:

We are grateful for the extensive and thoughtful reviews provided by Jesse Crosson and Brenda Beagan. The reviewers agreed on several major points, as well as made many useful minor suggestions regarding revision. My coauthors and I have studied the reviews in detail, and as a result pursued further several issues in the literature (leading to the incorporation of 10 additional references), and significantly revised the discussion section, as well as certain other sections of the paper. Specifically, we have made the following changes to the manuscript:

**Major Changes**

1) Both reviewers were rightly concerned that the Discussion was essentially a “restatement” of the Results. This comment caused us to rethink and reconceptualize this section, as well as do additional reading. Specifically, Reviewer Beagan raised the following points:
   a) Are there other frameworks, such as power and privilege, which students used in analysis? (And later) Are there innovative ways of teaching about cultural difference that avoid cook-book stereotyping? We discuss and reference these points on p. 18; and also provide information about innovative thinking by students which avoided the group stereotyping trap.
   b) What are the implications of students’ preference to utilize the informal curriculum to teach cultural competence? This point is now discussed on p. 16-17. We do not reach precisely the same conclusion as Dr. Beagan, but we do explore the possible meanings inherent in this expressed preference.
   c) Why didn’t students advocate for assessment of the efficacy of the CCC? This issue is now speculatively addressed on p. 17.
   d) How diverse really is the medical student body, and to what extent is “diversity” repressed in medical school? We thank Dr. Beagan for helping us understand this excellent point, which has now been included and referenced on p. 19.
   e) The findings related to political correctness and humanizing influence deserve further elaboration. We have now provided more discussion and references regarding these two points on pp. 19-20.

2) Reviewer Beagan expressed a desire for clarification regarding what students meant by the term “effective interaction” mentioned in the Definition subheading under Results. This request caused us to review the original transcripts to see if we could extract a meaning for this phrase. Our understanding of what students meant is now expressed on p. 8.

3) Based on both reviewers’ comments, we reorganized the Results section to make it clearer that three points (cultural “balance,” political correctness, and humanizing influence of the CCC) emerged spontaneously during focus group discussions, and were not elicited by the question guide (p.14).
Minor Changes

1) Reviewer Beagan correctly notes that for some unfathomable reason we used the phrase “the political correctness” in both the Abstract and the Conclusions. We have no idea how the unnecessary “the” sneaked in, and are happy to have the chance to remove it.

2) Reviewer Crosson felt we did not identify the “gap” in the literature which this study attempted to address. We have now pointed out that we felt the relative paucity of studies reporting medical student perceptions of the value of cultural competence curricula justified a qualitative study in this area. (p.4)

3) Reviewer Crosson expressed concern that the issues brought up in the last paragraph before the Methods section were “not carried through the paper effectively.” We gave serious consideration to this criticism, but felt that the 4 issues identified (students’ definitions of cultural competence; students’ perceptions of the efficacy of the CCC; translational applicability of the CCC to the clinical years; and specific suggestions for improvement) provide a good part of the structure of the paper. If we have misunderstood the intent of the reviewer, we would be glad to revisit this issue upon clarification.

4) Both Reviewer Crosson and Reviewer Beagan noted a discrepancy in our reporting of the number of subjects involved in the study. We apologize for our poor math skills, and appreciate the opportunity to correct this embarrassing mistake. The correct number of participants is 16, 14 in the 3 focus groups, and 2 in the individual interviews. (p.5)

5) Reviewer Crosson requested further information about what we meant by “purposive sampling.” We have now added (p.5) an explicit statement regarding the purposive aspect of our recruitment strategy; and have also clarified in what sense it was necessarily a sample of convenience.

6) Reviewer Beagan appropriately questioned the verbal consent only approved by our institutional review board. Verbal consent is by no means the standard for informed consent in the United States. We have tried to explain the specific circumstances which made our human subjects IRB comfortable with verbal consent (p.6).

7) Reviewer Beagan kindly pointed out that references 15 and 22 were identical references. We have gratefully corrected that oversight; now reference 22 is a different and accurate citation.

8) Reviewer Beagan also wanted additional information about the location of the focus groups and a clarification about the two “facilitators.” This information is now provided on p. 7.

9) Reviewer Crosson expressed unfamiliarity with the term “question route” and suggested two alternative phrases. Although “question route” is a term used by focus group researchers, we agreed that it might be puzzling to other readers, and have substituted the suggested alternatives (pp. 6,7).

10) Reviewer Crosson properly suggested we both define and reference the term “theoretical triangulation.” This has now been done (p. 7, ref. 25).
11) Reviewer Beagan rightly noted the inappropriate use of the word “summaries” on p. 8, and wondered to what they referred. We have now clarified this by substituting the phrase “independent analyses,” and stating that we integrated them through a “consensual process.”

12) Reviewer Crosson asks a good question regarding how the subheadings used in the Results were derived. We now clarify on p. 8 that the headings came from both direct questions in the interview schedule, and from topics initiated independently by the students themselves.

13) Reviewer Crosson delighted us by asking for more supporting quotations to provide evidence for the results presented. We are usually in the position of having to cut quotations, so it was a great pleasure to be allowed room for greater expatiation of students’ direct statements. Of course, if every conclusion was followed by a supporting quotation, the paper’s length would be unwieldy. Still, we have added direct quotations on pages 9-16 for a total of 17 new or expanded quotes.

14) Reviewer Beagan points out that in a student quote on p. 9 inaccurately used places when “place” was meant. We have eliminated that quote in this version, so the correction is no longer necessary.

15) Reviewer Crosson suggests that the section on the strengths of the informal curriculum would be “greatly strengthened” by substantive examples. We have now included three direct student quotations that demonstrate precisely how students viewed cross-cultural learning through the informal curriculum. (p.10).

16) Reviewer Crosson notes a numerical footnote on p. 11, with no corresponding narrative. We have removed this footnote, which was left over from an earlier draft.

17) Reviewer Beagan notes that we did not mention possible trends based on minority and white students’ opinions in the groups. Because of the very small numbers, it is impossible to truly make a meaningful analysis. However, in response to this point, we did add a paragraph on pp. 15-16, noting a trend in which white students tended to express concerns about political correctness, whereas minority students were more likely to endorse the value of the CCC.

18) Reviewer Crosson suggests eliminating the point about “only students with opinions” in the Limitations. We have done this, and in addition have reworked this section to incorporate a concern of Reviewer Beagan’s about our failure to discuss the difference of opinion between the individual interviews and the focus groups. We believe this discussion now represents a more complete consideration of the limitations of our study. (p.20-21).

Summary
We are extremely appreciative that both reviewers obviously took so much time and put so much thought into our paper. Their comments enabled us to catch minor but unacceptable errors. More importantly, they forced us to reconceptualize the main points we wanted to bring forward in the Discussion, and pushed our thinking to provide interpretation on all of these. We are also grateful for the opportunity to provide more supporting data in the form of direct student quotations. We believe we were also able to improve the overall organization of the paper, and to clarify previously obscure points.
throughout the paper. We hope that this extensively revised version will prove more satisfactory to our reviewers.

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